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Publication Date
2004

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Assessing Binational Civil Society Coalitions: Lessons from the Mexico–U.S. Experience

Jonathan Fox

Is globalization producing a transnational civil society? Are the transnational economic, social, and cultural forces that are ostensibly weakening nation-states also empowering civic and social movements that come together across borders? If there is more to this trend than internationalist dreams, then clear evidence should be emerging from the accelerating process of Mexico–U.S. integration. This binational relationship is the broadest and deepest example of global integration between North and South, and therefore it offers a clear "paradigm case" for assessing the dynamics and impact of cross-border civil society interaction. Assessments of impact are especially important if one is to avoid assuming that when international actors get involved, their role automatically becomes determinative.

The transnational civil society hypothesis can be framed in hard or soft terms, each with quite different political implications. In the hard version, international economic integration is generating qualitative changes in the balance of power between nation-states and private capital because of the latter’s increased mobility. On the civil society side, some analysts suggest that, due to increasingly accepted international political norms and greater ease of communications and travel, public interest advocacy networking has advanced to such a degree that a “transnational civil society” is emerging. Some use the even more ambitious terms “global social movements” or “global civil society.” In the soft version, the international economy has always reconfigured itself, and the current phase is not unprecedented. Most industrial activity remains national, and nation-states retain significant policy levers. From this perspective, “fully” transnational social or civic movements are still few and far between, with very limited capacity to go beyond internationalist discourse to influence state or corporate action in practice.

The U.S.–Mexico relationship offers a vast array of experiences with which to assess the “hard” versus the “soft” way of framing the globalization process. This chapter seeks to explore the softer rather than the hard version, finding that most Mexico–U.S. civil society relationships involve networking between fundamentally national social and civic organizations. Moreover, relatively few networks have consolidated into dense, balanced partnerships.

Assessments of transnational linkages between social and civic actors require clearly defined criteria. Measuring the density and impact of political linkages implies specifying a standard for comparison (dense compared to what? influential compared to what?). Compared to where U.S.–Mexico civil society relations were in the early 1990s, there is no question that a wide range of networks, coalitions, and alliances has emerged that would once have been hard to imagine. However, compared to the pace of binational integration among other actors – including automobile manufacturers, investment bankers, toxic waste producers, drug dealers, television magnates, immigrant families, and national policy makers – both the degree and the impact of binational civil society collaboration have been quite limited (with the notable exception of partnerships actually on the border).

Cross-border conversations between national civil society actors have certainly multiplied enormously, encouraging much deeper mutual understanding. But mutual understanding between civil society counterparts does not necessarily lead to actual collaboration. For example, sympathetic journalistic coverage very often

This study draws upon papers presented at a conference that was held at the University of California, Santa Cruz in July 1998, with the support of a timely grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (see Brooks and Fox 2002). The chapter was made possible by a decade of conversations and collaboration with David Brooks, director of the Mexico–U.S. Dialogos Project and U.S. correspondent for La Jornada. The study also benefited enormously from conversations with Luis Hernández Navarro, also of La Jornada. In addition, the authors thank Tani Adams, Sonia Alvarado, Maykel Blackwell, Jennifer Johnson, Margaret Keck, Kevin J. Middelbrook, Debra Rose, and Haydee Williams for very useful comments on earlier drafts. Earlier versions of this essay appeared as Fox 2000a and (in Spanish) 2001.
features headlines like “huddling cross-border resistance” (see, for instance, Rosen 1999), yet we have been reading similar headlines about relations between social movements in Mexico and the United States for more than a decade. For reasons not yet fully understood, these “buds” have had considerable difficulty flowering. Consolidating cross-border partnerships turns out to be easier said than done. Their impact, moreover, has often been overestimated. The involvement of international actors in the national arena does not in itself demonstrate that they exercise substantial influence in that arena. There is, for example, a widespread tendency to assume that the international concern provoked by the rebellion led by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) translated into significant international civil society impact upon the course of events in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. Yet an alternative hypothesis is quite plausible: in practice, international civil society actors engaged in the Chiapas conflict may have been marginal to what has been primarily a nationally determined political process.

This chapter is comprised of four sections. The first part frames society-to-society relationships in terms of the broader U.S.–Mexico context, which involves state and elite actors as well. The second part makes conceptual distinctions among transnational networks, coalitions, and movements, and it then assesses in those terms varying degrees of density of key U.S.–Mexico civil society partnerships. This section synthesizes the patterns in specific sectors, including labor rights, environmental concerns, trade policy advocacy, democracy and human rights, women’s rights, and immigrant rights. The third part of the chapter turns from coalition dynamics to impact, building upon Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) framework for assessing the impact of transnational advocacy networks. This section focuses upon binational societal partnerships in three sectors: environment, labor, and human rights. The conclusion includes a synthesis of the main analytic findings, presented in terms of a series of propositions for discussion.


4 Keck and Sikkink’s book presents an overview of the different kinds of political tools and strategies that transnational civil society advocacy networks use: (1) information politics, or the ability to quickly and credibly generate politically usable information and move it to where it will have the most impact; (2) symbolic politics, or the ability to call upon symbols, actions or stories that make sense of a situation for an audience that is frequently far away; (3) leverage politics, or the ability to call upon powerful actors to affect a situation where weaker members of a network are unlikely to have an influence; and (4) accountability politics, or the effort to hold powerful actors to their previously stated policies or principles” (1998: 46).

3 The conclusion includes a synthesis of the main analytic findings, presented in terms of a series of propositions for discussion.

Situating Society-to-Society Relationships

The full array of binational social, civic, and political coalitions involves a wide range of state and social actors. This chapter focuses primarily upon civil society-to-civil society relationships, concentrating in turn upon those actors that pursue broader social participation and public accountability in each country. However, these relations should be understood in the broader context of the many other partnerships that link states and societies in Mexico and the United States (not to mention the two countries’ private sectors, which have been studied extensively elsewhere). One can situate society-to-society relationships in terms of one of four quadrants in a simple two-by-two table that depicts the U.S. state and civil society on one side, and the Mexican state and civil society on the other. Table 15.1 illustrates the wide array of state-to-state coalitions that exist, ranging from those focusing upon keeping Mexico safe for U.S. investors (such as the financial rescue package that the U.S. government provided to help resolve Mexico’s 1994–1995 economic crisis), to the increasing degree of military and anti-drug cooperation, to regular institutionalized exchanges between federal cabinet officials and governors of border states.

State-to-State links

The wide range of state-to-state links between the United States and Mexico is well known and need not be detailed here. These partnerships reach across the many sectoral agencies in both federal governments, as well as from congress to congress. Subnational governments are also increasingly relating to one another—most notably in the case of regular meetings among the governors of border states, but also including frequent visits from state governors to regions linked by migration across the border. Although some of these cross-border relationships are largely ceremonial, others are quite substantial (as in the U.S. Treasury and White House role in the 1995 financial rescue package for Mexico, and in the increasing levels of cooperation between the two countries’ armed forces). Castañeda (1996) highlighted the political implications of these state-to-state partnerships when he argued that the U.S. government’s repeated financial bailouts bolstered the Mexican regime and postponed national democratization.

Links between the U.S. State and Mexican Civil Society

Linkages between the U.S. state and Mexican civil society are relatively recent. U.S. development assistance to private Mexican organizations historically focused upon family planning, health, and scientific, agricultural, and educational cooperation, rather than upon civil society capacity-building (even in the aforementioned sectors). Since the late 1980s, however, the U.S. Agency for International Development

5 The United States also played an important role in encouraging the multilateral development banks to invest heavily in Mexico, especially during the debate over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Fox 2000).
Table 15.1: Examples of Mexico–U.S. Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U.S. State</th>
<th>U.S. Civil Society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treasury ministries</td>
<td>Policy think tanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National cabinet meetings</td>
<td>Private lobbying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border governors’ conferences</td>
<td>Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-narcotics aid</td>
<td>Latino NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAFTA trinational institutions</td>
<td>Conservation NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military sales and training</td>
<td>Elite cultural institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. support for Mexico from</td>
<td>(museums, for example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>multilateral development banks</td>
<td>Mexican immigrant civil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchanges between judicial</td>
<td>society in the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authorities</td>
<td>(hometown clubs and federations)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mexican Civil Society</th>
<th>USAID (and its U.S. contractors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inter-American Foundation</td>
<td>Religious institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Endowment for Democracy</td>
<td>Private foundations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media elites</td>
<td>Environmental coalitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade union coalitions</td>
<td>Democracy networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy networks</td>
<td>Human rights networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s rights networks</td>
<td>Migrant voting rights advocacy networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous peoples networks</td>
<td>Small farmer networks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(USAID) has invested heavily in Mexican conservation organizations, aiming to bolster their capacity to protect biodiversity and, in some cases, to improve the management of what USAID called Mexico’s "paper parks." By the late 1990s, environmental projects constituted the largest category of USAID funding to Mexico. Some fraction of this conservation funding probably reached Mexican environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). USAID has also funded the Mexican Red Cross in times of disaster.

When analysts think of U.S. policy toward civil society in other countries, much of the discussion focuses upon so-called democracy promotion. Yet a recent comprehensive overview of the 1980–1995 period found that democracy promotion was never a major U.S. policy goal in Mexico (Maaza 2001). With very few exceptions, the U.S. executive and legislative branches both sustained a strong consensus to leave that issue off the bilateral agenda. By the late 1990s, however, the democracy issue had worked its agenda. USAID’s donations under its category of “more democratic processes” included US$5.725 million for several Mexican civic organizations in fiscal year 2000, complementing the support provided by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Some of this USAID funding was for judicial education, municipal development, and legislative institution-building, and it therefore belongs in the state-to-state category. Nevertheless, USAID’s democracy funding also reached the Citizens’ Movement for Democracy, the Mexican Center for Victims of Crimes, and the Mexican Society for Women’s Rights. The US$1.2 million that USAID proposed for fiscal year 2000 to deal with HIV/AIDS was also mainly targeted to NGOs (international, national, and local).7

The National Endowment for Democracy has played a more prominent role in grant-making to Mexican civic and human rights organizations. In the 1997 election year, NED granted approximately US$1.1 million to Mexican civic institutions and democratic processes, including $375,000 to Civic Alliance (AC); $278,000 through the American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations’ (AFL-CIO) refurbished international arm; and $274,000 via NED’s Republican Party affiliate to the Centro Cívico (Civic Center) and its women’s organization. Even though these funding levels were significant from the recipient organizations’ point of view, Mexico was not an especially high priority within NED’s portfolio, especially during the early 1990s when civic funding might have made more of a difference.

The Inter-American Foundation (IAF), a small federal agency responsible to the U.S. Congress and mandated to be independent of short-term U.S. foreign policy goals, has maintained a long-term, low-profile, but public involvement with Mexican civil society organizations. The IAF has provided grant funding to a wide range of Mexican NGOs, and in the late 1980s it shifted to more direct funding for community-based rural social organizations, including many autonomous indigenous producer groups.8 The IAF’s level of funding to Mexico was higher than the NED’s, averaging approximately US$2.3 million per year over the 1990s.9

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6 This category accounted for US$6 million (the majority of proposed USAID funding) during fiscal year 2000. See www.info.usaid.gov/pubs/epub/25000/101/mexico.html and, for details, USAID/Mexico 1999.
7 There has been very little informed public discussion of USAID’s Mexico program in either the United States or Mexico. This absence is both cause and effect of the lack of independent assessments of the program.
9 By 1999 funding for Mexico had dropped below US$300,000. See the annual reports at www.ned.org for public data that are more detailed and precise than USAID’s information.
10 Since the late 1980s, the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) has made extensive, strategic grant contributions to numerous regional peasant and indigenous movement organizations and networks, including the sustainable coffee and community-based forestry movements.
11 Author’s communication with David Bray, the IAF’s former Mexico representative, September 1999.
The Mexican State’s Ties to Civil Society in the United States

The political opposition’s surprisingly vigorous electoral challenge to the legitimacy of the established Mexican regime in 1988 spilled over into the United States, including open campaigning by the leftist opposition among Mexicans in the United States. The possibility of change in Mexico resonated with Mexicans in the United States to an unexpected degree, even though most of the migrant population lacked political rights in both the U.S. and Mexican political systems. In the aftermath of Mexico’s fraudulent 1988 presidential vote, post-electoral mobilizations by Mexican immigrants in the United States probably exceeded in size those staged during the campaign.13

In response, the Mexican state launched a multi-pronged strategy to reach out to Mexican civil society in the United States.14 The term “civil society in the United States” (rather than “U.S. civil society”) is employed here in order to include the Mexican state’s strategy for re-incorporating Mexican nationals. One could argue that this is only formally a cross-border relationship, given that the state’s outreach to the national diaspora is a cross-border extension of its national efforts to organize and re-incorporate Mexican civil society actors more generally. However, the task of outreach to emigrants falls to Mexico’s Ministry of Foreign Relations (SRE) and its network of consulates; by definition, therefore, it is a cross-border relationship.

Some state governments have developed their own outreach strategies, most notably in the case of Guanajuato.15 Moreover, one could argue that the Televisa network’s long-standing dominance over U.S. Spanish-language television also constituted a prominent example of the (de facto) Mexican state’s linkage to Latino civil society in the United States (A. Rodriguez 1999).16

Most instances of Mexican migrant organization in the United States can be understood as either state-led or migrant-led, with Mexican state actors playing an especially prominent role in inducing the formation of hometown clubs and their statewide federations (Goldring 1998, 2002).17 In the process, the Mexican state sought to keep most organized emigrants in the civic, rather than the political, arena. At the same time, a new civic network of emigrant voting-rights advocates began to lobby the Mexican state and the country’s major political parties for the first time (Martinez and Ross 2002, Ross 1999). Only in the late 1990s did Mexican immigrants, their leaders, and their organizations begin to influence national politics and gain a voice in the national media. This process is, however, best understood as a relationship within Mexican civil society (see below).

Although the Mexican state’s efforts to reach out to its diaspora have been largely invisible outside the Mexican community, its partnerships with more established U.S. civil society actors have received extensive attention.18 The Mexican state’s attempts to woo U.S. opinion makers reached unprecedented levels during the administration of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994), and a wide range of U.S. civic and political elites responded eagerly. The most influential U.S. private universities, think tanks, and large, moderate environmental organizations rushed to see which one could offer Salinas their most public platform and their most distinguished honors. The Mexican state made significant financial as well as political investments in efforts to influence U.S. public opinion through think tanks and lobbyists (Dresser 1991a, 1996; Eisenstadt 1997; Velasco 1997). Mexican American civil rights and business organizations also received significant official attention.19 Mexican government strategists realized that influencing the U.S. government required influencing U.S. civil society, especially because the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) overflowed the usual narrow boundaries of conventional bilateral policy making. In the 1990s, then, both the U.S. and Mexican governments increased their efforts to use non-state actors in the other country to influence the other state.20

Civil Society-to-Civil Society Links

The importance and density of binational societal relationships ebbed and flowed throughout the twentieth century, as Knight (1997) has suggested. Some of that history continues to resonate. Ricardo Flores Magón remains a hero to radical democratic movements in both societies, especially among Chicanos and southern...
Disentangling Binational Networks, Coalitions, and Movements

The 1990s witnessed an upsurge of binational civil society discussion in Mexico and the United States, beginning before the NAFTA debate but then rapidly expanding. These interactions often took the form of exchanges of information, practical experiences, and expressions of solidarity. Sometimes exchanges generated networks of ongoing relationships; at other times they produced the shared goals, mutual trust, and understanding needed to form coalitions that could collaborate.

19 See, for example, John Ross's regular email newsletter "Mexico Bárbaro" at www.sgc.org.

20 Since 1999 the Quaker-inspired American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has organized annual summer community development programs in Mexico to bring together youth from both countries. AFSC's main Mexican partner organization is Servicio, Desarrollo y Paz (Service, Development, and Peace, SEDEPAZ).

21 For example, the U.S. Red Cross has been governed by conservative Republican political leaders such as Elizabeth Dole. In contrast, the Mexican Red Cross is corrupt and ineffective at providing disaster relief. It had to return a US$100,000 Hurricane Paulina donation from the U.S. Agency for International Development (Zarifa and Olayo 1999). In Chiapas, moreover, pro-Zapatista indigenous communities identified the Mexican Red Cross with the Mexican government.

22 The concept of counterparts is also relevant here, a notion that does not imply similarity or agreement but rather suggests analogous roles in their respective societies (Brooks 1992).

23 Author's communication with Margaret Keck, Johns Hopkins University, March 2002.

24 The use of the term "transnational" rather than "binational" suggests that this framework can be applied more broadly.

25 The author is grateful to Sonia Álvarez for highlighting this distinction.
Table 15.2: Transnational Networks, Coalitions, and Movements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shared characteristics</th>
<th>Transnational networks</th>
<th>Transnational coalitions</th>
<th>Transnational movement organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exchange of information and experiences</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized social base</td>
<td>Sometimes more, sometimes less or none</td>
<td>Sometimes more, sometimes less or none</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual support</td>
<td>Sometimes from afar, and possibly strictly discursive</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint actions and campaigns</td>
<td>Sometimes loose coordination</td>
<td>Yes, based upon mutually agreed minimum goals that are often short-term and tactical</td>
<td>Yes, based upon long-term strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared ideologies</td>
<td>Not necessarily</td>
<td>Not necessarily</td>
<td>Generally yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared political cultures</td>
<td>Often not</td>
<td>Often not</td>
<td>Shared political values, styles, and identities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The ordering of transnational networks, coalitions, and movement organizations (from left to right) reflects the progressively greater density and cohesion of these relationships.

differently situated actors negotiate – formally or informally – the social, cultural, and political meanings of their joint enterprise” (1998: 3).

This essay builds upon Keck and Sikkink’s work by exploring the dynamics of these political spaces. However, because the U.S.–Mexico transnational political sphere includes broad-based social organizations as well as non-governmental organizations, this analysis covers a broader array of transnational actors than does Keck and Sikkink’s study. Keck and Sikkink focus upon the subset of civil society actors that are motivated by what they call “principled ideas or values,” in contrast to those transnational actors driven mainly by “instrumental goals” (such as corporations) or “shared causal ideas” (such as scientists) (1998: 1, 30). This definition fits many classic transnational advocacy campaigns quite well, but when broad-based social constituencies became involved in transnational campaigns, shared normative values are not the only motivation. Both material interests and shared causal ideas also become very relevant. For example, the U.S. trade unions and Mexican human rights activists who collaborated in a coalition to criticize the NAFTA shared a limited political goal, but they did not necessarily share political values. Because the U.S.–Mexico relationship is characterized precisely by the unusual degree to which “foreign” concerns become “local,” with the integration process directly affecting people organized around interests as well as values, this chapter employs a definition of “network” that differs from Keck and Sikkink’s. The approach used here defines network participants in terms of their actions, not their motivations and values. Keck and Sikkink’s reliance upon political values as a defining characteristic of transnational advocacy networks is unable to account for the involvement of broad-based membership organizations that perceive their material interests to be directly affected by transnational processes.

Relationships between Social/Civic Counterparts

The following section assesses the degree of density and cohesion among a diverse set of binational society-to-society relationships. Sectors reviewed include labor unions, environmentalists, trade policy advocacy groups, democracy and human rights activists, women’s rights activists, and Latino immigrant and civil rights organizations.

26 For a parallel approach to distinguishing among networks, coalitions, and movements, see Klandermans, Riker, and Sikkink 2002.
27 National borders may not be the most important ones in this context. For example, ecologists or feminists from different countries who share systematic critiques may have more in common with their cross-border counterparts than they do with the more moderate wings of their respective national movements.
29 Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) use of the term “network” encompasses both “network” and “coalition” as these terms are employed here. In this study’s framework, when networks engage in joint campaigns, they are considered to be coalitions – taking into account that ostensibly transnational networks may well carry our campaigns that are not jointly determined. In instances in which balanced relationships with partners on the ground are lacking, they are more appropriately viewed as international rather than transnational campaigns.
Women Workers (CFO). Another early effort was Mujer a Mujer (Woman to Woman), which led feminist support for the independent “19th of September” Seamstresses’ Union following the 1985 earthquakes in Mexico City. In the first binational U.S.–Mexican union-to-union effort since the beginning of the Cold War, the midwestern Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) coordinated in the late 1980s with an agricultural workers’ union in Sinaloa (an affiliate of the “official” Confederation of Mexican Workers, CTM) to counter Campbell Soup Company’s efforts to divide and conquer unions in the United States and Mexico (Neuman 1993; Barger and Reta 1994).

The multisectoral Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM) was founded in 1989, before the NAFTA debate began. It brought together religious, environmental, labor, community, and women’s rights organizers who had been working on binational integration issues. Initially led by U.S. religious activists based on the border, over the years the CJM has become increasingly trinational, with Canadian, Mexican, and U.S. members. In fact, in 1996 it began to require 50 percent Mexican representation on its board of directors.

Williams’s comprehensive comparative examination of a decade of diverse CJM campaigns found that transborder labor-centered initiatives can generate pressure upon both governments and private-sector interests to reform practices and uphold laws in a manner that they otherwise would not do (Williams 1999, 2002). The CJM has taken up the long-term challenge of bringing labor unions together with community-based worker organizations and NGOs. This is especially important in the maquiladora sector, where many Mexican workers do not see formal unions as organizations that will represent their interests. After all, through “protection contracts” signed without rank-and-file involvement, many of these workers are already nominally members of unions—albeit corrupt and largely invisible ones. Williams’s systematic comparison of a large number of solidarity actions shows that the more cross-border they were, the more impact they had on their targets. This suggests that the logic of binational approaches to workers’ rights campaigns is driven by its greater practical impact, not simply by ideology.

However, some kinds of cross-border actions create tensions between U.S. and


31 Such asymmetries are particularly noticeable in the automotive sector.

32 For example, in the early 1990s the United Auto Workers (UAW) did not pursue relationships with union democracy movements in the United States (such as the Ford-Custardtian movement of Mexico (such as the Ford-Custardtian movement of Mexico) in order to avoid alienating FDI union bosses. This permitted a rank-and-file dissenting movement within the UAW – New Directions – to gain the moral high ground by leading U.S. solidarity efforts with Mexican Ford workers (LaBianca 1992: 128–131; Arbuckle 1998). When thugs from the government-aligned Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) killed a worker at the Custardtian plant, thousands of New Directions UAW workers in the Midwest wore black armbands. Yet that solidarity breakdown may also have been a weakness, given that associations with New Directions probably made the Ford-Custardtian rank-and-file movement anathema to the UAW national leadership.

33 See Kanel and Hoffman 1999. The Border Committee of Women Workers is reportedly active in Ciudad Victoria, Rio Bravo, Piedras Negras, Ciudad Acuña, and Agua Prieta.

34 See Carillo 1999 and 1999 on efforts to build transnational solidarity with the “19th of September” Seamstresses’ Union. In the late 1980s, these ties included contacts with the major U.S. counterpart unions, as well as a relationship with Texas-based Fuerza Unida (United Force), International support for the “19th of September” Seamstresses’ Union waned following a disputed leadership transition in 1988. See also Mujer a Mujer’s (Woman to Woman) innovative binational newsletter “Correspondencia,” which linked supporters of female labor organizing in both countries from 1984 to 1992. For further discussion of Mujer a Mujer, see Waterman 1998: 168–72, and Carillo 1998.

35 For further discussion, see Kanel 1988, 1999; Kanel and Hoffman 1999; Peña 1997; and Ruiz and Tiano 1987.
and organizing initiatives undertaken within Mexico. By this time, increased Mexican (and Canadian) participation in the CJM had transformed the coalition into a much more balanced venue for forging joint strategies and processing very different campaign styles. Most notably, the relationship within the CJM between the AFL-CIO and autonomous Mexican worker-organizing initiatives had become a persistent source of internal debate. Thus, in terms of the conceptual framework presented in this study, the CJM is indeed aptly named—a coalition, more coordinated than a network but less unified than a movement.

One very high-profile maquiladora organizing experience involved Tijuana's Han Young automotive component factory. The Han Young union worked very closely with the San Diego Workers' Support Committee. Through its influential labor and political allies, the San Diego Workers' Support Committee generated widespread U.S. union and congressional concern about the blatant violations of freedom of association at the Han Young plant. Within Mexico, the Han Young union had affiliated with the national Authentic Labor Front (FAT) in order to gain sufficient political leverage to demand an open union election. However, it later left the FAT, giving priority to cross-border solidarity over Mexican coalition partners. The cross-border Han Young campaign won important court and media victories, but the factory's workers lost on the ground. Their victories in court were ignored by government authorities in Baja California, and all the pro-union workers were permanently replaced.

The Han Young case tested the limits of cross-border leverage. In this instance, at least, U.S. media coverage, plus access to Representative Richard Gephardt and then Vice President Al Gore, seem to have had little effect upon the defense of Mexican workers' rights. The Han Young case led to a claim filed through the U.S. National Administrative Office (one of the national offices established under the NAFTA's so-called labor side agreement to investigate worker rights grievances), but the main outcome was a factual public hearing on freedom of association in which dissident workers were publicly beaten in a Tijuana hotel (Bacon 2000). The Han Young experience is, then, a cautionary tale that warns against assuming that broad-based, high-level, and high-profile international pressure will be sufficient to influence political decisions within Mexico.

More generally, U.S. and Mexican labor unions have held numerous discussions, exchanges, and conferences, which have yielded frequent internationalist proclamations but relatively few consolidated partnerships. Some important U.S. unions have been divided over whether to pursue nationalist versus internationalist strategies. This was, for example, the case with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Han Young organizers did not participate in the new Mexican maquiladora organizing network.

For details on the Han Young campaign, see H. Williams 2000a; Hathaway 2000b; and the "Coalition for Labor Rights" (www.summerstock.com/agl/chl) and the "Working Together" and "Mexican Labor News and Analysis" bulletins (www.igc.sp.org/unitedefeat/alert.html). For overviews of border labor politics, see Bandy 1998, 2000.
which ended up undertaking both strategies at once during their mid-1990s period of reform leadership. The Teamsters’ high-profile campaign against the implementation of the NAFTA’s cross-border trucking provisions was remarkably successful; indeed, it was the only case in which a bottom-up U.S. protest blocked implementation of a NAFTA article. Working together with leading politicians from U.S. border states (including Texas Attorney General Dan Morales), the Teamsters managed to frame the issue in terms of public safety and the threat of illegal drug trafficking (rather than the promotion of the union’s special interests). In the process, they used media campaigns that many Mexican critics of free trade considered to be anti-Mexican in tone. Yet at the same time, the Teamsters’ internationalist wing pursued an organizing campaign in the state of Washington’s apple industry that was sensitive to the concerns of Mexican immigrants, coordinated with the United Farm Workers (UFW), and eventually involved Mexican unions. Although seemingly contradictory, these two approaches reflect both the political diversity that exists within the largest U.S. union and the pragmatic, short-term political calculations made by anti-NAFTA forces in the United States more generally.

The most notable binational union partnerships have been between relatively small, progressive unions, including alliances between the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE) and the FAT and between the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the Mexican Telefone Workers’ Union (STRM). The FAT-UE alliance was sustained by shared ideological commitments to internationalism and worker empowerment. This partnership helped to launch perhaps the most ambitious binational North American union coalition so far, the Dana Workers’ Alliance, which brought together many industrial unions to defend freedom of association in a Mexican auto parts plant. However, as the case slowly wound its way through the NAFTA labor grievance procedures, the two U.S. unions most involved withdrew from leadership of the initiative. The UE-represented auto parts factory was closed, and the Teamsters’ reform leadership lost power.

43 Kourtesis (2001) argues convincingly that the U.S. groups opposed to the North American Free Trade Agreement’s trucking provisions continue to reflect national biases.
44 In contrast to the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, as of the year 2000 the United Farm Workers (UFW) had not ventured beyond tentative gestures toward potential Mexican counterparts. According to local observers, the absence of a binational approach contributed to the failure of the UFW’s three-year campaign to organize Mexican strawberry workers in the Salinas Valley of California.
46 Author’s communication with United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE) representative Robin Alexander, September 1999.

The STRM-CWA alliance was especially significant because the unions came together to seek common ground despite their different positions regarding the NAFTA. They formed a coalition to meet long-term challenges, while “agreeing to disagree” over various short-term political questions. The STRM-CWA partnership initiated two cases under NAFTA labor grievance procedures alleging violations of the right to freedom of association. In the first case, the STRM filed a complaint on behalf of U.S. workers – Latina employees at a Sprint telecommunications facility who were fired for union organizing.42

Remarkably few organizations have followed the example set by the Farm Labor Organizing Committee when it pioneered the strategy of bringing together unions representing workers employed by the same company in Mexico and the United States. One important exception involved the airline industry, which is increasingly binationally integrated. Delta Airlines and Aeroncafé have one of the most extensive corporate partnerships in the sector; in response, the pilots’ organizations representing both companies formed an alliance “to protect wage structures and work distribution ... the first of its kind in Latin America” (Millman 2000).

In summary, cross-border union collaboration has brought to public attention some blatant violations of freedom of association — but thus far without any tangible effect in terms of practical developments in the workplace. Indeed, some U.S. workers who supported their Mexican counterparts saw their own plant shut down, allegedly in retaliation for their solidarity actions (Bacon 1998). Perhaps the most interesting departure is for Mexican unions to pursue binational claims involving violations of freedom of association of workers (often Mexico-origin workers, as in the cases of Sprint and Washington apple growers) in the United States. These efforts have contributed to more balanced coalitions by showing that the right to freedom of association is also systematically violated in the United States, not just in Mexico.47

The national administrative offices created under the North American Agreement
on Labor Cooperation have been one of the most tangible institutional results of binational NAFTA union campaigning, and coordinated grievance initiation has constituted one of the most important ways in which unions have sought to sustain and deepen their cross-border coalitions. Having a shared institutional target clearly helped to focus coalition-building efforts. Nevertheless, in the 23 complaints initiated over the 1994–2001 period, the labor side agreement produced very few tangible results in terms of influencing either government policies or private employers, and there were many more complete defeats than partial victories (Human Rights Watch 2001). More generally, the dominant pattern is that the right to organize remains tenuous in both countries, and cross-national ties have been unable to offset labor’s weak bargaining power within national political institutions.44

Environmentalists

As in the case of organized labor, binational environmental networking and advocacy have been marked by very significant differences within, as well as between, the Mexican and U.S. movements. Both national environmental movements are characterized by high levels of internal diversity, including both groups that see corporate-led economic growth as the answer to meeting environmental needs and elements that view unregulated economic growth as the problem (Hogenboom 1998, Bejarano 2002). Moreover, in both countries the experiences and priorities of groups working directly on the Mexico–U.S. border are often quite distinct from the larger national environmental organizations that have more ample access to the media and policy makers.

There have also been important differences over time in networking effectiveness. The high-profile pre-NAFTA debate was more than the exception in binational environmental politics. Indeed, despite the central role that U.S. environmental organizations played on both sides of the pre-NAFTA debate, none of the major national environmental organizations in the United States devoted serious sustained attention to Mexico or to potential Mexican partners after the vote on the NAFTA in the U.S. Congress.45 This generalization holds true for the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, and Greenpeace, which were the only large membership-based U.S. environmental organization to oppose NAFTA. When Washington’s short-term agenda moved away from Mexico, so did theirs.46

It is not surprising that the major U.S. conservation organizations chose to follow the official logic that Mexico needed trade-led economic growth to generate the resources needed for (hypothetical) environmental investments. These U.S. organizations espoused “free-market environmentalism,” and the boards of directors of the most powerful pro-NAFTA U.S. conservation organizations included several prominent corporate representatives, some of whom were simultaneously active within the pro-NAFTA corporate lobby (Dreiling 1997, 2004). Beginning also in the early 1990s, some large U.S. conservation organizations received major grants from the U.S. government to promote the park approach to biodiversity conservation in Mexico.47

Despite the high public profile of the biodiversity issue, rare indeed are binational partnerships with established Mexican social counterparts involved in rural natural resource management (with, for example, the vast community forestry movement or the densely organized smallholder coffee cooperative movement, both of which are primarily indigenous). One network began to emerge when the Natural Resources Defense Council, together with the Smithsonian Institution’s Center for Migratory Birds, convened a major conference on sustainable coffee in 1996 (Rice, Harris, and MacLean 1997). Since then, however, the U.S. promoters of “bird-friendly” coffee have yet to form many close partnerships with the “fair trade” coffee traders, who focus more on balanced coalitions with Mexican

44 The exception was the pro-whale campaign against Mitsubishi Corporation’s salt works in Baja California, as discussed below.
45 One important exception to this trend emerged in the late 1990s when the Sierra Club began to take up issues of environmental human rights, including a Guerrero case involving a peasant anti-corporate logging activist (www.sierraclub.org/human-rights/Mexico; Eaton 1999). This campaign contributed to the peasant winning the high-profile Goldman award for environmental activism (Dillon 2000).
46 In contrast, the Sierra Club’s 1998 internal referendum over whether to consider immigration to be an environmental problem attracted high levels of public attention (Clifford 1998). Although the membership decisively defeated the proposition, neither the internal nor the public debate had any immigrant or binational participation.
47 These organizations included the Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, and Conservation International. Independent evaluations are lacking of the degree to which these large U.S. conservation organizations have forged balanced partnerships with the communities residing in protected areas. One case worthy of further examination is Conservation International’s operation of the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve, which began in the early 1990s with USAID funds. According to one biologist from Chiapas with extensive field experience in the region, the reserve was managed without community-based civil society partners and to little tangible environmental effect (author’s interview, September 1999, Santa Cruz, California).
grassroots coffee producers. The sustainable coffee campaign has had some success at penetrating the U.S. media, but coverage often focuses upon protecting birds rather than forest dwellers’ livelihoods, organizations, or human rights. Moreover, the supply of fair-trade and sustainable coffee continues to be much larger than the demand from “conscious” consumers. One common U.S. subtext is occasionally made explicit: the assumption that birds that migrate between the two countries are “American” — as though birds have national identities (Silver 1999). Overall, the alternative coffee issue has produced many meetings and networks but few coalitions.

Greenpeace, with its broad ecological critique, developed one of the very few binational partnerships among the large international environmental membership organizations. In principle, this organization would appear to be a case of a transnational social movement organization, but in practice the fit with this concept has been uneven. As part of Greenpeace’s effort in the early 1990s to seek greater internal North-South balance, its international leadership sided with its Latin American branches on the controversial tuna-dolphin issue, on the grounds that the Mexican tuna fishing industry had reportedly changed its practices in order to protect dolphins. Southern environmentalists perceived Greenpeace’s heterodox stance as a blow against eco-imperialism, but nationalistic U.S. ecological groups such as the Earth Island Institute (which lacked strong Mexican partnerships) responded vigorously. Earth Island — a Greenpeace competitor in the direct-mail fund-raising market — seized the opportunity to denounce its rival as anti-dolphin. Greenpeace-International had long been divided over whether to pursue more North-South balance within the organization, and by the mid-1990s the pro-Southern faction within Greenpeace had been defeated. One lesson here is that balanced transnational partnerships can be politically charged when charismatic mega-fauna are involved.

Middle-of-the-road U.S. environmental NGOs appear to have bolstered the Mexican environmental ministry’s prestige and budgetary resources for dealing with biodiversity protection, but they have had less influence upon border politics. In

contrast, the border’s transnational public sphere has been occupied by a civil society that has been gradually thickening from below. Notable NGO coalitions that predated the NAFTA debate include the Environmental Health Coalition (Tijuana–San Diego), the International Sonoran Desert Alliance and other binational tribal initiatives, the CML’s anti-toxics efforts, the Border Ecology Project, and the successful partnership between Chicahuau’s Commission for Solidarity and Defense of Human Rights and the Texas Center for Policy Studies to stop a World Bank-aided loan in the Sierra Madre’s indigenous territories in 1991–1992. Subsequent initiatives have included a broad-based binational coalition bringing together environmentalists throughout the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo basin, among others.

Not only have the pace and intensity of binational civil society collaboration on the border increased significantly since NAFTA, but they have also had some very tangible successes. Border environmental coalitions have blocked several controversial proposed projects, including the Tamaulipas canal waterway and, most notably, the Sierra Blanca nuclear waste dump in Texas. Ironically, the fact that the proposed Sierra Blanca dump was designed to receive waste generated at the United States’ northern border, in New York and Vermont, bolstered critics’ charges of environmental racism.

The Sierra Blanca anti-dump campaign was followed by the defeat of the proposed joint venture between Mitsubishi Corporation and the Mexican government to expand an industrial salt works in Baja California. The project threatened to affect the breeding grounds of the California gray whales that migrate between Mexico’s coastal waters and the Bering Straits, past the United States. In this case, binational pressure forced project proponents to meet unusually rigorous environmental assessment standards, and both mainstream and radical U.S. environmental organizations engaged in successful mass media campaigns that raised the project’s political cost to both the Mexican government and Mitsubishi.

Both the Sierra Blanca and Baja California projects had unusually media-worthy protagonists — nuclear waste in one case, charismatic mega-mammals in the

52 In one notable fair-trade partnership, Equal Exchange and Cultural Survival both launched a support campaign for the Majoros organic coffee cooperative, which had been hit hard by the December 1997 massacre of peasant families in Acteal, Chiapas (see www.equalexchange.org and www.cs.org).

53 For a comprehensive and insightful analysis of sustainable coffee marketing issues, see Rice, Harris, and MacLean 1997. This report provides extraordinary insight into obstacles that have slowed the emergence of credible coffee labeling and consumer education efforts in the United States, but it does not highlight the role of independent producer organizations as actors. See also Bray 1999.


55 Author’s interview with former Greenpeace International leader, December 1998, Santa Cruz, California.

56 Tani Adams (1999) has developed this last point.


58 The Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition, for example, includes more than fifty organizations and defines itself as “a multi-national, multi-cultural organization with leadership from the United States, Mexico, and the Pueblo nations whose purpose is to help local communities restore and sustain the environment, economics, and social well-being of the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin” (see www.riveweb.org). Note that not all cross-border environmental collaboration is sustained for very long. The Red Patagonia de Salud y Medio Ambiente (Border Network for Health and the Environment), for example, did not consolidate ongoing cross-border partnerships.


other—that enhanced the campaigners’ leverage. These two campaigns show that, given sufficient lead time, environmental NGOs can influence or block new, high-profile, high-risk policy decisions. Both initiatives involved balanced coalitions with clear, tangible, shared goals. One could argue, however, that these goals were relatively “winnable” because they did not challenge the dominant pattern of maquiladora industrialization. In contrast, it is difficult to find significant victories in the area of toxic industrial waste disposal despite the issue’s high public profile.61

In addition to defeating specific proposed projects, border environmental campaigns have also set precedents for constructive public participation in local and binational policy processes. Mainstream U.S. national environmental organizations played a central role in extracting promises of limited procedural reforms for dealing with border environmental threats (Audley 1997; Hogenboom 1998). These concessions—made by the U.S. government and imposed upon Mexico—provided middle-of-the-road environmental NGOs with the political cover they needed to avoid conflict with the administration of President Bill Clinton, which they supported on other, often higher priority, issues. Following the NAFTA vote in 1993, when U.S. national environmental NGO agendas moved on to other topics, it fell primarily to border groups to encourage the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC) and the North American Development Bank (NADBank) to fulfill their mandates (BIOS Action Kit 1999; Mumm 1999). Most independent environmental policy observers see the BECC and NADBank as setting higher standards for public participation in the policy process, even though they have yet to produce significant tangible impacts upon the border environment.62

The sensitivity of many border environmental organizations to interlocking human health and natural resource concerns facilitated cross-border coalition-building. U.S. and Mexican border groups also share their distance—and, to some degree, alienation—from their respective national elites. Moreover, border groups have been willing to take on the difficult challenge of recognizing and overcoming cultural differences (Kelly 2002). This commitment is crucial because, as the history of the border shows, proximity does not necessarily generate mutual understanding.

Trade Advocacy Networks

In the United States, the NAFTA debate of the early 1990s focused upon the domestic implications of the North-South relationship—especially upon the nature of U.S. relations with the developing world in general and with Mexico in particular. In Mexico, early opposition to the NAFTA was more limited than in

the United States, but there, too, it generated a very wide-ranging debate about relations with “the North.”

The trade debates in both countries had transnational and multisectoral dimensions. Domestic constituency organizations met with their counterparts in the other country (often for the first time) in order to understand each other’s perspective and, in some instances, to engage in joint activities and contribute to each other’s efforts. At the same time, because diverse actors perceived that their interests were directly affected by the NAFTA, unusual “citizen” coalitions brought together local, regional, and national organizations representing organized workers, farmers, environmentalists, and consumers, immigrants, Latino, and human rights activists. Many of these organizations had never worked together, and some of them had long histories of mistrust, if not outright antipathy.63 Suddenly, social constituency organizations that once considered themselves as solely “domestic” and conceptually remote from international economic policy entered the transnational arena as they responded to the NAFTA proposal.

In the United States, the NAFTA opposition became a movement with somewhat disjointed nationalist and internationalist wings (Cavanagh, Anderson, and Hansen-Kuhn 2002). Some of the anti-NAFTA forces perceived economic integration as a process that threatened U.S. sovereignty. Ralph Nader’s Public Citizen organization stressed this nationalist approach, as did those environmentalists and labor unions who argued that the NAFTA would supersede the authority of local and national labor, consumer, and environmental laws and standards (Nader et al. 1993). These leftist populists were joined, and then overshadowed, by conservative nationalist populists led by Ross Perot Jr. and Patrick J. Buchanan.

The NAFTA’s proponents were caught off guard by the broad public challenge, and they became increasingly alarmed as the popular debate came to threaten the legislative survival of their project. The U.S. opposition was strong enough to oblige then-presidential candidate Bill Clinton to acknowledge, for the first time in U.S. history, the legitimacy of embedding labor and environmental standards in trade policy. The so-called environmental and labor side agreements designed by the Clinton administration managed to divide the major environmental organizations and provided some political cover for labor leaders, who differed privately over how intensely to oppose their ostensible ally Clinton on the NAFTA (Mayet 1998, Audley 1997, Dreiling 1997). At the same time, an unusual Latino advocate-environmentalist coalition also led to the creation of new binational institutions (the BECC and the NADBank) to buffer the NAFTA’s environmental and social costs on the Mexico-U.S. border (Hinojosa-Ojeda 2002).

The common campaign practice of building broad, often contradictory short-term coalitions around specific legislative conflicts dominated the U.S. process. U.S.-based critics of the NAFTA found relatively few like-minded counterparts in

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61 For comprehensive overviews of border toxic waste issues, see, for example, Red Mexican de Acción Frente al Líbano Cereceres et al. 2000 [http://www.texasscenter.org/pubs/pubs.htm] and Varady, Romero Lankao, and Hawkins 2000. The most recent data from the National Institute for Statistics, Geography, and Informatics (INEGI) indicate that, of the estimated 8 million tons of toxic waste generated annually, only 13 percent receive some kind of treatment (Encio 2001).

62 See diverse critiques in "Borderlines Update" and Public Citizen 1997, among others.

63 See Lehman 2002 and Hernández Navarro 2002 on the many binational exchanges between farmers and campesino organizations.
Mexico, where unilateral trade opening had already occurred and even NAFTA critics limited their political investment because closer economic integration between Mexico and the United States was perceived as inevitable. The nationalist wing of the U.S. NAFTAs opposition also used incisive rhetoric that discouraged binational collaboration. Nationalist U.S. critics of the NAFTA found that their message of “Blame the foreigners” was well received by important mass publics. Economic restructuring had generated widespread insecurity among industrial workers, and many U.S. employers systematically used the threat of flight abroad to weaken union organizing efforts and undermine workers’ position in their efforts to negotiate contracts (Greenhouse 2001, Human Rights Watch 2000, McKennemy et al. 1997). Some U.S. environmental and food safety campaigns also sought to play upon images of Mexico as a foreign threat, resonating with inherited popular cultural stereotypes of “dirty Mexicans”—even though the most dangerous food safety threat to U.S. public health is clearly the domestic meatpacking industry (Pett 2000).

The internationalist wing of the U.S. NAFTA opposition recognized that some kind of economic integration was inevitable. Nevertheless, by the time of the NAFTA vote in the Congress, its first slogan, “Not this NAFTA,” had been replaced by “No to NAFTA.” Although U.S. internationalists worked closely with their Mexican counterparts and with anti-racist social movements in the United States, their ambitious goal of mass economic literacy required sustained political investments, whereas the legislative campaign momentum imposed a short-term political logic that privileged nationalist discourses.

Mexican critics coalesced around the Free Trade Action Network, led by the FAT, human rights groups, environmentalists, and other NGOs (Arroyo and Montoy 1996, Luján 2002, Peñaloza Méndez and Arroyo Picard 1997, RMALC 1994). Despite significant domestic political constraints, this activist network obliged senior governmental officials and even cabinet ministers to engage in an ongoing dialogue with them during the NAFTA negotiation process, a previously unimaginable possibility.

The Mexican Action Network Against Free Trade (RMALC) was bolstered by its partnerships with the Action Canada Network and, in the United States, the Alliance for Responsible Trade. In spite of the pressures created by the final “yes or no” NAFTA vote, these national networks tried to change the terms of the debate by engaging in an unusual process of binational civil society negotiations to produce a shared alternative policy stance. The most important proposal of this kind, “A Just and Sustainable Trade and Development Initiative for North America,” was developed by three NGO trade coalitions: Alliance for Responsible Trade (ART), RMALC, and a group within Action Canada Network. This initiative was overshadowed publicly by the highly polarized final phase of the NAFTA debate in the United States, but its innovative binational consensus-building approach set a historic precedent (ART/CTC/RMALC 1994; Cavanagh, Anderson, and Hansen-Kuhn 2001). Even the more nationalist U.S. network eventually supported it. The networks worked from drafts that bracketed their points of difference, in conscious imitation of the treaty negotiation process itself. One of the most important points of contention was the issue of whether (implicitly Mexican) failure to meet minimum environmental and social standards should provoke trade sanctions.

The overall pattern that emerged from a decade of trade policy debate was not a secular trend of ever-increasing levels of binational partnership and coalition-building. Instead, there were ebbs and flows in which both nationalist and internationalist trade advocacy efforts peaked during the debate preceding the NAFTA vote. The NAFTA again appeared on the U.S. policy agenda because of Mexico’s December 1994 financial crisis, when U.S. advocacy groups took a distinctively nationalist position. One noted left-liberal advocacy economist even compared the United States’ subsequent financial rescue of Mexico to its involvement in the Vietnam war, suggesting that the United States was entering a dangerous quagmire and thereby reinforcing the “Mexico as threat” NAFTA critique (Faux 1995). Similarly, domestic opposition to the 1997 renewal of so-called fast-track U.S. trade legislation involved much less coordination with Mexican counterparts than existed during the NAFTA debate. Sustained U.S. labor and consumer opposition to the implementation of the NAFTA’s cross-border trucking provisions also relied upon nationalist approaches. Meanwhile, RMALC continued to monitor the NAFTA’s effects, but it focused its advocacy work upon Mexico’s free-trade agreement with the European Union, managing to incorporate a significant democracy clause into the agreement (Arroyo and Peñaloza 2000). In short, balanced cross-border civil society coordination is far from an inevitable dimension of increasing international concern about economic globalization.

**Democracy and Human Rights**

If one had looked ahead from 1988 or 1994, it would have been difficult to predict that the U.S. presidential race of 2000 would suffer from much more serious procedural flaws than the Mexican presidential election held earlier that same year. During the most contested phase of Mexico’s transition to electoral democracy, the main pattern of U.S.–Mexico societal relations involving democracy and human rights issues took the form of networks. As Dresser (1996) has shown, Mexico’s “democracy network” provides an excellent illustration of the concept of transnational advocacy networks. In terms of the framework proposed in this study, a few organizations went further to sustain coalitions, involving coordinated agreements to pursue joint campaigns.

Dresser (1996: 215) notes that “The Mexican democracy network includes domestic and international electoral observer organizations, international NGOs, private foundations, groups of scholars, international secretariats of political parties, and some sectors of the national and international media... Mexican pro-democracy social movements are key parts of this nascent network.”

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64 See Ayres 1998 on the Canadian trade movement.
U.S. civil society organizations concerned with democracy and human rights abroad were slow to focus upon Mexico. Though influential international human rights reports began to appear in the mid-1980s, even Mexico’s 1988 electoral conflict did not lead to a sustained strategy of binational pro-democracy or human rights coalition-building.66 The NAFTA debate created a major opportunity to strengthen these civil society ties, but it was constrained by the narrow confines of the official policy agenda. Although most Mexican civil society organizations were wary of imposing direct pro-democracy or human rights conditionality upon the trade agreement,67 the NAFTA debate made these issues more visible in the United States. However, with the exception of those organizations involved with election monitoring, this political moment did not produce a major convergence between U.S. and Mexican human rights groups.

Although human rights groups were important actors in the Mexican coalitions dealing with trade issues, democracy and human rights had little relevance for most U.S. trade advocacy groups. According to one of Mexico’s leading human rights activists, the issue was a low priority within the trilateral coalition-building process (Acosta 2002). Moreover, human rights groups in Canada, Mexico, and the United States had different views about the relationships among economic, social, and political rights.68 Independently of the trade debate, Mexican national human rights organizations also pursued claims through multilateral legal channels, such as the Inter-American Human Rights Commission. They were successful insofar as the Mexican government was issued several critical decisions, but only in one case did the government actually respond by complying with international law.69

It took the 1994 Chiapas rebellion to make human rights in Mexico a priority on the binational civil society agenda. A wide range of U.S. groups responded quickly, contributing to the international pressure for a political solution to the conflict. By 1999, four different national U.S. organizations and networks, as well as many smaller local groups, had made Chiapas a priority (Stephen 2002). Lack of coordination among indigenous rights support groups within the United States reflected different political cultures and constituencies, as well as different approaches among Mexican counterpart groups. Most U.S. support initiatives drew heavily upon the legacy of Central American peace movements in the 1980s, including both faith-based and secular leftist political cultures and strategies (Goss 1998, 1995; C. Smith 1996). This legacy bolstered Chiapas solidarity work in the short term, but it carried medium-term weaknesses (including the strategic limitations associated with interpreting Mexico through a Central American lens). This pattern began to change with the founding of the Mexico Solidarity Network in 1999. Some 75 organizations participate in this group, which has organized several labor and human rights delegations to Mexico.70

Many observers have pointed to the increased volume and velocity of the international information flow from Chiapas as strong evidence of “globalization from below” and an indication of the power of international solidarity. The flow of information to international sympathizers has irritated Mexican government officials, who have referred disparagingly to the Chiapas conflict as a (mere) “war of ink and Internet.”71 However, the conflict on the ground has remained stalemated for years, information flow and international solidarity notwithstanding. Thus the degree to which the Zapatape supporters’ able use of the Internet has contributed to their cause remains an open question. Stephen (2002), for example, aptly questions the widespread assumption that more and faster activist access to information necessarily leads to greater policy impact.72 According to one key U.S. strategist (Lewis 2002), solidarity groups’ focus upon Chiapas to the exclusion of other militarized regions and national-level democratization in Mexico has also limited the impact of U.S. peace support efforts. Although U.S. civil society efforts to achieve peace in Chiapas gained widespread legitimacy in the United States, they did not penetrate and mobilize major U.S. civil society institutions. This outcome contrasts with what was achieved by the movement against U.S. intervention in Central America in the 1980s, which generated broad-based mainstream participation in religious, civic, and trade union arenas, leading to significant influence in the U.S. Congress. In the 1980s, Central American opposition and peace movements themselves made winning U.S. civil society allies a strategic priority, whereas neither the EZLN nor the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) has given primacy to network-building.73

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66 Amnesty International published the first significant report (1989). The timing of its release coincided with the peak of Republican political criticism of Mexico from Washington, D.C. This association significantly undermined the report’s political impact because the Mexican government could write it off as foreign intervention in the country’s internal affairs.

67 For one exception (a Mexican effort to create a link in the U.S. debate over the NAFTA between the trade agreement and democratization in Mexico), see Castañeda and Hedenskog 1993. For a trinational overview, see MacDonald 1999.


69 Author’s interview with Emma Maza Calvillo, international relations director of the Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez, April 2001, Mexico City. For details on Mexico’s international human rights legal decisions, see Centro de Derechos Humanos 2000.

70 See www.mexicossolidarity.org.

71 See Ronfeldt and Arquilla 1998 for a U.S. military-sponsored analysis of this issue.

72 The widely assumed direct Internet linkage between the EZLN and the outside world has been overdrawn. In the early years, the principal communication process involved two stages - first between the EZLN and La Jornada, and then between La Jornada’s website and the rest of the world. For subsequent debate over the role of international solidarity with Chiapas, see Hellman 2000 and Cleaver 2000.

73 For an analysis of why certain radical movements gain international visibility and others do not, including a comparison of the EZLN and the Popular Revolutionary Army (ERP), see Bob 2000.
The Chiapas rebellion focused the attention of U.S. pro-democracy groups - and the U.S. government - upon Mexico's 1994 presidential election. This was the high point of U.S. civil society interest in working with Mexican election observers, although some groups (including Global Exchange and the Washington Office on Latin America) continued to work closely with Mexico's Civic Alliance in their efforts to monitor controversial state-level elections. Mexican independent election observer efforts only began in 1991 (Aguayo Quezada 1998, Álvarez Icaza 2002, McConnell 1996). U.S. observer groups (including participants from traditional human rights organizations, universities, peace groups, Latino rights advocacy groups, and trade unions) became involved in 1994 and together accounted for a large fraction of international observers. However, the entire international contingent during the peak period of foreign concern numbered only about 500 individuals, compared to as many as 25,000 Mexican observers (Álvarez Icaza 2002). In contrast, U.S. citizens' organizations alone sent 700 official representatives to observe El Salvador's 1994 elections (Gosse 1995).

The largest single U.S. citizen contingent in 1994 was organized by Global Exchange, an NGO whose numerous "reality tours" to Chiapas later provoked Mexican government hostility. Unlike most international observers, Global Exchange delegates traveled to remote rural hotspots where electoral violations were most probable. On the night of the 1994 election, however, under media pressure to make a public statement, the logic of the organization's mission led its representatives to take a position even before its Mexican host, Civic Alliance, had decided how to respond to the exclusionary practices that surfaced during the election (practices that were as unexpected as they were difficult to document). At that moment, Global Exchange's exercise of its autonomy caused tension within the binational partnership, reinforcing an image of the organization as a reckless seeker of media attention. Global Exchange subsequently made a long-term, sustained political investment in working with its Mexican partners, and it has since been one of the Mexican pro-democracy movement’s most consistent U.S. civil society allies. For example, Global Exchange (in partnership with regional human rights organizations) subsequently organized experienced U.S. observer delegations for relatively less fashionable missions such as observation of Guerrero’s municipal elections.

Several human rights organizations and Chiapas support initiatives formed sustained networks, and some of the campaigns with an on-the-ground presence could clearly be considered coalitions (including, for example, International Service for Peace in Chiapas and the Schools for Chiapas project). The Global Exchange-Civic Alliance partnership was the clearest instance of a sustained pro-democracy coalition that addressed issues beyond Chiapas. Aside from these few cases, however, one could argue that both U.S. and Mexican pro-democracy actors have lacked a sustained strategy for building partnerships that reach deeply into their respective civil societies.

**Women's Rights Networks**

Binational women’s rights networks have been extensive, but they generally have had a lower profile than networks in other sectors because activists have brought gender perspectives to other social movements - most notably supporting the empowerment of women workers and indigenous women, Mujer a Mujer and the American Friends Service Committee’s maquiladora support program both played pioneering roles. Sometimes the links between women’s rights concerns and binational integration reached deeply into U.S. civil society. For example, the United Methodist Women, a progressive membership organization with more than one million members, was the first women’s organization publicly to oppose the NAFTA (Dougherty 1999).

Many experiences of the binational women’s movement are remarkably similar to those in other sectors in terms of the distinction between mutual learning and exchanges, on the one hand, and sustaining coalitions and campaigns, on the other. As Carrillo (1998: 394) observed in relation to Mexicana/Chicana movement relations, “the majority of contacts across the border have not yet reached a point of collaborative action, remaining instead in a beginning step of establishing contact and discussing common ground.” Carrillo further noted that lack of resources is not the only obstacle to binational coalition-building, “Differences in central focus and agenda” are also important; “Chicanas and Latinas in the United States have focused on questions of race and ethnicity, while Mexicanas have focused on class issues and survival.” After reviewing a wide range of cross-border initiatives dating from the mid-1980s, Carrillo concluded that:

-Time and again women showed a strong interest in making connections and taking a more active role in establishing the rules and regulations of the process of regional integration. The frustration voiced by both Chicanas/Latinas and Mexicanas was that no one knew exactly how to take the next step in transnational network building after establishing initial contact. Women’s movements lack a unifying focus or initiative around which groups can find a common ground and take collaborative action. On every front, the move from communication and contact to collaborative action was not clearly defined (1998: 407).


75 Paraphrasing Dresser (1991b), one might call this a "neo-nationalist reaction to a neoliberal problem."

76 Author’s observation and interviews, August 1994, Mexico City. After processing their data for several weeks, Civic Alliance came to the conclusion that, in effect, two different elections had taken place - one relatively clean, the other marked by systematic pressures upon voters and violations of ballot secrecy. For a discussion of the data, see Fox 1996.

77 For more on Global Exchange’s Mexico work, see Lewis 2002 and www.globalexchange.org. On the Civic Alliance, see www.lneca.apec.org/alianza/.
U.S. and Mexican women’s rights activists have also worked together to reframe policy discourse for women’s organizing in terms of the broader concept of human rights. According to Mayelí Blackwell, an analyst of U.S.–Mexican women’s movement relations, because of the United Nations conferences on women, “human rights discourse has replaced discrimination as the principal coalition-building element in international women’s politics.... For the fifteenth anniversary of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, there was a major campaign in Mexico called “Sin mujeres, los derechos no son humanos” (“Without women, rights are not human”).

Two converging trends made reproductive rights the highest-impact area of binational women’s movement collaboration. First, feminist activists in the United States expanded the framework for understanding reproductive rights to the broader concept of access to reproductive health rights more generally, a shift driven largely by the mobilization of U.S. women of color. Second, several large private U.S. foundations involved in Mexico became increasingly sensitive to feminist approaches to reproductive issues. As a result, since the 1980s U.S. foundations involved in reproductive issues in Mexico have invested millions of dollars to bolster the capacities of civil society organizations that defend women’s health rights, contributing significantly to the infrastructure of the Mexican women’s movement more generally. One of the most important instances of binational feminist coalition-building has emerged from the reproductive rights movement. It involves the very close relationship forged between the Mexican and U.S. women’s movement in efforts to shape reproductive rights. Though each is an independent NGO, each also sees itself as the voice of a large, underrepresented constituency. Both branches of the organization emerged from, and are extensively linked to, diverse feminist movements in their respective country. The Mexican branch is also deeply involved in national movements for human rights, Chiapas solidarity, and liberation theology. The U.S. and Mexican groups share a common mission and values, and both view themselves as part of a larger pro-choice Catholic movement. Both combine policy advocacy with efforts to influence broader public opinion. Finally, they have worked together in joint campaigns, including an initiative to persuade the United Nations to withdraw the Vatican’s state status in the interest of separating church and state and efforts to insert pro-choice Catholic perspectives into the ongoing international debates on population and development.

U.S. and Mexican pro-choice Catholic groups clearly constitute a binational coalition. They also share many of the characteristics of a transnational movement—including, notably, a perception of themselves as constituting a movement. As with many other cross-border partnerships, the density of this coalition rests upon the combination of a deeply shared ideology (feminism within the Catholic faith) and a strongly shared campaign target (the Catholic Church itself, perhaps the transnational civil society institution par excellence).

**Chicano/Latino Civil and Immigrant Rights**

Chicano/Latino leaders and activists have played crucial roles in several cross-border movements discussed under other “sector” rubrics, most notably those promoting labor rights and women’s rights. This section, however, focuses specifically upon relationships between civil and immigrant rights movements in the United States and Mexico.

Since the 1980s, domestic U.S. public interest organizations have built broad and deep advocacy institutions and coalitions to defend immigrant rights in the United States. For many years, however, these efforts developed largely without sustained exchange or collaboration with Mexican counterparts. Even some of the most consolidated, regionally based and nationally networked immigrant rights coalitions had relatively little contact with their neighboring counterparts in Mexico. Indeed, in the early 1990s some major national immigrant rights advocacy leaders, after years of being on the defensive, pursued an “ethnic” strategy of attempting to “de-mexicanize” the U.S. policy debate. Joint U.S.–Mexican efforts to develop binational civil society approaches to immigration issues came together organizationally only in the late 1990s, with the formation of the broad-based Mexican–U.S. Advocates Network (Gonzalez 2002).

Bilateral constituency-based organizing among immigrant communities, often marked by the difficult choice of whether to participate primarily in the United States or in the Mexican arena, has followed diverse paths. Since the late 1990s, however, organized immigrant communities have transcended this dichotomy by participating simultaneously in social and political movements in both countries. There is evidence that many Mexican citizens in the United States remain engaged with Mexican civic life. Despite immigrants’ lack of voting rights, Mexican political candidates...
have since the late 1980s carried out open electoral campaigns in the United States (Dresser 1991a, 1993, 1996). In contrast to the expectations created by the wave of immigrant sympathy for opposition presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in 1988, Mexican opposition political parties did not sink deep roots into immigrant communities in the United States. Nevertheless, many immigrants remain engaged with Mexican politics from afar.

In response, the Mexican government has paid a great deal of attention to Mexican immigrant associations, using its extensive network of consular offices to create semi-official channels for growing cross-border participation (González Gutiérrez 1993, 1997, 1999). Some immigrant organizations have responded enthusiastically to opportunities to collaborate with Mexican governmental authorities, while some have preferred to follow more autonomous paths (Goldring 1998, 2002; Fitzgerald 2000; Leiken 2000; Rivera Salgado 1999a, 1999b, 2002; R. Smith 1999). Most so-called hometown associations engage in “translocal” Mexican politics but remain relatively disengaged from U.S. politics — even during major moments of public debate, such as the furor surrounding California’s anti-immigrant Proposition 187 in 1994 (Zabin and Escala Rabádán 1998).

Among U.S. citizens, Mexican American organizations have long grappled with the dilemma of how to gain full and equal rights while defending their right to ethnic self-expression.89 Because of persistent U.S. perceptions of “foreign-ness,” Latinos’ struggles to be perceived as legitimate actors in the process of formulating U.S. foreign policy have been especially challenging.90 Latino civil rights leaders are divided over the implications of Mexican electoral politics in the United States.91 As Latino civil rights activists continue to debate whether and how immigrants and

U.S. Latinos should forge coalitions for social change, increasing Latino political empowerment in the United States has created new political space for cross-border coalitions.92" The effects of the dramatic increase in immigrant participation in U.S. politics are only beginning to be understood. In 1996 more than two-thirds of Latinos in the United States were potentially eligible for U.S. citizenship, yet less than 7 percent had become U.S. citizens (Mexico–United States Binational Commission 1997). Since then, Mexico-born immigrants have become U.S. citizens at much higher rates, and on average these newly naturalized citizens vote at higher rates than U.S.-born Latinos.93 At the same time, many Mexicans in the United States continue to identify more with Mexican than with U.S. politics. U.S. immigration reforms of the late 1980s legalized millions of Mexicans, who were then able to reinforce their home ties via more frequent back-and-forth travel than had been possible as long as they lived in the United States in undocumented status (Espinosa 1999).94

In 1996 the Mexican Congress granted Mexican citizens abroad the right to vote — in principle. Since then, Mexicans residing legally in the United States have mobilized new advocacy networks to encourage the Mexican government to comply with its commitment. In the process, they have constituted the first transnational advocacy network organized by immigrants to influence Mexican government policy toward them (Ross 1999; Martinez and Ross 2000; Santamaría Gómez 2001).95 The emigrant advocacy network has found relatively few allies within the Mexican political system; all the major parties have been internally divided on the issue.96 In 1999 the key voting rights reform provision passed Mexico’s federal Chamber of Deputies before stalling in the Senate. Nevertheless, the fact that Mexicans abroad won their political rights, even if only in principle, has permanently redrawn the boundaries of the Mexican immigrant civic arena, with quite open-ended consequences.

The emigrant transnational advocacy network has had its greatest impact at the

84 An independent Mexican commission convened to inform the national policy debate over the asylum ballot issue found that an estimated 87 percent of Mexican citizens in the United States would have liked to vote in the 2000 elections if they could have done so from the United States. The commission also estimated that between 1.3 and 1.5 million immigrants in the United States already held valid Mexican electoral registration cards (IFE 1998).

85 There is a rich, diverse literature on relations between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans. See, for example, Flores and Benmayor 1997; García Acevedo 1996; Gómez Quintana 1990; D. Gutiérrez 1995, 1996; Maciel and Herrera-Sobek 1998; Santamaria Gómez 1988; Sierra 1999; Villa 2000; and Weber 1998.


87 For example, influential University of Texas political scientist Rodolfo O. de la Garza has expressed concern about the threat that Mexican absentee voting might pose to Mexican Americans. "An extended display of Mexican politicking on U.S. soil would provoke a nativist fury in the United States directed not only at migrants but also at Mexican-Americans" (Dill 2002). However, leading voting rights activist Antonio González, director of the William Velasquez Research Institute, has stated that he "just [did not] see any kind of competition or negative effect in terms of U.S. Latino political empowerment versus Mexican political empowerment. They're complementary" (remarks at the conference "Lessons from Binational Civil Society Coalitions," University of California, Santa Cruz, July 1998).

88 This change was quite visible in 1999 when Antonio Villaraigosa, then speaker of the California General Assembly, visited Mexico, where he promoted U.S. support for Mexican immigrant-led community development initiatives as an alternative to Proposition 187-style policies (Romney 1995). As an indicator of the "localization" of transnational politics, the Los Angeles Times placed this article about a major state political leader’s international visit in the metropolitan news section. See also Villaraigosa and Huerta-Ojeda 1999.

89 On naturalization and political attitudes, see Pacheco and DeSipio 1992 and DeSipio and De la Garza 1998. On Latino voter turnout, see DeSipio 1996 and Arizmendi and Garcia 1996.

90 The many immigrants who remain undocumented are now eligible for naturalization in the United States.

91 The Mexican state’s strategy, in contrast, has been to encourage emigrants to become U.S. citizens and participate in U.S. politics, rather than to extend the boundaries of the polity to include the entire national diaspora.

level of the public agenda and the ways in which issues are framed. At the very least, immigrant civic leaders now have access for the first time to the national media in Mexico. A March 1999 non-governmental referendum in Mexico provided a revealing illustration of the resulting shifts in the terrain of political culture. The EZLN called the referendum as part of its effort to break the political stalemate that followed the Mexican government's withdrawal from the San Andrés agreements for peace in Chiapas. One of the leaders of the principal emigrant advocacy network, the “Coalition of Mexicans Abroad – Our Vote in 2000,” took advantage of his new access to the national press to appeal directly to EZLN leader Subcomandante Marcos, noting parallels in the ways in which both emigrants and indigenous peoples are excluded from full citizenship rights (Martínez Saldaña 1999). Apparently in response, the EZLN called for a fifth question (on the emigrant voting rights issue) to be added to the referendum at U.S. polling places, where approximately 50,000 votes were tallied. At least 8,000 of these votes came from the Binational Indigenous Oaxacan Front in the Fresno area. The FIOB is one of the few binational social organizations that can be considered a fully transnational social movement; its participants are part of a cohesive social subject – politicized pueblos – whether they are in the Mixteca (Northwest Oaxaca), Baja California, Los Angeles, or the central valleys of California (Rivera Salgado 1999a, 1999b, 2002).44

Late 1999 witnessed the most tangible evidence thus far of organized emigrants’ growing political influence. In its effort to protect the “national” (U.S.-dominated) automobile production industry, Mexico’s Ministry of Finance and Public Credit (SHCP) unilaterally decided to crack down upon emigrants’ widespread practice of returning to Mexico with used cars, which are much less expensive than automobiles produced by trade-protected Mexico-based manufacturers. To discourage the importation of what are officially illegal vehicles, the ministry announced that all drivers entering Mexico – tourists and returning migrants alike – would be required to leave a substantial financial deposit for each vehicle they brought with them (the deposit would be returned when the vehicle exited the country). The policy – which was to have been implemented shortly before the Christmas holidays, when millions of emigrants would be returning home – provoked a broad wave of protests by the increasingly politicized Mexican community in the United States. Emigrant leaders convinced the Mexican Senate to pass a resolution, supported by both the political opposition and the leaders of the then-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), to end the program after only two days in operation. Even the Ministry of Foreign Relations was reportedly critical of the program; ministry personnel apparently were not consulted in advance, yet they had to bear the brunt of emigrant protests.

93 More than two million people voted in Mexico on the original four questions. 44 On the FIOB, see www.lanca.apc.org/fiob/. See Nagengast and Keary 1990 on the interaction between the immigration process and ethnic identity formation.

The vehicle deposit controversy revealed the extraordinary separation between the worldviews of economic policy makers in Mexico City and the binational reality of as many as one in ten Mexican families. As the New York Times observed, “The plan apparently arose from some confusion within the government when officials failed to calculate the impact on Mexicans living north of the border. As many as two million are expected to come home for the holidays, many in their own cars” (Preston 1999). Even though the deposit was to be returned to vehicle owners upon their departure from Mexico, SHCP officials clearly overestimated the credibility of the official promise to refund the money.

The media and legislative lobbying campaign victory against the vehicle deposit is the most clear-cut success to date in binational immigrant organizing.53 It appears to have built directly upon the previous unsuccessful effort to gain the right for emigrants to vote in Mexico’s 2000 elections.54 As the president of the Concilio Hispano (Hispanic Council), a Mexican group based in Chicago put it, “This is the first time the Mexican community here managed to bring this kind of pressure on Mexico. It shows that we can use our power and make changes” (Preston 1999).

The issue of immigrant rights has catalyzed the formation of several binational networks and coalitions. Some have cross-border targets, as in the cases of the vehicle deposit, absentee voting rights, and immigrant rights policy advocacy issues. Other partnerships have cross-border constituencies, as in the case of immigrant hometown associations. Among hometown associations, the degree to which these U.S.-based groups have actual hometown partner organizations varies significantly. In terms of the distinctions among networks, coalitions, and movements, different
hometown associations would range across the spectrum, with the FIOB being the most clear-cut instance of a transnational social movement organization.

Assessing the Impact of Binational Networks and Coalitions

This section returns to Keck and Sikkink's conceptual framework, applying their categories for assessing different kinds of network impact to three of the most active binational sectors. This process involves addressing in combination two distinct questions. First, was there some kind of civil society impact in these different cases? Second, was that impact due largely to the specifically binational dimensions of each civil society?

Keck and Sikkink's impact categories start with "issue creation and agenda setting," followed by "influence on official discourse (of states and international organizations)," "influence on national and international institutions and procedures," "influence on policy change in target actors, which can be public or private," and finally "influence on state behavior" (1998: 25, 201ff). These authors argue that the different kinds of impact actually constitute stages of impact, because establishing discursive legitimacy and benchmark standards can bolster leverage in the future. It is also possible, however, that in some instances discursive reforms and weak institutional commitments serve to divide or distract civil society actors, weakening pressures for accountability (which critics might argue, was what happened with the NAFTA environmental side agreement). To "give a centavo (cent) to keep a peso" is an old story in Mexico. The propositions to be presented here constitute, then, a preliminary empirical test of this part of Keck and Sikkink's hypothesis about NGO impact - with the proviso that this study of Mexico-U.S. cases includes organized social constituencies as well as NGOs.

Table 15.3 assesses the impact of binational civil society networks in the Mexico-U.S. context, framing this issue in terms of Keck and Sikkink's categories and focusing on the environment, labor rights, and human rights issue areas. The table not only synthesizes this chapter's empirical findings in terms of Keck and Sikkink's different dimensions of potential network impact, but also summarizes the author's analytic assessment of the degree to which binational politics contributed to observed change in distinct issue areas (judged in terms of low, medium, and high impact). These causal assessments are subject to the usual caveats in terms of the difficulty of making counterfactual observations (for instance, how much policy change would one have found in the absence of cross-border campaigning?). It should also be noted that, because impact is defined here in terms of such categories as influence upon official discourse and policy, this exercise does not consider the consequences of binational networks for civil society actors themselves or for political cultures (see Brooks and Fox 2002).

In the three issue areas considered here, cross-border civil society activism has had the highest degree of impact upon environmental policy. It was especially consequential in Mexico, and it held the potential to block approval of the NAFTA in the United States. The Mexican state responded to cross-border initiatives by making major, sustained policy and discursive commitments, including the creation of Mexico's first environmental policy ministry (led by a credible, nonpartisan expert). The power of U.S. and Mexican environmental NGOs clearly led to the adoption of the NAFTA side agreement on environmental issues and to the creation of new border investment institutions. Although the side agreement has had little impact in practice, and even though the U.S. and Mexican policy makers who have directed the NADBank so far have not fully pursued its potential of innovation (Boudreau and Hinojosa-Ojeda 1998, Kourous 2000), by the late 1990s the BECC and the NADBank had begun to increase their levels of activity.

Mexico-U.S. NGO partnerships have had notable impacts upon biodiversity-related projects and policies in Mexico, ranging from removing the threat to whales in the San Ignacio Biosphere to sustained support for increased funding and improved management for protected natural areas. In contrast, cross-border campaigns against the industrial pollution associated with the maquiladora industry have had little impact. Moreover, free trade has posed major challenges for Mexico's most consolidated sustainable rural development initiatives (the organic coffee and community forestry movements), where strong cross-border partnerships have been lacking. In summary, cross-border environmental coalitions have produced some of the most dramatic breakthroughs in terms of civil society leverage, but also some of the most clear-cut defeats.

In the area of labor rights, there has been a more consistent pattern of failure. Labor rights briefly gained public prominence as an issue during the NAFTA debate, although it never had as much legitimacy or held as much attention as the environment. The most significant examples of labor's political leverage were the 1997 defeat of U.S. fast-track authority for approving trade agreements (Shue 2000) and President Bill Clinton's (1992-1996, 1996-2000) electoral decision to use discursive support for labor rights during the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle. Neither case, however, involved significant cross-border partnerships. Mexican organized labor continues to lose ground, and it has yet to win a significant foothold in the maquiladora industry. The Han Young campaign - a clear test of the limits of cross-border leverage - revealed that solidarity from the highest levels of the U.S. political system could not compel Mexican authorities to enforce basic court decisions. The enforcement of Mexican labor law continues to be determined almost exclusively by local and national politics.

Many analysts assume that international human rights campaigns have an impact. Keck and Sikkink, for example, claim that "from 1988 to 1994, the international
network in collaboration with recently formed domestic human rights groups provoked a relatively rapid and forceful response from the Mexican government, contributing to a decline in human rights violations and a strengthening of democratic institutions" (1998: 115, emphasis added). Yet in reality, the human rights record in Mexico is actually quite mixed.

Sustaining the case for international impact upon the human rights situation in Mexico requires stronger evidence in two areas. First, it is far from clear that human rights violations dropped during the period Keck and Sikkink discuss, and their indicators of change are very limited. Even though a lack of consistent baseline data makes systematic analysis of change over time difficult, the opposition Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) alleged that more than 600 of its activists were assassinated during this same period.99 Second, Keck and Sikkink's conclusion assumes that international factors were of primary importance in shaping the government's (largely symbolic) response. This may hold for the creation of the official National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), which Keck and Sikkink often as a principal indicator of impact.100 But whether the CNDH made a significant contribution to the prevention of human rights abuses is widely questioned. The clearest way to assess its impact is to review government responses to its official recommendations (that is, official CNDH findings that government agencies violated human rights). Here, according to top CNDH appointee, the general pattern was that of impunity (Ballinas 2003); government agencies nominally accepted CNDH recommendations but then did little in practice to prevent future human rights violations. Even in the very clear-cut case of peasant-ecologist political prisoners in the state of Guerrero, strong national and international campaigns (led by Amnesty International and the Sierra Club) did not prevent the Mexican legal system from sentencing individuals to long jail terms on trumped-up charges. They were finally released well into the presidency of Vicente Fox — and only after their lawyer was killed in the downtown Mexico City office.101

99 The situation appeared to improve somewhat in the late 1990s, although whether that was because of international pressure or a post-1994 decline in the electoral threat from the Left was not clear. What is clear is that serious and systematic human rights violations persisted and not only in Chiapas. On the case of Guerrero, see M. Guzmán 1998. During the 1996-1999 period alone, the Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez documented 115 disappearances (Centro de Derechos Humanos 1999).

100 Not all Mexican human rights analysts agree on this point. For example, the analysis of the CNDH's creation in Sierra Guzmán, Ruiz Harrell, and Barragán 1996 barely refers to international factors.

101 This case is very revealing of how the "boomerang effect" described in Keck and Sikkink (1998) operates in practice. The two political prisoners, Rodolfo Monreal and Teodoro Cabrera, were first arrested in May 1999. In August 1999, a local human rights organization in Guerrero, The Voice of the Voiceless, brought their case to a major national human rights NGO, the Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez (author's interview with Emma Maza Calviño, international relations director of the Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel

The impact of cross-border civil society partnerships upon Mexico's gradual democratization process is also easily overstated. Mexico's pro-democracy movement received remarkably little international support, and there is scant evidence that such support made a qualitative difference (for example, in ensuring that the 1994 elections were as clean as they were). The turning point in favor of electoral reform was a January 1994 agreement among Mexico's major political parties, and many Mexican observers concur that the government was pushed to the bargaining table by the delegitimizing effect of the Chiapas rebellion.

The Chiapas rebellion itself is probably the clearest example of the importance of international factors, which contributed directly to blocking a full-scale military response to the EZLN in mid-January 1994. For the U.S. mass media, hitherto entranced by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), the rebellion revealed that the "emperor had no clothes" and led to the immediate rejection of Salinas's claim that the rebels were illegitimate and foreign-inspired. International human rights protests certainly helped, although they were effective largely because both the U.S. government and the U.S. private sector were unenthusiastic about the prospect of their new NAFTA partner becoming engaged in a televised bloodbath. In this regard, the NAFTA had contradictory effects in January 1994 — contributing to the outbreak of the Chiapas rebellion, and then helping to stay Salinas's initial military response.

National factors are often downplayed in discussions of the Chiapas conflict. Yet Mexican civil society mobilized very quickly for peace, and key national political elites — most notably, then-foreign minister and one-time presidential "pre-candidate" Manuel Camacho Solís — threatened to break with Salinas if the government did not cease fire in January 1994. Disentangling the relative weights of national and international factors is always a challenge, but many analysts simply assume that the international (and, specifically, civil society) factors were primary, rather than consider them in national context.

Among the various international factors surrounding the Chiapas conflict, it is also important to consider the growing weight of European civil society and government human rights protests. The Zapatista support movement appears to be significantly broader and deeper in Europe than in the United States. President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) signed the San Andrés peace accords in 1996, just before he was about to travel to Europe to promote Mexico's free-trade agreement.

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Agustín Pro Juárez, April 2002 (Mexico City). The Center, in turn, took the case to Amnesty International, which in March 2000 finally decided to consider Monreal and Cabrera prisoners of conscience. The international campaign began then, leading to strong Sierra Club support, the Goldman Prize, and high-profile endorsements from Ethel Kennedy and Hillary Clinton. However, even after the inauguration of President Vicente Fox Quesada (2000-2006) the prisoners remained in jail (along with 67 other political prisoners remaining in Guerrero). See www.sierraclub.org/human-rights/ and www.sjocial.org/PRODH.
with the European Union. European concerns did not, however, prevent him from<br>later backing out of the peace agreement. This sequence of events reflects a more<br>general pattern in which international protests about human rights violations in<br>Mexico are sufficient to prompt partial and symbolic concessions, but not enough<br>to break the political stalemate on indigenous rights and peace in Chiapas.

Concluding Propositions

This final section steps back from the specific cases examined in the course of this<br>chapter to draw out several propositions for discussion, involving both the dyna-

mics of networks and coalitions and their impact. As noted in the introduction, these<br>propositions refer only to the subset of civil society actors that seek increased<br>participation and public accountability.

- **Networks often need shared targets to become coalitions.** Mutual sympathy or<br>shared concerns are usually not enough for networks to become coalitions, in<br>the sense of agreeing to sustain joint campaigns. Jointly held political ideologies<br>help, but they are not necessary; if they were, the list of binational coalitions<br>would be much shorter. Shared targets can certainly be politically constructed,<br>but it helps to have some tangible political opportunity structure that can make<br>collective action seem potentially effective. Shared targets include: policy makers<br>posed to make policy decisions that affect both Mexico and the United States<br>(such as congressional trade votes); transnational corporations operating in both<br>countries (such as Campbells Soup Company and Delta Airlines/Aeroméxico);<br>entire economic sectors (maquiladoras); specific products (organic coffee, for<br>example); shared watersheds (the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo); migrating whales,<br>butterflies, or birds; and international institutions such as the BECC, NADB,<br>the trilateral labor or environmental commissions, the World Bank, or even the<br>Catholic Church.

- **National and Mexico–U.S. border trends in binational relations have followed two<br>different paths since 1994.** Binational networks and coalitions have not followed<br>any one single trend over the past decade. Rather, border and national trends appear<br>to have diverged along two different paths. Environmental and labor coalitions<br>grouped along the Mexico–U.S. border have gradually increased their density as<br>In contrast, national-level networks and coalitions have displayed less consistent<br>patterns. In the case of some environmental, human rights, and labor organizations,<br>the pace of non-border binational social and civic relationship-building slowed<br>after 1994. The 1997 fast-track debate over U.S. trade policy revealed significant<br>backsliding compared to the 1994 high point. In retrospect, the NAFTA vote<br>and the initial phase of the Chiapas rebellion sparked upsurges of binational<br>political action and created a certain sense of a “war of movement,” producing<br>the hope that binational coalition-building might be broadened and deepened.<br>Instead, the handful of binational coalitions that have managed to sustain

coordinated relationships have pursued more of a “war of position.” Perhaps<br>this should not be surprising given the extensive investments in within-
organization and general public education that balanced binational coalitions<br>require.

- **Broad-based organizations that have sustained cohesive partnerships tend to “think<br>locally to act binationally.”** The classic formulation of global environmental<br>philosophy (“think globally, act locally”) does not help to explain why relatively<br>few broad-based social organizations sustain cohesive binational partnerships.<br>Accountability may be more important than ideology in this regard. Mass-based<br>social organizations governed by their members are under more pressure than<br>NGOs to be accountable to organized constituencies. They must allocate<br>resources based upon perceived tangible benefits for their members. To justify<br>investing resources in binational coalition-building, social organizations usually<br>need to be able to demonstrate that these initiatives have local results. For<br>example, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters reached out to Mexican<br>immigrants and worked with Mexican unions to protect the rights of workers in<br>the state of Washington’s apple industry because such efforts promised to increase<br>the union’s bargaining power. Mexican trade-advocacy networks tolerated a<br>degree of nationalistic rhetoric on the part of U.S. NAFTA critics because those<br>relationships increased their leverage. Similarly, the U.S. and Mexican tele-
phone workers’ unions joined forces in 1992 (despite deep differences over the<br>upcoming NAFTA vote) because they perceived that such an exchange would<br>reinforce their bargaining power over the longer term, with or without the<br>NAFTA. In the same way, both U.S. and Mexican environmental organizations<br>on the border appear willing to make serious investments in the difficult process<br>of overcoming cultural differences because they increasingly share the view that<br>the local is binational, and vice versa. Binational ideological convergence<br>though rare, can help sustain “think locally, act binationally” perspectives<br>because it establishes a longer time horizon for assessing local benefits. Shared<br>ideological visions can also sustain long-term alliances (such as that between the<br>United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America and the Authentic<br>Labor Front) whose tangible victories so far have been limited.

- **Binational networks and coalitions have had significant impact upon official policy<br>discourse, but they have only rarely won tangible increases in public or private<br>accountability.** The experiences of human rights, labor, and environmental coal-
tions suggest that there is a very large gap between their influence upon public<br>discourse and more tangible kinds of impact. Assessing impact is often methodo-
logically problematic, especially when some of the most important forms of<br>impact involve counterfactual assumptions (“the situation would be even worse<br>if not for . . .”). One might plausibly argue that binational networks and coalit-
ions have indeed been important in some such circumstances (helping to<br>prevent a full-scale military assault in Chiapas or the downfall of Mexico’s<br>reformist environmental policy makers). But even in counterfactual scenarios
such as these, it is difficult to establish conclusively that transnational factors or binational relationships were of primary importance. In terms of bolstering more reformist policies or inducing qualitative changes in actual state behavior (for example, increased authority for Mexican environmental reformers, significantly greater opportunities for Mexican and U.S. unions to organize, or indigenous rights reforms that could begin to resolve the Chiapas conflict), binational partnerships have not had much impact thus far. The NAFTA-origin border environmental institutions are the main exception to this generalization, and their impact so far has been quite limited compared to their mandate. The environmental campaign defeats of the Sierra Blanca and Mitsubishi projects were significant, but each had unusual features (they involved, respectively, nuclear waste and whales) that limit their generalizability. In summary, binational networks appear to have much more influence over public agendas and official discourse than on what their target actors actually do in practice. This should not be surprising, where the main points of leverage used against them are informational and symbolic politics, targeted actors can respond with symbolic concessions and arrangements such as a trinational commission that produces information.

Binational coalitions are long-term investments with uncertain payoffs. Networks that do more than exchange information from afar require human and material resources. Coalitions, because they involve higher levels of coordination, require even more resources to endure. Although some organizations can afford to invest such resources without short- to medium-term payoffs, organizations that are less well endowed must carefully weigh the tradeoffs involved. Transportation costs and other financial considerations aside, every week that an activist spends in another country is a week not spent organizing on home ground. Moreover, coalitions can involve certain risks, insofar as one set of partners may or may not consult before making decisions that could be politically costly for the other. On the positive side, investments in networks and coalitions often generate social capital (understood as resources for collective action embodied in horizontal relationships), and social capital can produce often unpredictable multiplier effects. But precisely because the empowering effects are difficult to assess, political investments in coalitions compete with much more pressing demands and with alternative investments that promise more immediate results.

In sum, binational civil society networks and coalitions have had much more impact upon themselves than on the broader processes and targets that provoked their emergence. Organized constituencies in each civil society have become better acquainted with their counterparts. Greater mutual understanding is likely to produce empowering effects, at least in the long term. Broad-based actors in both civil societies are qualitatively more open to, and experienced with, binational cooperation than ever before. This accumulated social capital constitutes a potential political resource for the future. Whether and how national civil society actors will choose to draw upon it remains to be seen.

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102 This hypothesis resonates with the World Bank campaign experience. In that case, transnational networks were a crucial reason why the World Bank decided to make environmental and social reform commitments, but national factors primarily determined the degree to which states met those commitments in practice (Fox and Brown 1998).

103 For many organizations, networks with their lower levels of commitment may make much more sense than coalitions. Relatively few binational interlocutors can draw "strength from weak ties" (Granovetter 1973), serving as resources when their organizations need them. In this scenario, relatively low-cost binational networks can exercise leverage at key turning points, as long as they link organizations that have some degree of influence in their respective societies. For an application of this argument to transnational advocacy networks, see Fox and Brown 1998.

104 For a related effort to broaden the criteria and scope for assessing social movement impact, see Álvarez 1997.


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Assessing Binational Civil Society Coalitions


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When Vicente Fox Quesada won the Mexican presidency in July 2000, he pledged to govern on behalf of “118 million Mexicans,” including the 18 million people of Mexican origin living in the United States (J. Smith 2000). His expanded constituency included the new leader of El Granjital, a village in the Mexican state of Michoacán, who shortly after his election flew north to his construction job in Santa Ana, California. His deputy stayed behind to attend village affairs. Every few months, the leader returns and the deputy migrates, as they take turns governing El Granjital on behalf of a community whose members mostly live in Santa Ana (Fitzgerald 2000). Yet the participation of Mexican emigrants in Mexican politics remains contested, as Andrés Bermúdez found when he was elected mayor of Jerez, Zacatecas in 2001—twenty-eight years after leaving Zacatecas to make his fortune in tomato farming in California. Bermúdez’s election was later overturned because of his California residency (Garrison 2002).

These vignettes illustrate the ways that relations between the U.S.-resident population of Mexican origin and political institutions in Mexico are enacted on multiple levels. Boundaries of national and hometown communities— and the rights of members absent from these communities—are subject to negotiation. This chapter discusses various aspects of such transborder politics, including Mexican hometown associations and their relationship with Mexican federal, state, and local governments; negotiations of dual nationality; the right to vote abroad; the proposed creation of an extra-territorial electoral district in the Mexican Congress; and U.S.-resident Mexicans’ and Chicanos’ interest in participating in Mexican politics.

The author is grateful to Wayne Cornelius, James Holston, David López, and Kevin J. Middelbrook for their comments and suggestions.

1 Fox was not the first opposition presidential candidate to campaign among the Mexican population in the United States, but he was the first to win.
DILEMMAS OF POLITICAL CHANGE IN MEXICO

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Contents

List of Figures and Tables vii
Acknowledgments x
List of Acronyms xi

INTRODUCTION
1 Mexico's Democratic Transitions: Dynamics and Prospects
   Kevin J. Middlebrook 1

PART I: PARTIES, ELECTIONS, AND THE MEXICAN VOTER
2 Party Competition in Mexico: Evolution and Prospects
   José Antonio Crespo 57
3 Public Institutions and Electoral Transparency in Mexico
   Silvia Gómez Tagle 82
   Jorge Buendía 108

PART II: PARAMETERS OF A NEW INSTITUTIONAL ORDER
5 Changing Patterns of Executive-Legislative Relations in Mexico
   Jeffrey A. Weldon 133
6 Democratization, Judicial and Law Enforcement Institutions, and the Rule of Law in Mexico
   Beatriz Magaloni and Guillermo Zepeda 168
7 Decentralization, Democratization, and Federalism in Mexico
   Alberto Díaz-Cayeros 198
PART III: KEY POLITICAL ACTORS: PILLARS OF THE OLD REGIME—FOUNDATIONS OF THE NEW?

8 A New Scenario for Mexican Trade Unions: Changes in the Structure of Political and Economic Opportunities
Graciela Bensudn

9 Rural Producers' Organizations and the State in Mexico: The Political Consequences of Economic Restructuring
Horacio MacKinnon

10 Business and Politics in Mexico
Matilde Luna

11 Mexico's Armed Forces: Marching to a Democratic Tune?
Roderic Ai Camp

12 Building the Fourth Estate: Media Opening and Democratization in Mexico
Chappell H. Lawson

PART IV: CHALLENGES OF RIGHTS AND REPRESENTATION

13 Civil Society in Mexico at Century's End
Alberno J. Olivera

14 Indigenous Rights: The Battle for Constitutional Reform in Mexico
Luis Hernández Navarro and Laura Carlen

15 Assessing Binational Civil Society Coalitions: Lessons from the Mexico-U.S. Experience
Jonathan Fox

16 "For 118 Million Mexicans": Emigrants and Chicanos in Mexican Politics
David Fitzgerald

Contributors

Index

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

4.1 Educational Level and Electoral Support for Mexico’s Institutional Revolutionary Party, 1991–2000


4.3 Retrospective Evaluations of the National Economy and Electoral Support for Mexico’s Institutional Revolutionary Party, 1991–2000

4.4 Prospective Evaluations of Personal Economic Circumstances and Electoral Support for Mexico’s Institutional Revolutionary Party, 1991–2000

6.1 Crimes Reported to State-Level Public Prosecutors’ Offices in Mexico, 1991–2000

6.2 Crimes Under Investigation at the State Level in Mexico, 2000


7.1 The Relationship between Regional Disparities and the Level of Economic Development in Selected Countries, 1980s–1990s

7.2 Divergence in Economic Performance in Mexico’s States, 1990s

7.3 The Relationship Between Mexican States' Self-Generated Revenue and Poverty, 1999


7.5 Electoral Competitiveness and Support for the Institutional Revolutionary Party in Mexico’s 2000 Federal Elections

7.6 The Simulated Effect of Support for Mexico’s Institutional Revolutionary Party on Municipal Revenue Collection

10.1 Membership in Mexico’s Private Sector Coordinating Council