

**Assessing Binational Civil Society Coalitions:
Lessons from the Mexico-US Experience**

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Comments and suggestions welcome

Introduction¹

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-US integration. This binational relationship is the broadest and deepest example of global integration between North and South, and therefore offers a clear paradigm case.

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, thanks to the latter's increased mobility. On the civil society side, some analysts suggest that thanks to increasingly-accepted international political norms and more accessible communications and travel, public interest advocacy networking has advanced to such a degree that a "transnational civil society" is now emerging. In the soft version, the international economy has always reconfigured itself, and the current phase is not unprecedented. This view notes that most industrial activity remains national, and contends that nation-states retain significant policy levers. In this view, "fully" transnational social or civic movements remain few and far between, with very limited capacity to go beyond international discourses to influence state or corporate action in practice. The US-Mexico relationship provides a vast array of experiences with which to test the hard vs. the soft ways of framing the globalization process.² This paper finds that most Mexico-US 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 specified criteria. Measuring the density and impact of political linkages implies specifying a standard for comparison (dense compared to what? influential compared to what?)³ Compared to where US-Mexico civil society relations stood a decade ago, there is no question that a wide range of networks, coalitions and alliances have emerged that would once have been hard to imagine. However, compared to the pace of binational integration among *other* actors – including auto manufacturers, investment bankers, toxic waste producers, drug dealers, TV magnates, immigrant families and national policymakers – both the degree and impact of binational civil society collaboration have been quite limited (with the notable exception of partnerships actually *on* the border).

Cross-border conversations 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 often features headlines like "budding cross-border collaboration" (e.g., Rosen, 1999), yet we have been reading similar headlines about relations between social movements in Mexico and the US for more than a decade. For reasons not yet fully understood, these buds have had difficulty flowering.

This paper is organized into four parts. First, society-to-society relationships are framed in terms of the broader US-Mexico context. The second part makes conceptual distinctions between transnational networks, coalitions and movements, and then assesses varying degrees of density of key US-Mexico civil society partnerships in those terms. The third section builds on Keck and Sikkink's framework for assessing the impact of transnational advocacy networks, focusing on binational societal partnerships in three sectors: environment, labor and human rights. The paper concludes with a series of preliminary propositions for discussion.⁴

Situating Society-to-Society Relationships

The full array of binational social, civic and political coalitions involves a wide range of state as well as social actors. This paper will focus primarily on civil society to civil society relationships, concentrating in turn on those actors that pursue broader social participation and public accountability in each country. 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 private sectors, which have been studied extensively elsewhere). One can situate society-to-society relationships in terms of one quadrant within a simple two-by-two chart that depicts the US state and civil society on one side, and the Mexican state and civil society on the other. Table One illustrates the wide array of state-to-state partnerships, which range from those focusing on keeping Mexico safe for US investors, such as the 1995 peso crisis bailout, to the increasing degree of military and anti-drug cooperation, as well as regular, institutionalized exchanges between federal cabinets and border governors.

Table One: Examples of Mexico-US Partnerships

	US State	Civil Society in US
Mexican State	Treasury ministries National cabinet meetings Border governors conferences Anti-narcotics aid NAFTA trilateral institutions Armed forces to armed forces Military sales US support for Mexico from MDBs Exchanges between judicial authorities	Policy think tanks Private lobbyists Universities Latino NGOs Conservation NGOs Elite cultural institutions (e.g., museums) Also - Mexican immigrant civil society in US: (Hometown clubs and federations)
Mexican Civil Society	USAID (and its US contractors) National Endowment for Democracy Inter-American Foundation	Religious institutions Private foundations Media elites Environmental coalitions Trade union coalitions Democracy networks Human rights networks Women's rights networks Emigrant voting rights advocacy networks Indigenous peoples networks Small farmer networks

State-to-state links

The wide range of state-to-state links between the US and Mexico is well known, and will not be detailed here. These partnerships reach across the many sectoral agencies in both federal governments, as well as congress-to-congress linkages. Increasingly, subnational governments are relating to one another – most notably in the case of the regular meetings of the border governors, but also including regular visits from state governors in one state to regions linked by immigration across the border. While some of these relationships between counterparts are largely ceremonial, many others are quite substantial, as in the case of the US Treasury and White House role in the 1995 Mexican bailout, and the increasing levels of cooperation between the armed forces.⁵

US state links to Mexican civil society

Linkages between the US state and Mexican civil society are relatively recent. Historically, US development assistance to private Mexican organizations focused on family planning, health, scientific, agricultural and educational cooperation, rather than on civil society capacity-building (even in those sectors). Since the late 1980s, however, the US Agency for International Development began to invest heavily in Mexican conservation organizations, to bolster their capacity to defend biodiversity, and in some cases, to improve the management of what AID called Mexico's "paper parks." By the late 1990s, environmental funding grew to be the largest category of USAID funding to Mexico, accounting for \$6 million (the majority of its proposed FY 2000 funding). Some fraction of this conservation funding probably reached Mexican environmental NGOs. USAID also has funded the Mexican Red Cross in times of disaster.⁶

USAID's donations under the category of "more democratic processes" includes some funding for Mexican civic organizations, complementing the role of the National Endowment for Democracy (\$3.725 million in FY2000). Some of this funding is for judicial education, municipal development and legislative institution-building, and therefore belongs in the state-to-state category. USAID's democracy funding also reaches, however, the Citizens' Movement for Democracy, the Mexican Center for Victims of Crimes, and the Mexican Society for Women's Rights (Semillas). USAID's proposed \$1.2 million in funding to deal with HIV/AIDS is also mainly targeted to NGOs, (international, national and local).⁷

The National Endowment for Democracy has played a higher profile role in grant-making to Mexican civic and human rights organizations (Dresser, 1996). In 1997 NED granted approximately \$1.1 million to Mexican civic institutions and

democratic processes, including \$371,000 to Alianza Cívica, \$278,000 through the AFL-CIO's refurbished international arm, and \$274,000 via its Republican affiliate to the Centro Cívico and its women's affiliate.⁸

The Inter-American Foundation, a small federal agency responsible to the US congress and mandated to be independent of short-term US 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 shifted to more direct funding for community-based rural social organizations, including many autonomous indigenous producer groups. The IAF's funding to Mexico averaged approximately \$2.3 million per year over the past decade.⁹ Since the late 1980s, the IAF made extensive, strategic grant contributions to several rural peasant and indigenous movement organizations and networks, including the sustainable coffee and community-based forestry movements.

Mexican state links with civil society in US

The 1988 electoral challenge to the regime's legitimacy spilled over into the US, including open campaigning by the left opposition among Mexicans in the US. In response, the Mexican state launched a multi-pronged strategy to relate to civil society in the US (Dresser, 1993; González Gutiérrez, 1993; 1997, de la Garza, 1997; Martínez and Ross, 1999). The term "civil society in the US" is used here instead of "US civil society" in order to include the Mexican state's strategy for reincorporating Mexican nationals. One could argue that this is only formally a cross-border relationship, since the state's outreach to the national diaspora is a cross-border extension of its national efforts to organize and reincorporate Mexican civil society actors more generally. The task of outreach to emigrants falls to the Foreign Ministry and its network of consulates, however, and is by definition a cross-border relationship. Some state governments have also developed their own outreach strategies, most notably in the case of Guanajuato. More than 30 Casas Guanajuato are organized into a national network.¹⁰ One could also argue that Televisa's longstanding hegemony over US Spanish language television (especially the news), which ended relatively recently, also constituted a prominent case of de facto Mexican state linkage to Latino civil society in the US.

As Goldring has argued, most patterns of Mexican migrant organization in the US 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 (1999).¹¹ In the process, the Mexican state has out-organized both major opposition parties, keeping 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 state and political parties in Mexico for the first time (Martínez and Ross, 1999, Ross, 1999). Only in the past few years have Mexican immigrants, their leaders and organizations, begun to influence national politics and gained a voice in the national media, but this process is best understood as a relationship within Mexican civil society (see below).

While the Mexican state's efforts to reach out to its diaspora have been largely invisible outside the Mexican community, its partnerships with more established US civil society actors have received extensive attention.¹² The Mexican state's efforts to woo US opinion-makers reached unprecedented levels during the Salinas administration, and a wide range of US civic and political elites responded eagerly. The most powerful private universities, think-tanks, and conservation organizations rushed to see which one could offer Carlos Salinas de Gortari their most public platform and their most distinguished honors. The Mexican state made more than political investments in their efforts to influence US public opinion through think-tanks and lobbyists (Dresser, 1991; Eisenstadt, 1997; Velasco, 1997). Mexican-American civil rights and business organizations also received significant official attention.¹³ Mexican state strategists realized that influencing the US states required influencing US civil society, especially on an issue like NAFTA that spilled over the usual narrow boundaries of conventional bilateral policy-making. In summary, in the 1990s both the US and Mexican states increased their use of non-state actors in the other country to influence the other state.

Civil society to civil society

The importance and density of binational societal relationships have ebbed and flowed in long waves throughout the twentieth century, as Alan Knight has suggested (1997). Some of that history continues to resonate. Ricardo Flores Magón remains a hero for radical democratic movements in both societies, among Chicanos and indigenous peoples, respectively. John Reed continues to inspire contemporary alternative US journalists.¹⁴ Other historical chapters, in contrast, have been largely forgotten, such as the mutual identification between both national labor movements in the late 1930s (Peterson, 1998). The oldest sustained binational collaborative effort for social justice and mutual understanding dates back to that period, sustained by the American Friends Service Committee.¹⁵

This paper deals with one subset of the much larger, diverse category of civil society actors. The focus is on comparative case studies of binational relationships between actors in each country that see themselves as promoting social equality and more accountable public and private institutions in each country. The intention of delimiting this specific set of subsectors is to underscore that many actors and institutions within both civil societies act primarily to reinforce institutional arrangements that limit public accountability and reproduce elitist political cultural legacies. For example, this would characterize the dominant broadcast media in both societies, as well as the dominant tendencies within some religious hierarchies, or the Red Cross.¹⁶ Both societies also have broad social movements that oppose the extension or consolidation of social and political rights won by other social movements, most notably women's rights. Looking at civil society in this broad sense of including its powerful pro-status elements reminds us that it is a force of inertia as well as a force for change. The focus here, however, is on those actors within civil society that share some degree of commitment to democratization and social change. The concept of *counterparts* is also relevant here, a notion that does not imply similarity or agreement, but rather analogous roles in their respective societies.

Disentangling Binational Networks, Coalitions and Movements

The past decade witnessed an upsurge of binational civil society discussion, beginning before the NAFTA debate but then rapidly expanding. These discussions often took the forms of exchanges of information, experiences and expressions of solidarity. Sometimes these exchanges generated networks of ongoing relationships. Sometimes these networks generated the shared goals, mutual trust and understanding needed to form coalitions that could collaborate on specific campaigns. As Keck put it, "coalitions are networks in action mode."¹⁷ Networks, in contrast, do not necessarily coordinate their actions, or come to agreement on specific joint actions (as implied by the concept of coalition). Neither networks nor coalitions necessarily imply significant horizontal exchange between participants. Indeed, many rely on a handful of interlocutors to manage relationships between broad-based social organizations that have relatively little awareness of the nature and actions of their counterparts. The concept of transnational social movement organizations, in contrast, implies a much higher degree of density and much more cohesion than networks or coalitions. Transnational movement organizations suggest a social subject that is present in more than one country, as in the paradigm case of the Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional, and other indigenous organizations that literally cross the border (Rivera, 1999a; 199b).

Table Two: Transnational Networks, Coalitions and Movements

Shared characteristics:	Transnational networks	Transnational coalitions	Transnational movement organizations
Exchange of information & experiences	Yes	Yes	Yes
Organized social base	Sometimes more, sometimes less or none	Sometimes more, sometimes less or none	Yes
Mutual support	Sometimes, from afar and possibly strictly discursive	Yes	Yes
Joint actions & campaigns	Sometimes loose coordination	Yes, based on mutually agreed minimum goals, often short-term, tactical	Yes, based on shared long-term strategy
Shared ideologies	Not necessarily	Not necessarily	Generally yes
Shared political cultures	Often not	Often not	Shared political values, styles and identities

Note: Shading illustrates suggested degree of relationship density and cohesion

In practice, these concepts of "network," "coalition" and "movement" are often used interchangeably. For the sake of developing tools for more precise assessment of the nature of binational relationships, however, these three concepts will be treated here as qualitatively distinct (see Table Two), and then applied to a series of cross-border relationships between social and civic actors. In short, transnational civil society exchanges *can* produce networks, which *can* produce coalitions, which *can* produce movements.¹⁸ Note that underscoring these distinctions does not imply any judgement that more cooperation is necessarily better. On the contrary, realistic expectations about what is possible are critical to sustain any kind of collective action. Indeed, one of the main conclusions of the cross-sectoral comparative discussion that follows is that cross-border cooperation involves costs and risks that must be taken into account, and depends heavily on finding both appropriate counterparts with whom to cooperate, and shared targets to inspire joint action.

It is relevant to keep in mind that, independently of the recent pace of binational integration, many civil society actors in both countries have long considered themselves to be internationalist, such as many currents within religious, environmental, feminist, human rights and trade union communities. While many local and national groups see themselves as part of a global movement (for feminism, for human rights, in defense of the environment), this study focuses on *sustained cross-border relationships between organized constituencies* (as distinct from broadly shared goals). As a result, the study will use the relatively tangible category of transnational movement *organization* (as distinct from the more amorphous concept of global civil society, for example).¹⁹

Distinguishing between networks, coalitions and movements helps to avoid blurring political differences and imbalances within what may appear from the outside to be “transnational movements.” As Keck and Sikkink’s pioneering study notes, transnational networks face the challenge of developing a “common frame of meaning” in spite of cultural differences (1998: 7). Such shared meanings are socially constructed through joint action rather than shared intentions. Political differences within transnational networks are also not to be underestimated, in spite of apparently shared goals. Even those transnational networks that *appear* to share basic political-cultural values, such as environmental, feminist or human rights movements, often consist of actors that have very different, nationally-distinct political visions, goals and styles.²⁰ As Keck and Sikkink point out, “transnational advocacy networks must also be understood as political spaces, in which differently situated actors negotiate – formally or informally – the social, cultural and political meanings of their joint enterprise” (1998: 3).

This paper builds on Keck and Sikkink’s work by exploring the dynamics of these political spaces. Because the US-Mexico transnational political sphere includes broad-based social organizations as well as NGOs, however, the analysis covers a broader array of transnational actors.²¹ Keck and Sikkink focus on 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. Where broad-based social constituencies begin to get involved in transnational campaigns, however, shared values are not the only motivation. For example, US trade unionists and Mexican human rights campaigners may well collaborate in a coalition to criticize NAFTA, they may share a limited political goal, but that does not mean that they share political values. Because the US-Mexican relationship is characterized precisely by the unusual degree to which “foreign” concerns become “local,” directly affecting people organized around *interests* as well as values, this study uses a much narrower definition of “network.”²² When broad-based membership organizations begin to see their interests as directly affected by transnational processes, then the distinction between value-based and interest-based motivations begins to blur.²³

Relationships Between Societal 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.

Labor unions

Mexico-US labor partnerships have been among the most challenging of any sector for four main reasons.²⁴ First, the political cultures of both country’s labor movements are dominated by powerful nationalist ideological legacies. Second, workers in some sectors have directly conflicting interests, especially in industries characterized by high degrees of North American “production sharing,” such as automobiles, textiles and garments. Third, counterpart productive sectors often have very different union structures. Sectors may be unionized in one country but not in the other, or unions may be centralized in one country but decentralized in the other – creating asymmetries that make it difficult to finding counterparts (most notably, auto). Fourth, some unions have privileged preferred the diplomatic stability of working with politically compatible counterparts, and have been unwilling to explore relationships with a broader range of counterparts. Until the recent recomposition of national labor leaderships in both countries, the dominant pattern of binational relations between union leaders was to avoid conflict by limiting diplomatic ties to official counterparts.²⁵

A very limited number of cross-border efforts involving workers preceded the NAFTA debate. One of the early pioneers was the American Friends Service Committee’s Texas border-based efforts in support of discreet community-based maquila worker organizing, leading to the formation of the now broad-based Comité Fronterizo de Obreras.²⁶ After the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, Mujer a Mujer led feminist support for the independent Mexico City seamstresses union.

²⁷ In the first binational US-Mexican union-to-union effort since the Cold War, the midwestern Farm Labor Organizing

Committee's coordinated in the late 1980s with a CTM- affiliated agricultural worker union in Sinaloa to offset Campbell's Soup efforts to divide and conquer unions in the US and Mexico (Neuman, 1993; Barger and Reza, 1994).

The multisectoral Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM) was founded in 1989, before NAFTA, bringing together religious, environmental, labor, community and women's rights organizers who had been working on binational integration issues.²⁸ Initially led by US religious activists on the border, over the years the CJM has become increasingly trinational, including a 1996 decision to require 50% Mexican representation on its board of directors.

Williams' comprehensive comparative analysis of a decade of diverse CJM campaigns finds that transborder labor-centered campaigns can generate pressure on both on governments and private sector interests "to reform practices and to uphold laws in a manner that they otherwise would not". 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 maquila sector, where many workers do not see formal unions as organizations that will represent their interests. After all, many are nominally in unions already – though corrupt and largely invisible ones (through so-called "protection contracts" signed without worker involvement). Williams' systematic comparison of a large set of campaigns shows that the more cross-border they were, the more impact they had on their targets (1999). This suggests that logic of binational approaches to workers rights campaigns is not simply driven by ideology, but by its greater practical impact.

However, some kinds of cross-border campaigns create tensions between US and Mexican labor organizers. US-based organizers often prioritize media impact, especially during politically key moments such as congressional trade policy decision. Yet Mexican maquila organizers report that once US delegations televise their broadcasts from in front of factory gates, denouncing terrible conditions, any workers inside who may be suspected of organizing are promptly fired.²⁹ According to Martha Ojeda, CJM director, most Mexican maquila organizers, are less focused on US media coverage, concentrating primarily on long-term shopfloor and community-based organizing rather than short term political and corporate campaigns.³⁰ Until recently, however, Mexican maquila organizers had been quite isolated from one another. It was only after several years of meeting one another through participation in cross-border coalitions (the Southwest Network for Economic and Environmental Justice as well as the CJM), that Mexican maquila organizers called their first two border-wide Mexican networking meetings. While US-led cross-border networking encouraged Mexican-side networking up to a point, some Mexican activists grew wary of importing US-side rivalries. The second encuentro was called, pointedly, "La Organización en las Maquiladoras en y Desde México."³¹ This broad-based gathering sought to further Mexican-side border-wide coalition-building by ventilating concerns, forging shared political goals and working out a series of "ethical principles." Point 9 reads:

No aceptaré apoyo alguno, nacional o internacional, que este condicionado, que fomente la división y la competencia entre las organizaciones mexicanas de los trabajadores, que subordine a mi organización a intereses ajenos, o que menosprecie, haga peligrar o afecte negativamente a las y los trabajadores.³²

By the late 1990s, Mexican organizers began to speak of an incipient *movement* of maquila workers for the first time, as a result of both cross-border and Mexican-side organizing. By this time the increased Mexican (and Canadian) participation in the CJM turned the coalition into a much more balanced, critical venue for forging joint strategies and for processing very different campaign styles. Most notably, the relationship within the CJM between the AFL-CIO and autonomous Mexican worker organizing initiatives is a persistent source of debate. In terms of the framework presented above, the CJM is aptly named. It is more coordinated than a network, though less unified than a movement.

One of the most high profile maquila organizing experiences involved Tijuana's small Han Young auto component factory. The Han Young union worked very closely with the San Diego Workers' Support Committee. Through its influential union and congressional allies, the San Diego Workers' Support Committee generated widespread US union and congressional concern about the blatant violations of freedom of association, reaching the highest levels of the United States government. Within Mexico, the Han Young union had affiliated with the national Authentic Labor Front (FAT) to be able to call a union election. The new local won the support of workers in the plant as well as initial legal victories, but later left the FAT, prioritizing cross-border over Mexican coalition partners. Han Young organizers did not participate in the new Mexican maquila organizing network. The cross-border Han Young campaign won important legal and media victories, but on the ground the workers lost – they remain without jobs at Han Young. This suggests a test case of the limits of cross-border leverage. At least in this case, US media coverage plus access to Rep. Gephardt and Vice-President Gore seems to have little effect on Mexican worker rights.³³

US and Mexican labor unions have held innumerable discussions, exchanges, and conferences, leading to frequent internationalist proclamations, but relatively few consolidated partnerships. Some important US unions have been

divided over whether to pursue international or nationalist strategies, as in the case of the Teamsters, which ended up pursuing both at once during their period of reform leadership. The Teamster's high-profile campaign against the implementation of NAFTA's trucking provision was remarkably successful. Indeed, it was the only case of a bottom-up US protest that blocked part of NAFTA implementation. Together with border state politicians (such as Texas Attorney General, Dan Morales), the Teamsters managed to frame the issue in terms of public safety and the threat of drug imports (rather than "special interests"). In the process, they used media campaigns that many Mexican free trade critics considered to be anti-Mexican in tone.³⁴ At the same time, the Teamsters' internationalist wing pursued an organizing campaign in the Washington apple industry that was sensitive to Mexican immigrants, coordinated with the United Farm Workers, and eventually involved Mexican unions.³⁵ While seemingly contradictory, these two approaches reflect both the political diversity within the largest union in the US, as well as the pragmatic calculations made by US anti-NAFTA forces more generally.³⁶

The most notable binational union alliances have been between relatively small, already-progressive unions, such as the United Electrical Workers (UE) and the FAT, as well as the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the Telephone Workers of the Mexican Republic (STRM).³⁷ Notably the STRM/CWA alliance brought two charges of anti-union violation of freedom of association to the procedures of the labor side agreement. Notably, the first case was brought by a Mexican union on behalf of US workers' rights (Latino workers at Sprint were fired for union organizing).³⁸

The FAT-UE partnership helped to launch perhaps the most ambitious trilateral 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. This case, like many others, has wended its way through the "inordinately slow" procedures of the labor side agreement. Along the way, the two US unions most involved withdrew from leadership of the initiative. In the US, the autoparts plant involved that was represented by the UE was closed, and the Teamster's reform leadership lost power.³⁹

Since the Farm Labor Organizing Committee pioneered the strategy of bringing together unions representing workers employed by the same company in both countries, remarkably few others have followed in its path. One recent exception to this pattern involves an industry that is increasingly binationally integrated. As the Wall St. Journal put it, "major US airlines are rapidly turning Mexico into a domestic destination... making travel to Mexico's hinterland easier than it has ever been" (Millman, 1999). Delta and Aeromexico have one of the most extensive corporate partnerships in the sector, and in response, both companies' pilots' organizations recently 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 some blatant violations of freedom of association to public attention, but so far to no tangible effect. Indeed, some US workers who supported their Mexican counterparts saw their plant shut down, allegedly in retaliation (Bacon, 1998). Perhaps the most dramatic new trend is for Mexican unions to pursue trilateral claims about the violation of freedom of assembly of workers in the US – often Mexican-origin workers, as in the Sprint and Washington state apple cases. These efforts have contributed to more balanced coalitions by showing that the right to freedom of association is systematically violated in both countries, not just in Mexico. The Sprint claim led the labor side agreement process to hold public hearings and extensive studies on the subject (McKinnerey, et al, 1997).⁴⁰ The right to organize remains tenuous in both countries, however, and cross-national ties have been unable to offset labor's weak bargaining power within each respective set of national political institutions.

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, each national movement. First, both US and Mexican environmental movements are characterized by high levels of internal diversity, including groups that see corporate-led economic growth as the answer to environmental needs, as well as groups that see unregulated economic growth as the problem (Hegenboom, 1998; Bejarano, forthcoming). Second, the experiences and priorities of groups working directly on the border, in both countries, are often quite distinct from the larger national environmental organizations that have more access to the media and policymakers. Third, striking differences emerge between before and after the governmental decision to sign the NAFTA agreement. The high-profile pre-NAFTA debate was more the exception than the rule for binational environmental politics. Indeed, in spite of the central role that US environmental organizations played on both sides of the pre-NAFTA debate, none of the major national environmental organizations in the US devoted serious sustained attention to Mexico or to potential Mexican partners *after* the vote in the US congress (with the exception of the pro-whale campaign against Mitsubishi's proposed salt works, see below). This generalization holds even for the

Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, which were the only large membership-based US environmental organization to oppose NAFTA. When Washington's short-term agenda moved away from Mexico, so did theirs.⁴¹

It is not surprising that the major US conservation organizations chose to follow the official logic that Mexico needed trade-led economic growth to generate the resources needed for (hypothetical) environmental investments. The major US conservation organizations espoused "free-market environmentalism," and the boards of directors of the most powerful pro-NAFTA US conservation organizations included prominent corporate representatives, some of whom were simultaneously active within the pro-NAFTA corporate lobby (Dreiling, 1997). Beginning also in the early 1990s, some large US conservation organizations received large US government grants to promote the park approach to biodiversity conservation in Mexico (The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund and Conservation International).⁴²

Notably under-represented in the array of binational biodiversity projects are partnerships with already-organized counterparts involved in rural natural resource management, such as Mexico's vast community forestry movement, or the densely-organized smallholder coffee coop movement, both primarily indigenous. One partial exception was the Natural Resources Defense Council, which together with the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Migratory Birds convened a major conference on sustainable coffee (Rice, et al, 1997). Since then, however, the US promoters of "bird-friendly" coffee have yet to work closely with the "fair trade" coffee traders, who focus more on balanced coalitions with Mexican grassroots coffee producers. The sustainable coffee campaign has had significant success at penetrating the US media, but focuses on protecting birds rather than forest dwellers' livelihoods, organizations or human rights. One common US subtext is occasionally made explicit: the assumption that migratory birds that migrate between the two countries are "American" -- as though birds have national identities. (AP report by Silver, 1999).⁴³

Greenpeace, with its broad ecological critique, developed one of the few binational partnerships among the large international environmental membership organizations. As part of the international organization's effort in the early 1990s to seek greater internal North-South balance, Greenpeace's international leadership sided with its Latin American branches on the controversial tuna-dolphin issue, since the Mexican tuna fishing industry had reportedly changed its technology. This heterodox stance was perceived by Southern environmentalists as a blow against eco-imperialism, but it provoked a powerful propaganda backlash by more nationalist US ecological groups, such as Earth Island Institute (which lacked strong Mexican partnerships). Given this opportunity to present Greenpeace as anti-dolphin to US constituents, Earth Island seized the opportunity to make inroads into Greenpeace's large direct mail market share (which had been heavily dependent on sympathy for cetaceans). Greenpeace-International had been divided all along about whether to pursue more North-South balance within the organization, and by the mid-1990s the pro-Southern faction within Greenpeace was defeated. The US affiliate lost a significant fraction of its domestic base, in part because of siding with its Latin American counterparts.⁴⁴ In other words, one lesson is that balanced transnational partnerships can be politically costly when charismatic meg-fauna are involved.

The influence of the more conservative environmental organizations on the border has been less prominent than with biodiversity issues. The maquila industry does not affect few large mammals whose protection can bolster direct mail fundraising in the US. The border's transnational public sphere has been occupied, in contrast, by a gradually thickening civil society. Notable NGO coalitions that predated the NAFTA debate include as the Environmental Health Coalition (Tijuana-San Diego), the International Sonoran Desert Alliance and other binational tribal initiatives, the CJM's anti-toxics efforts, as well as the successful Texas-Center for Policy Studies/Comisión de Solidaridad y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos campaign to stop a World Bank logging loan in the Sierra Madre's indigenous territories in 1991.⁴⁵ They have since been joined by the Red Fronteriza de Salud y Medio Ambiente and a broad-based binational coalition bringing together environmentalists throughout the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo basin, among others.⁴⁶ Not only has the pace and intensity of binational collaboration on the border increased significantly since NAFTA, they have also had some important, 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.⁴⁷ Ironically, the fact that the proposed Sierra Blanca dump was designed to receive waste generated at the US's northern border, in New York and Vermont, bolstered critic's charges of environmental racism.

The Sierra Blanca anti-dump campaign was followed by the recent defeat of the proposed Mitsubishi/Mexican government joint venture to expand an industrial salt works in Baja California. The project threatened to affect the breeding grounds of whales that migrate north, past the United States. In this case, binational pressure obliged project proponents to meet unusually rigorous environmental assessment standards, and both mainstream and radical US environmental organizations engaged in successful media campaigns, significantly raising the project's political cost to both the government and Mitsubishi (Preston, 2000). Both projects had unusually media-worthy characteristics that significantly increased the leverage of campaigners -- charismatic mega-mammals in one, nuclear waste in the other.

Most environmental threats to the border, however, are on-going, and are much more integral to the dominant pattern of industrialization. Notably, neither the Sierra Blanca nor the Mitsubishi victories had anything to do with maquila industrialization. Both cases show that, given sufficient lead time, campaigners can influence or block *new*, high-profile, high-risk policy decisions.

At least as notable as the defeat of specific proposed projects is that border campaigns have set precedents for constructive public participation in local and binational policy processes. National environmental organizations played a central role in extracting partial reforms for dealing with border environmental threats (Audley, 1997, Hogenboom, 1998). But after the vote, the task fell primarily to border groups to encourage the promised Border Environmental Cooperation Commission (BECC) and the North American Development Bank to begin to fulfill their mandates (BIOS, 1999; Mumme, 1999). Most independent environmental policy observers see the BECC and NADBank as setting higher standards for public participation in the policy process, at the same time as they have yet to have a significant impact on the border environment.

The sensitivity of many border environmental organizations to interlocking human health and natural resource concerns facilitated cross-border coalition-building. US and Mexican border groups also share their distance from -- and to some degree alienation from -- national elites (opposition as well as official) in both countries. Border groups have also been willing to take on the difficult challenge of recognizing and overcoming cultural differences (Kelly, forthcoming). This commitment is critical because -- as the history of the border shows -- proximity does not necessarily lead to mutual understanding. Even in the case of the successful campaign against the Mitsubishi salt works, for example, some Mexican environmentalists had to at times distance themselves from US campaigners because of what they considered to be unilateral and inappropriate pressure tactics (Pérez, 1999)

Trade Advocacy Networks

In the US, the NAFTA debate focused on the domestic implications of the North-South relationship; on the nature of the United States' relations with the developing world in general and with Mexico in particular. In Mexico, the opposition to NAFTA before 1994 was more limited, but also served to generate a wide-ranging social and elite debate on relations with "el norte."

The debate in both Mexico and the U.S has both transnational and multi-sectoral dimensions. In many cases, domestic constituency organizations met their counterparts in the other country for the first time. The trade debate encouraged some groups to understand their counterparts' perspectives in order to engage in joint activities and contribute to each other's efforts. At the same time, because so many diverse actors saw their interests directly affected by NAFTA, unusual "citizen" coalitions brought together local, regional and national organizations representing labor, farmers, environmentalists, consumer rights, immigrant rights, Latinos, and human rights organizations. Many of these organizations had either never worked with each other or had long histories of mistrust if not outright antipathy among each other. Suddenly, a debate on something as conceptually remote and politically far from their reach as international economic policy brought them together. Social constituency organizations that once considered themselves as solely "domestic" now entered the transnational arena as they responded to the NAFTA proposal.

In the US, the NAFTA opposition became a movement with somewhat disjointed nationalist and internationalist wings (Cavanagh, Anderson and Hansen-Kuhn, forthcoming). Some of the anti-NAFTA forces perceived the economic integration process as one that threatened US "sovereignty." Ralph Nader's Public Citizen explicitly stressed this nationalist approach, along with some environmentalists and trade unionists, arguing that NAFTA would supersede the authority of local and national labor, consumer and environmental laws and standards (Nader, 1993). These left populists were joined and then overshadowed by conservative nationalist populists, led by Ross Perot and Pat Buchanan.

NAFTA's proponents were caught off guard by the broad public challenge, and they became increasingly alarmed as the popular debate ultimately threatened the legislative survival of their project. The US opposition was strong enough to oblige then-presidential candidate Bill Clinton to recognize the legitimacy of the notion of labor and environmental standards in trade policy for the first time in U.S. history. The US administration designed side agreements that managed to divide the major environmental organizations and provided some political cover for labor leaders -- who were privately divided over how intensely to oppose their ostensible ally Clinton on NAFTA (Mayer, 1998, Audley, 1997, Dreiling, 1997). At the same time, an unusual Latino-environmentalist coalition also led to the creation of new binational institutions to buffer NAFTA's environmental and social costs on the border (Hinojosa, forthcoming).

The common campaign practice of building broad, often contradictory short-term coalitions around specific legislative conflicts dominated the US process. US critics found relatively few like-minded counterparts in Mexico, where unilateral trade opening had already occurred and even NAFTA critics limited their political investment because it was perceived as inevitable. The nationalist wing of the US NAFTA opposition also used insensitive rhetoric that discouraged binational collaboration. Nationalist US critics of NAFTA found that the message of blaming foreigners was widely received -- economic restructuring had generated widespread insecurity among industrial workers, and many US employers systematically used the threat of flight to weaken union organizing and contract campaigns (McKinnirey, et al, 1997). Some US environmental and food safety campaigns were also intended to play on images of Mexico as a foreign threat, resonating with historically inherited popular cultural stereotypes of "dirty Mexicans" (even though the most dangerous food safety threat to US public health is clearly domestic: the meatpacking industry).

The internationalist wing of the US NAFTA opposition recognized that some kind of integration was inevitable, and promoted the slogan "Not this NAFTA." By the time of the NAFTA vote, however, the slogan "No to NAFTA" won out. US internationalists worked closely with Mexican counterparts and anti-racist social movements in the US, but their ambitious goal of mass economic literacy required sustained long-term political investments, whereas the legislative campaign momentum imposed a short-term, base-broadening logic on the movement.

Mexican critics coalesced around the Free Trade Action Network, led by the FAT, human rights groups, environmentalists and other NGOs (RMALC, 1994; Lujan, forthcoming). Despite their domestic political weakness, this activist network was able to oblige senior government officials, and even cabinet ministers, to engage in an ongoing dialogue with them during the trade negotiation process, a previously unimaginable possibility. The RMALC was bolstered by its partnerships with Canadian and US partner networks, the Action Canada Network and the Alliance for Responsible Trade.⁴⁸ In spite of the pressures of the final 'yes or no' NAFTA vote, the three national networks tried to change the terms of the debate by engaging in an unusual process of trilateral civil society negotiations to produce a shared alternative policy proposal. The most important one, "A Just and Sustainable Trade and Development Initiative for North America" was produced by three NGO trade coalitions in North America (ART, RMALC and a group within Action Canada Network). In terms of public attention, this initiative was overshadowed by the highly polarized climate of the final phase of the NAFTA debate in the US, but its innovative trinational consensus-building process set a historic precedent (ART/CTC/RMALC, 1994). Even the more nationalist US network eventually signed on. The networks worked from drafts that [bracketed] their points of difference, in conscious imitation of the treaty negotiating process itself. One of the most important points of contention revolved around the issue of whether (implicitly Mexican) failure to meet minimum environmental and social provoke trade sanctions.

Democracy and human rights

The main pattern of US-Mexican societal relations involving democracy and human rights takes the form of networks. As Dresser has shown, Mexico's "democracy network" provides an excellent illustration of the concept of transnational advocacy network (1996).⁴⁹ A few organizations have gone further to sustain coalitions, involving coordinated agreements to pursue joint campaigns.

US civil society organizations concerned with democracy and human rights abroad did not focus on Mexico until relatively recently. 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. The NAFTA debate created a major opportunity to strengthen these civil society ties, but was constrained by the narrow confines of the official policy agenda. While most Mexican civil society organizations were wary of proposing direct pro-democracy or human rights conditionality on the trade agreement, the NAFTA debate made these issues more visible in the US.⁵⁰ This political moment did not produce a major convergence between US and Mexican human rights groups, however, with the exception of those organizations involved with election monitoring. While human rights groups were important actors in the Mexican coalitions dealing with trade, "this had little relevance" for most US trade advocacy groups. According to one of Mexico's leading human rights activists, the issue was a low priority within the trinational coalition-building process (Acosta, forthcoming). Moreover, human rights groups in each country also had different views about the relationships between economic, social and political rights.⁵¹

It took the Chiapas rebellion to make human rights in Mexico a major priority on the binational civil society agenda. A wide range of US groups responded quickly, contributing to the international pressure for a political solution. Five years later, four distinct national US organizations and networks make Chiapas a priority, as well as many small local groups (Stephen, forthcoming). Lack of coordination in the US reflects different political cultures, constituencies, as well as different approaches among Mexican counterpart groups. Most US support initiatives draw heavily on the legacy of the

movements for peace in Central America in the 1980s, including both faith-based and secular left-wing political cultures and strategies (Gosse, 1993; 1995; Smith, 1996). This legacy bolstered Chiapas solidarity work in the short term, but carried medium-term weaknesses, including the strategic limitations associated with interpreting Mexico through Central American lenses.

Many observers have pointed to the increased volume and velocity of international information flow from Chiapas as strong evidence of “globalization from below,” as an indication of the importance of international solidarity. This information flow to international sympathizers has irritated Mexican government officials, who refer disparagingly to the Chiapas conflict as a (mere) “internet war.” The actual contribution of the “internet war” to the Zapatista cause remains an open question, however, since the conflict on the ground has remained stalemated for years, information flow and international solidarity notwithstanding. Stephen aptly questions the widespread assumption that more and faster activist access to information *necessarily* leads to greater impact (forthcoming).⁵² Solidarity groups’ focus on Chiapas to the exclusion of other militarized regions and national level democratization has also limited the impact of US peace support efforts, according to one key US strategist (Lewis, forthcoming). While US civil society efforts for peace in Chiapas have achieved widespread legitimacy in the US, they have not penetrated and mobilized major US civil society institutions. This contrasts with the movement against US 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 congress. It is probably not a coincidence that Central American opposition and peace movements themselves made winning US civil society allies a major strategic priority, whereas neither the EZLN nor the National Indigenous Congress have made US network-building a priority.⁵³

The Chiapas rebellion focused the attention of US pro-democracy groups on Mexico’s 1994 presidential election – as well as raising the issue for the US government. This was the high point of US civil society interest in working with Mexican election observers, though some, like Global Exchange and the Washington Office on Latin America, continued to work closely with Mexico’s Alianza Cívica in their effort to monitor controversial state level elections.⁵⁴ Mexican independent election observer efforts are relatively recent, beginning in 1991 (Aguayo, 1998, Alvarez Icaza, 1998). When US groups began to get involved in 1994, participants ranged from traditional human rights groups and universities to peace groups, Latino rights advocates and trade unionists, accounting for a large fraction of the international observers. However, the entire international contingent during the “peak” period of foreign concern numbered approximately 500, while as many as 25,000 Mexicans participated as observers (Alvarez Icaza, 1998). For comparison, US citizens’ organizations alone sent 700 official observers to El Salvador’s 1994 elections (Gosse, 1995).

The largest single US citizen contingent in 1994 was organized by Global Exchange, an NGO whose numerous “reality tours” to Chiapas later provoked government hostility (paraphrasing Dresser, 1991, one could call this a “neo-nationalist reaction to a neoliberal problem”).⁵⁵ Unlike most international observers, Global Exchange traveled to remote rural hotspots where violations were most probable. On the night of the 1994 election, however, under media pressure to make public statement, the logic of their mission led them to take a position before their Mexican host, Alianza Cívica, had decided how to deal with the challenge of dealing with exclusionary practices that turned out to be significantly different from what they expected (and more difficult to document).⁵⁶ At the time, Global Exchange’s exercise of its autonomy caused tension within the partnership, reinforcing an image of seeking media attention even at high cost. Nevertheless, Global Exchange subsequently made a long-term, sustained political investment in working with Mexican partners, and has since been one of the Mexican democracy movement’s most consistent US civil society allies. For example, GE organizes experienced US observer delegations on missions much less fashionable, as in the case of Guerrero’s municipal elections (in partnership with regional frontline human rights organizations).

With a few exceptions, one could argue that both US and Mexican pro-democracy actors have lacked a sustained strategy for building partnerships that reach into their respective civil societies. One indicator is the number of US citizens who respond to invitations to get to know Mexican counterparts on the front lines, in conflictive areas. Another indicator is the level of material aid. It is very likely that the US government has provided much higher levels of funding for Mexican prodemocracy groups than US private foundations – leaving Mexican aid recipients politically vulnerable to nationalist critics.⁵⁷

Women’s rights networks

Binational women’s rights networks have been extensive, but generally lower profile than in other sectors, in part because activists have focused on bringing 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 maquila support program played pioneering roles. Sometimes these links between womens’ rights concerns and

binational integration reached deeply into US civil society. For example, the United Methodist Women, a progressive membership organization with more than one million members, was the first women's organization to publicly oppose NAFTA (Dougherty, 1999).

Many of the binational women's movement experiences 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 Teresa's Carrillo observes, in her insightful overview of 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" (1998: 394). Carrillo notes that lack of resources are not the only obstacle to binational coalition-building, "differences in central focus and agenda" are also important; 'Chicanas and Latinas in the US have focused on questions of race and ethnicity, while Mexicanas have focused on class issues and survival" (1998: 394). After reviewing a wide range of cross-border initiatives dating from the mid-1980s, Carrillo concludes 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 Chicana/Latina and Mexicana women 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).

US and Mexican women's rights activists have also shared a common effort to reframe policy discourse for women's organizing in terms of the broader umbrella concept of human rights. According to Maylei Blackwell, an analyst of US-Mexican women's movement relations, because of the process of UN conferences on women, "human rights discourse has replaced discrimination as the principle coalition-building for international women's politics... For the 50th anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, there was a major campaign in Mexico "Sin mujeres, los derechos no son humanos." ⁵⁸ Similarly, US human rights advocates also increasingly recognize gender-specific violations (e.g., Human Rights Watch, 1996b, 1998a, 1998b).

Probably the highest-impact area of binational women's movement collaboration involves reproductive rights. This was the result of two converging trends. First, feminist activists in the US broadened the frame for understanding of reproductive rights to the broader concept of access to reproductive health more generally – a shift driven to a large degree by the mobilization of women of color within the US. ⁵⁹ Second, major liberal private US foundations involved in Mexico became increasingly sensitive to feminist approaches to reproductive issues. As a result, since the 1980s US foundations involved in reproductive issues in Mexico have invested many millions of dollars to bolster the capacities of civil society organizations that defend women's health rights, contributing significantly to the infrastructure of Mexico's women's movement more generally.

One of the most significant specific cases of binational feminist coalition-building has emerged from the reproductive rights movement. The relationship is very close between the US and Mexican branches of Catholics for Free Choice (Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir). ⁶⁰ Though each is an independent NGO, each also conceives of itself as providing voice for a very large, under-represented constituency. Both emerge from and are extensively networked with diverse feminist movements in each country. The Mexican branch is also deeply embedded in national movements for human rights, Chiapas solidarity and liberation theology. The US and Mexican groups share a common mission and values and consider themselves part of a larger prochoice Catholic movement. Both combine policy advocacy with efforts to influence broader public opinion. They also work together on joint campaigns, such as the effort to convince the United Nations to withdraw the Vatican's nation-state status, in the name of separating church and state. They also work together to infuse prochoice Catholic perspectives in the international debates on population and development following the Cairo UN summit. The US and Mexican pro-choice Catholic groups certainly constitute a binational coalition. They also share many of the characteristics of a transnational movement -- including, notably, a self-conceptualization as constituting a movement (thereby raising questions about the conceptual exercise above, which attempts to distinguish between binational coalitions and movements). As in many other partnerships, the density of this partnership rests on the combination of a deeply shared ideology (feminism within the Catholic faith) with a strongly shared campaign target (the Church itself, perhaps the transnational civil society institution par excellence).

Chicano/Latino civil and immigrant rights

Chicano/Latino leaders and activists played critical roles in several of the movements discussed as other “sectors,” most notably labor and women’s rights. For example, the AFL-CIO leadership’s recent decision to support amnesty for undocumented workers was not simply ‘structurally determined’ by the tight labor market and the need to organize immigrants, it was also the result of years of political work by Chicano and Latino trade unionists with AFL-CIO. This section, however, will focus specifically on relationships between civil and immigrant rights movements in the US and Mexico.

Domestic US public interest organizations have built broad and deep advocacy institutions and coalitions to defend immigrant rights in the US over the past twenty years. Until recently, however, these efforts developed largely without sustained exchange or collaboration with Mexican counterparts. Joint US-Mexican efforts to develop binational civil society approaches to immigration issues came together organizationally only two years ago, with the formation of the broad-based Mexico-US Advocates Network (Gzesh, 1999). Moreover, many of even the most consolidated immigrant rights coalitions, which are regionally based and nationally networked, have relatively little contact with either organized migrants or Mexico. Indeed, some major national immigrant rights advocacy leaders after many years on the defensive, pursued in the early 1990s a “pragmatic” strategy of attempting to “demexicanize” the US policy debate.⁶¹

Binational constituency-based organizing among immigrants themselves has followed diverse paths, marked by the difficult choice of whether to participate primarily in US or in Mexican arenas. More recently, however, organized immigrants are transcending this dichotomy by participating in social and political movements in both countries at once. There is evidence that many Mexican citizens in the US remain engaged with Mexican civic life. In spite of the lack of immigrant voting rights, Mexican political candidates have carried out open electoral campaigns in the US for more than a decade (Dresser, 1993).⁶² 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 the growing cross-border participation (González Gutiérrez, 1993; 1997). Some immigrant organizations respond vigorously to the opportunities to collaborate with Mexican authorities, while others prefer more autonomous paths (Goldring, 1998, Rivera, 1999a; 1999b). Most hometown associations are quite engaged in “translocal” Mexican politics, but remain relatively disengaged from US politics – even during major moments of public debate, such as the California’s anti-immigrant Proposition 187 (e.g., Zabin and Escala, 1998).

Among US citizens, Mexican-American organizations have long grappled with the dilemma of how to gain full equal rights while defending their right to ethnic self-expression.⁶³ Because of persistent US perceptions of ‘foreign-ness,’ the Latino movement struggle to be perceived as legitimate actors in the process of formulating US foreign policy has been especially challenging.⁶⁴ Latino civil rights leaders are divided over the implications of Mexican electoral politics in the US.⁶⁵ While Latino civil rights activists continue to debate whether and how immigrants and US Latinos should forge coalitions for social change, increasing Latino political empowerment in the US has created new political space for cross-border coalitions.⁶⁶

The effects of the dramatic increase in immigrant incorporation into US politics are only beginning to be understood. In 1996 more than two-thirds of Mexicans in the US were potentially eligible for citizenship, yet less than 7% had become US citizens (Mexico-United States Binational Commission, 1997). Since then, Mexican-born immigrants have become US citizens at much greater rates than in the past, and newly-naturalized citizens vote at higher rates than US-born Latinos, on average.⁶⁷ At the same time, many Mexicans in the US continue to identify more with Mexican than with US politics. US immigration reforms of the late 1980s legalized millions of Mexicans, who were then able to reinforce their home ties by more frequent travel back and forth (e.g., Espinosa, 1999). The significant minority of immigrants who remain undocumented are excluded from the option of US naturalization.

The Mexican congress granted its citizens abroad the right to vote in 1996 -- in principle. Since then, Mexican US residents mobilized new advocacy networks to encourage the state to actually comply with its commitment. This was the first transnational advocacy network organized by immigrants to try to influence Mexican government policy towards them (Ross, 1998, 1999, Martínez and Ross, forthcoming). The Mexican state’s strategy, in contrast, has been to encourage emigrants to become US citizens and participate in US politics, rather than to extend the boundaries of the polity to include the entire national diaspora. The emigrant advocacy network found relatively few allies within the Mexican political system; all the major parties were internally divided on the issue.⁶⁸ The key voting rights reform provision managed to pass the lower house of congress before stalling in the senate, still controlled by the PRI. 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 perhaps its greatest impact at the level of the public agenda and the ways issues are framed. At the very least, immigrant civic leaders now have access to the national media in Mexico for the first time. The March, 1999 independent Mexican referendum provided a revealing illustration of shifts in the terrain of political culture. This referendum on peace in Chiapas and indigenous rights was called as part of an effort to break the political stalemate that followed the government's withdrawal from the San Andrés Accords. One of the leaders of the Coalición de Mexicanos en el Exterior - Nuestro Voto en el 2000, the principal emigrant advocacy network, took advantage of his new access to the national press to appeal directly to Marcos, noting parallels in the ways in which emigrants and indigenous peoples are both excluded from full citizenship rights (Martínez, 1999). Apparently in response, the EZLN called for the addition of a fifth question to the referendum, on the emigrant vote question. The fifth question was added to US polling places, where approximately 50,000 votes were tallied (the more than two million Mexican participants voted on the original four questions. At least 8,000 of those votes were tallied by the Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional (FIOB) in the Fresno area, one of its four California polling places. 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 paisanos, whether they are in the Mixteca, Baja California, Los Angeles or the Central Valleys (Rivera, 1999, forthcoming).

Late 1999 witnessed the most tangible evidence so far of the growing political influence of organized emigrants. The Mexican Treasury Ministry, in its effort to support its protection of the “national” (US-dominated) auto production industry, decided unilaterally to crack down on the widespread practice of immigrants returning to Mexico with used cars. Because of the sharp price differential in the cost of used cars, as the result of trade protection for Mexico-based auto manufacturers, a significant fraction of Mexican cars are not officially considered legal. To discourage this practice, the Treasury Ministry announced that a large deposit would be required for each car entering Mexico, whether tourist or immigrant – to begin shortly before the 1999 Christmas holiday, a time when millions of immigrants return home. This provoked a broad wave of protests by the increasingly-politicized Mexican community in the US, and the program lasted only two days. Emigrant leaders convinced the Mexican Senate to pass a resolution with support from both the opposition and the leaders of the ruling party. The president's own Foreign Ministry was also reportedly critical of the plan, since they were apparently not consulted and had to bear the brunt of immigrant protests.

The car deposit controversy revealed the extraordinary disconnect between the worldviews of Mexico City economic policymakers and the binational reality of as many as one in ten Mexican families. As the New York Times gently 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). Though the deposit was in principle supposed to be returned to car owners upon their departure from Mexico, Treasury Ministry officials clearly overestimated the credibility of the official promise to return the money.

The media and legislative lobbying campaign victory against the car deposit is the most clear-cut success so far, in terms of binational immigrant organizing.⁶⁹ The campaign appears to have built directly on the previous year's unsuccessful effort to gain the right to vote in the 2000 elections. As the president of the Concilio Hispano, 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” (quoted in Preston, 1999).

Assessing Binational Network and Coalition Impact

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 combining two distinct logical steps. First, was there some kind of civil society impact? Second, was that impact driven by the specifically binational dimensions of each civil society, to a large degree? 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 “impact on state behavior” (1998: 25, 201ff). They argue that these different kinds of impact actually constitute “stages” of impact, because establishing discursive legitimacy and benchmark standards can bolster leverage in the future.⁷⁰ It is also possible, however, that in some cases discursive reforms and weak institutional commitments serve to divide or distract civil society actors, weakening pressures for accountability – as critics might argue in the case of the NAFTA environmental side agreement. To give a centavo to keep the peso is an old story in Mexico. The propositions to be presented here constitute a preliminary empirical test of this part of Keck and Sikkink's hypothesis (with the proviso that the set of Mexico-US cases includes organized social constituencies as well as NGOs).

Table Three: Assessing Impacts of Mexico-US Civil Society Networks and Coalitions

Impact	Environmental standards	Labor rights	Human rights
Issue creation and agenda setting	<p>High</p> <p>Became key public issue in NAFTA debate, still on binational public agenda, regular media attention</p>	<p>Medium</p> <p>Became key public issue in NAFTA debate, occasionally returns to binational agenda, influenced fast track defeat. Binational coalitions engendered incipient Mexican-side maquiladora organizing network</p>	<p>Low-Medium</p> <p>Rose to secondary issue in NAFTA debate, then fell from US public agenda (except for 1994-1995 Chiapas period)</p>
Influence on official discourse (states & international organizations)	<p>High</p> <p>Both states and the NAFTA institutions continue to make strong discursive commitments to environmental concerns</p>	<p>Low-Medium</p> <p>Both states continue to recognize some labor rights, but both states ignore systematic violations of the right to organize. Trinational labor institutions occasionally raise the issue, but with little impact on broader public discourse.</p>	<p>Medium</p> <p>Both governments are obliged to recognize and condemn violations when the media and binational coalitions make them difficult to ignore. US State Dept reports and incipient congressional resolutions raise human rights concerns. The Mexican state expresses concern over migrant rights.</p>
Influence on national & international institutional procedures	<p>Medium</p> <p>The trinational side agreement remains quite weak, but the binational BECC and NADBANK created new practices and standards for public participation on the border. Lack of progress institutionalizing and broadening NADBANK contributed to 1997 fast track defeat.</p>	<p>Low</p> <p>The labor side agreement is extremely weak, has a very limited mandate and no authority over violations of the right to organize. However, public hearings and ministerial level consultations have been held. Lack of labor progress contributed to 1997 fast track defeat.</p>	<p>Medium</p> <p>The NAFTA debate contributed to the launching of the CNDH. Mexican human rights organization have prioritized multilateral more than binational fora (UN, OAS).</p>
Influence on policy change in “target actors,” public or private	<p>Medium</p> <p>Increased external funding for Mexican environmental protection from World Bank, USAID and US private foundations. The EPA also significantly increased border investments. Binational environmental coalitions have successfully blocked large, controversial projects in both countries (e.g., Sierra Blanca, Mitsubishi)</p>	<p>Low</p> <p>In spite of the labor side agreements’ limitations, several coalitions have tried to use its procedures – though so far with no policy impact. The main labor union impact on integration policy was not binational (US Teamsters’ trucking campaign). However, several binational maquila worker defense campaigns have led to modest, plant-specific concessions</p>	<p>Low-Medium</p> <p>To the degree that Mexican laws and institutions have recognized human rights since the NAFTA debate, there is little evidence that binational coalitions were important. International concern did contribute to the government decision to pursue a combination of negotiations and LIC in Chiapas, rather than a full military assault – but has been too weak to break the national stalemate.</p>
Influence on the behavior of target actors	<p>Low-Medium</p> <p>Mexican environmental reform authorities have had uneven effectiveness but at least they remain in power, indirectly bolstered by persistent international, mainly US concern. Environmental policymakers’ room for maneuver, however, has been economically and politically limited. Basic environmental laws continue to be violated often and with impunity (e.g., Mayan riviera)</p>	<p>None</p> <p>No evidence of tangible progress in terms of the right to organize, wages or working conditions in either country (especially in the maquiladoras) Han Young case showed that even a binational campaign that generated extensive, very high level US concern had little to no effect on Mexican legal processes and respect for labor rights in practice.</p>	<p>Unclear</p> <p>Because of the lack of consistent, independent, nation-wide data, change in levels of impunity over time are difficult to assess. Even if improvements were documented, the role of binational civil society remains uncertain. The clearest impact is in Chiapas, where the military usually limits easily televisable abuses. Binational coalitions may have contributed to limited Acteal massacre prosecutions.</p>

Concluding Propositions

This final section steps back from the cases to draw out several propositions for further discussion, involving both the network and coalition dynamics as well as their impact. As noted in the introduction, this discussion refers only to the subset of civil society actors that seek increased participation and public accountability.

1) Networks often need shared targets to become coalitions.

Mutual sympathy or shared concerns are usually not enough for networks to become coalitions, in the sense of agreeing to sustain joint campaigns. Shared political ideologies help, but are not necessary – if they were, then the list of binational coalitions would be much shorter. Shared targets can certainly be “politically constructed” but it helps to have some tangible political opportunity structure that can make collective action seem potentially effective. Shared targets can range from policymakers about to make specific policy decisions that affect both countries (such as congressional trade votes), shared transnational corporations (such as Campbells, Delta Airlines), entire sectors (maquiladoras), specific products (organic coffee), shared watersheds (Rio Grande/Rio Bravo), and international institutions, (e.g., the BECC, NADBANK, the labor or environmental commissions, the World Bank, or the Catholic Church),

2) National and border trends in binational relationships have followed two different paths since 1994

Binational networks and coalitions have not followed any one single trend over the past decade. Instead, border and national trends seem to have followed two different patterns. Border environmental and labor coalitions have gradually increased their density and cohesion, starting well before NAFTA and continuing after the vote – while national-level networks and coalitions have followed less consistent patterns. In several key sectors the pace of non-border binational social and civic relationship-building slowed after 1994, as in the case of some environmental, human rights and labor organizations. The 1997 fast track debate, in terms of binational coordination, involved significant “backsliding” compared to the high point reached in 1994. Looking back, the NAFTA vote and the initial phase of the Chiapas rebellion provoked upsurges of activity and a certain sense of “war of movement,” creating some expectations that binational coalition-building might be broadened and deepened. Instead, most of the key coalitions that have sustained coordinated relationships have pursued more of a “war of position.” This should not be surprising, given the extensive investments in internal and public education that balanced binational coalitions require.

3) Broad-based organizations that have sustained cohesive partnerships tend to “think locally to act binationally”

The classic formulation of global environmental philosophy, “think globally, act locally,” does not help to explain why a few broad-based social organizations manage to sustain cohesive binational partnerships. Accountability may be more important than ideology. Mass-based social organizations governed by their members are under more pressure than NGOs to be accountable to organized constituencies. They therefore must allocate resources based on perceived tangible benefits for their members. To justify resources invested in binational coalition-building, social organizations usually need to be able to make direct connections to local results. For example, the Teamsters Union reached out to immigrants and worked with Mexican unions in the apple campaign because such a strategy would increase their bargaining power. Mexican trade advocacy networks put up with some degree of nationalist rhetoric on the part of US NAFTA critics because those relationships increased their leverage. The CWA and the STRM joined forces in 1992 in spite of deep differences over the upcoming NAFTA vote because they perceived such an exchange to reinforce their respective bargaining powers in the longer term, with or without NAFTA. Both US and Mexican environmental organizations on the border seem to be willing to make serious investments in the difficult process of dealing with cultural differences, because they increasingly share the view that the local is binational, and vice versa. Binational ideological convergence, though rare, can help to sustain such “*thinking locally, acting binationally*” because it allows a longer time horizon for assessing local benefits. Shared alternative ideological visions can also sustain long-term alliances, such as the UE/FAT, whose tangible victories so far have been limited.

4) Binational networks and coalitions have had significant impact on official policy discourse, but have only rarely gained tangible increases in public or private accountability.

The experience of human rights, labor and environmental coalitions suggests that there is a very large gap between their influence on public discourse and more tangible kinds of impact. Aside from several clear-cut campaigns, mainly on the border, assessing impact is methodologically problematic, especially when some of the most important kinds of impact involve counterfactual assumptions (the situation would be even worse if not for...). Alternative, counterfactual scenarios such as a more obvious full-scale military assault in Chiapas, or the fall of Mexico's reformist environmental policymakers, have been avoided. But even in those counterfactual scenarios, it is difficult to assert conclusively that transnational factors or binational relationships were of primary importance. In terms of bolstering more reformist policies or qualitative changes in state behavior, such as increased authority for Mexican environmental reformers, or noticeable increases in the rights of unions to organize in either country, or indigenous rights reforms that could begin to resolve the Chiapas conflict, binational partnerships have not had much impact. The defeat of border environmental institutions are the main exception to this generalization, and their impact so far has been quite limited compared to their mandate. The defeats of the Sierra Blanca and Mitsubishi projects are quite significant, but they each had very unusual characteristics that limit their generalizability (nukes and whales). 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.⁷¹ This should not be surprising -- where their main levers are informational and symbolic politics, target actors can respond with symbolic concessions and trinational commission that produce information.

5) 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 of their higher levels of coordination -- according to the definition used here -- require even more resources to sustain. While some organizations can afford to invest such resources without a short-to-medium term costs-benefit analysis, organizations that are less well-endowed must carefully weight the tradeoffs involved. Airplane tickets aside, every week that an activist spends in another country is a week not spent organizing on the ground at home. Coalitions can also 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 -- resources embodied in horizontal relationships -- and social capital can produce often unpredictable multiplier effects. But precisely because the empowering effects are difficult to assess, investments in coalitions compete with much more pressing demands, and with alternative investments that promise more immediate results.⁷²

To sum up, so far, binational civil society networks and coalitions have had much more impact on themselves than on the broader processes and targets that provoked their emergence. Organized constituencies in each civil society have gotten to know their counterparts better. Greater mutual understanding is very likely to have 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 resource for the future. Whether and how national civil society actors will choose to draw on it remains to be seen.

Notes:

¹ This is a revised and updated version of a paper first presented at “Dilemmas of Change in Mexican Politics,” Center for US-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, October 8-9, 1999. This paper owes a great deal to more than a decade of conversations and collaboration with David Brooks, of the Mexico-US Diálogos Project and *La Jornada*. Thanks to Maylei Blackwell, Jennifer Johnson, Margaret Keck, Kevin Middlebrook and Heather Williams for very useful comments on earlier drafts. The next version of this paper will appear as a chapter in Kevin Middlebrook, ed., *Dilemmas of Change in Mexican Politics* (La Jolla: UCSD, Center for US-Mexican Studies, forthcoming).

² For analysts who clearly distinguish between these two approaches, see Keck and Sikkink (1998) and Tarrow (1998). For stronger versions of the transnational social movements approach, see, among other Smith, et al (1997) and Wapner (1996), among others. Keck and Sikkink (1998), like Hanagan (1998), discuss transnational societal linkages in long-term historical context.

³ In response to the assertion that labor unions need to “catch up” in the integration process, senior AFL-CIO strategist Ron Blackwell pointed out: “Why are we lagging behind? [corporations and states] They make the rules. Not only is it their game and they take an aggressive posture towards the rest of us, but their activities in organizing people are self-financing. Business is a masterful organizer and a massive organizer of people. So are governments. We don’t have that advantage. Moreover, our interests are social interests; they are particular among us and it takes awhile to find each other... Workers have differences of interests. They overlap, but they are not identical and they do contradict each other over some issues. The whole project of building a union, of building any organization, is to be able to map the areas of overlapping interests, and be able to build a working relationship, the capacity for collective action based on what we share” (presentation made at “Lessons from Mexico-US Binational Civil Society Coalitions,” UC Santa Cruz, July, 10-11, 1998)

⁴ This paper draws on a July, 1998 conference held at the University of California, Santa Cruz, with the support of a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The proceedings will appear as Brooks and Fox (2000).

⁵ The US also played an important role in encouraging the multilateral development banks to invest heavily in Mexico, especially during the NAFTA debate (Fox, forthcoming).

⁶ This paragraph is based on the most recent public information, accessible at www.info.usaid.gov/pubs/cp2000/lac/mexico.html. For details, see USAID/Mexico (1999).

⁷ Ibid. There has been very little informed public discussion of USAID’s Mexico program in either country. This gap is both cause and effect of the lack of independent assessments of USAID’s Mexico program.

⁸ See the annual reports at www.ned.org. The data is more detailed and precise than AID’s public information.

⁹ David Bray, former Mexico Foundation Representative, personal communication, Sept., 1999

¹⁰ Personal communication, anthropologist Laura González, University of Texas, Dallas, August, 1999.

¹¹ Research, primarily by sociologists, is starting to catch up with the last decade’s wave of Mexican immigrant social and civic organization. See Espinosa (1999), Goldring, (1998, 1999), Rivera (1999a; 1999b), Smith (1999), Zabin and Escala, (1999). For conceptual context, see Smith and Guarnizo (1998).

¹² This was not the first wave of Mexican state-US civil society relationships. For an overview of Mexican relations with the US political system early in this century, see Knight’s comprehensive discussion (1997). On US civil society’s cultural engagements with Mexico during this period, see Delpar (1992), among others. On the Mexican state’s efforts to work with US authorities to repress exiled Mexican radicals (as well as their alliances with the US left), see MacLachlan (1991). In the past, some ties in this category also involved Mexican government invitations to US non-governmental organizations to Mexico, as in the case of the Rockefeller Foundation’s public health (1930s) and agricultural research work (1940s), as well as the Summer Institute of Linguistics, invited by President Cárdenas to promote literacy in indigenous regions in the 1930s.

¹³ The Mexican state used elite cultural outreach to lay the groundwork, influencing opinion-makers with 1991 “The Splendor of Thirty Centuries” exhibit in New York, San Antonio and Los Angeles.

¹⁴ See, for example, John Ross’s regular email news bulletin Mexico Bárbaro (wnu@jgc.apc.org).

¹⁵ For sixty years -- since 1939 -- the Quaker-inspired American Friends Service Committee has organized annual summer community development programs in Mexico to bring youth from both countries together. AFSC’s main Mexican partner organization is Servicio, Desarrollo y Paz.

¹⁶ For example, the US Red Cross has been governed by conservative Republican political leaders, such as Elizabeth Dole, while the Mexican Red Cross is corrupt and ineffective at provided disaster relief and is identified with the military in Chiapas. In a much larger corruption scandal, the Red Cross had to return a \$300,000 USAID Hurricane Paulina donation (Zúñiga and Olayo, 1999).

¹⁷ Personal email communication, March 9, 2000.

¹⁸ The use of the term transnational rather than binational here is intended to suggest that this framework can be applied more broadly.

¹⁹ I am grateful to my UCSC colleague, Prof. Sonia Alvarez for encouraging me to specify this distinction.

²⁰ National borders may not be the most important ones here. 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 in each country.

²¹ On the related notion of “transnational public spheres,” see Yudice (1998).

²² Keck and Sikkink’s use of the term network encompasses both “network” and “coalition” as used here. In this framework, when networks engage in joint campaigns, they are considered coalitions – taking into account that ostensibly transnational networks may well carry out campaigns that are not jointly determined. In such cases where balanced relationships with partners on the ground are lacking, they may be more appropriately considered international rather than transnational campaigns.

²³ Moreover, the boundaries of the other category of transnational networks, epistemic communities based on shared causal ideas, can also blur when applied to campaigns. For example, environmental organizations around the world work together to reform the World Bank because of their shared view that if they could change it, the multiplier effects would be enormous. This is a shared causal view of the international influence of that institution. When unions in different countries begin to work together because they share the view that their respective bargaining powers are weakened by capital mobility and business strategies that pit them against one another, this is also a shared causal idea. These environmental groups and unions may or may not share political ideologies, but shared interests and this causal idea may be enough to justify transnational networking.

²⁴ For background on the international politics of US labor unions, see Sims (1992); Shorrock (1999) and McGinn and Moody (1992), among others. On the history of US economic nationalism see Frank (1999). On variations in trade unions responses to NAFTA in the US and Canada, see Dreiler and Robinson (1998). On US-Mexican union relations, see Armbruster (1995, 1997), Brooks (1992), Cook (1997), Carr (1996, 1998), Kidder and McGinn (1995) and Williams (1997).

²⁵ For example, in the early 1990s, the United Auto Workers did not pursue relationships with movements for union democracy in Mexico, such as the Ford Cuautitlan movement, in order to avoid alienating PRI union bosses. This created an opening for a rank-and-file dissident movement within the UAW, New Directions, to gain the moral high ground by leading US solidarity efforts with Mexican Ford workers (La Botz, 1992: 148-159). When a Mexican Ford worker was killed in the plant by CTM thugs, New Directions workers wore black armbands by the thousands. Yet that solidarity breakthrough may also have been a weakness, since associations with New Directions probably made the Mexican Ford movement anathema to the UAW national leadership.

²⁶ See Kamel and Hoffman (1999). The CFO is reportedly active in Ciudad Victoria, Rio Bravo, Piedras Negras, Ciudad Acuña, and Agua Prieta.

²⁷ See Carrillo (1990; 1998) on the efforts to build cross-border solidarity with the “19th of September Garment Workers’ Union.” In the late 1980s, these ties included contacts with the major US counterpart unions, as well as a relationship with Texas-based Fuerza Unida. International support for the waned following a disputed leadership transition in 1988. See also the NGO Mujer a Mujer’s innovative binational bulletin Correspondencia, which linked supporters of women worker organizing in both countries from 1984 to 1992. For further discussion of Mujer a Mujer, see Waterman (1998: 168-172) and Carrillo (1998).

²⁸ For further discussion, see, among others, Kamel (1988, 1989), Kamel and Hoffman (1999); Peña (1997) and Ruiz and Tiano (1987).

²⁹ Interview, Sept., 1999. Note for example, the case of Custom Trim in Matamoros, where leaders of the visiting delegation reportedly ignored warnings that organizers would likely be fired.

³⁰ Discussant’s remarks, “Lessons from Mexico-US Binational Civil Society Coalitions,” University of California, Santa Cruz, July, 1998

³¹ Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, 20-21 August, 1999. Of 65 participants, 23 were active workers, 15 recently-fired workers, a much higher proportion than in any other border network. Of the Mexican organizations that signed the final political declaration, 11 were affiliated with the CJM, 6 were affiliated with SNEEJ, 2 were in both, and three were not in either cross-border network (interview, Carmen Valadez, Casa de la Mujer: Factor X, Sept, 1999)

³² “Principios Eticos,” 20-21 de agosto, 1999, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, distributed by email.

³³ For details on the Han Young campaign, see the Coalition for Labor Rights (www.summersault.com/~agj/clr/), Working Together and Mexican Labor News and Analysis bulletins (www.igc.apc.org/unitedelect/alert.html)

³⁴ Interviews and plenary discussion, “Trinational Exchange: Popular Perspectives on Mexico-US-Canada Relations,” Cuernavaca, Mexico, February, 1996.

³⁵ In contrast to the FLOC, the UFW has not ventured beyond tentative gestures toward potential Mexican counterparts.

³⁶ It is unclear whether the ouster of the Teamsters’ “reform” leadership will lead to a complete dismantling of its internationalist wing.

³⁷ See Alexander and Gilmore, 1994; Cohen and Early, 1999; Garcia Urrutia, forthcoming; Rosen, 1999, Sepúlveda, 1998.

³⁸ CWA leaders note that the second case, against a border maquila plant, Maxi-Switch, led to “more success working together,” involving of active rank and file participation by workers at the border (including CWA’s Tucson local). Nevertheless, US union support was still not sufficient to protect Mexican organizers from being assaulted by factory supervisors (Cohen and Early, 1999: 158-159).

³⁹ Personal email communication, Robin Alexander, UE, Sept. 30, 1999.

⁴⁰ CWA leaders claim that the final official study of threats of plant closings as a violation of freedom of association (McKinnerey, et al, 1997) was first delayed and then watered down (Cohen and Early, 1999). They charge that the final study downplayed the findings of one of the project’s key researchers, Kate Bronfenbrenner of Cornell, who found that “plant closing threats and plant closings have become an integral part of employer anti-union strategies”... and that the rate of plant closings after US union elections “has more than doubled in the years since NAFTA was ratified” (Cohen and Early, 1999: 157).

⁴¹ 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), but the membership decisively defeated the

proposition. Nevertheless, neither the internal nor the public debate had any immigrant or binational participation. Very recently, the Sierra Club has taken up issues of environmental human rights, including a Guerrero case of a peasant anti-corporate logging activist (www.sierraclub.org/human-rights/Mexico).

⁴² Independent evaluations of the degree to which these large US conservation organizations have forged balanced partnership with the communities residing in the protected areas are lacking. One case worthy of further examination is Conservation International's operation of the Montes Azules Biosphere reserve, with USAID funds beginning in the early 1990s. According to one Chiapanecan biologist with extensive field experience in the region, the reserve was managed without community-based civil society partners and to little tangible environmental effect, (interview, Sept., 1999).

⁴³ For the most comprehensive and insightful analysis of sustainable coffee marketing issues, see Rice and McLean (1999). This report provides extraordinary insight into the obstacles that have slowed the emergence of credible coffee labeling and consumer education efforts in the US. The report appears to reproduce one of the main obstacles to more balanced relationships between producers and consumers, however, with its lack of focus on autonomous coffee smallholder organizations as key potential partners for organized consumers. This omission is underscored by the report's presentation, in an appendix, of who was interviewed. All the NGO and alternative trade specialists are mentioned by the full name of each individual and organization. The peasant leaders, in contrast, are relegated to a list of organizational acronyms, without naming any individuals.

⁴⁴ Interview with former Greenpeace International manager, December, 1998.

⁴⁵ On the Environmental Health Coalition, see www.environmentalhealth.org. On the path-breaking cross-border campaign against the World Bank forest project, see Lowerre (1994).

⁴⁶ The Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition, for example, includes more than 50 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, economies, and social well-being of the Río Grande/Río Bravo Basin" (see www.rioweb.org).

⁴⁷ On the Sierra Blanca campaign, see Abraham and Cone (1999), LaFranchi (1998), Paterson (1999), Robbins (2000) and Walker (1998) On the Tamaulipas canal project, see Texas Center for Policy Studies (199X)

⁴⁸ On the Canadian trade movement, see Ayres (1998).

⁴⁹ Dresser 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 prodemocracy social movements are key parts of this nascent network." (1996: 325).

⁵⁰ For one exception, a Mexican effort to link NAFTA to Mexican democratization in the US debate, see Castañeda and Heredia (1993).

⁵¹ Note the changing themes in the more recent reports from Human Rights Watch (1990; 1991a; 1991b; 1993; 1994a; 1994b; 1995; 1996; 1997; 1998; 1999, as the scope of their definition of human rights broadens to eventually include gendered human rights among maquila workers.

⁵² The widely-assumed internet linkage between the EZLN and the outside world has been overdrawn. From the beginning, the primary communication process has involved two stages – first between the EZLN and La Jornada, and then between La Jornada's web site and the rest of the world.

⁵³ For an analysis of why certain radical movements gain international allies while many do not, focusing on the determinative role of their own campaign efforts, including a comparison of the EZLN and the EPR, see Bob (2000).

⁵⁴ See WOLA (1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1995a, 1995b, 1997). For more information, see <http://www.wola.org/wola5.html>

⁵⁵ The Central American movement experience suggests that internationalist visits to zones of conflict can be critical for turning sympathy into activist commitment, and as many as several thousand US citizens may have visited Chiapas since 1994 (Ross, 1999, Sandoval, 1999, Stephen, forthcoming).

⁵⁶ Personal observation and interviews, Mexico City, August, 1994. After processing their data for several weeks, Alianza Civica later came to the conclusion that, in effect, two different elections had taken place, one relatively clean, the other marked by systematic violations of ballot secrecy and *coaccion*. For discussion of the data, see Fox (1996).

⁵⁷ By and large, even more liberal US foundations did not give much more importance to democratization in Mexico, than, for example, in Chile, South Africa or the former Soviet bloc. Private foundation strategists faced the following tradeoff – in the longer term a managed transition to liberal democracy in Mexico would reinforce a smooth process of North American integration, but in the shorter term, significant funding for democratic movements would have implicitly recognized that Mexico was less than democratic, and thereby potentially reinforced NAFTA critics.

⁵⁸ Personal email communication, Maylei Blackwell, Ph.D. candidate in the History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz (Feb. 10, 2000).

⁵⁹ Thanks to Maylei Blackwell for relating this observation.

⁶⁰ This paragraph is based on an interview with a US Catholic for a Free Choice activist with several years of experience working in Mexico with the Mexican chapter (Kathy Toner, March 9, 2000). The origins of the Latin American branches of this organization can be traced back to the late 1980s, when the founding US organization set up a regional office in Uruguay. Now sister organizations are active in Colombia, Argentina (2), Chile, Peru, with the strongest ones in Bolivia, Brazil and Mexico. The Latin American partner NGOs have their own autonomous regional board.

⁶¹ Mexico-US Advocates Network Seminar, Carnegie Endowment, Washington, DC, Feb., 1999

⁶² A major independent Mexican commission convened to inform the national policy debate over the absentee ballot found that an estimated 83% of Mexican citizens in the US would like to vote in the elections in 2000, if they could do so from the US. They also estimated that between 1.3 and 1.5 million emigrants in the US already hold valid Mexican electoral registration cards (IFE, 1998).

⁶³ There is a rich, diverse literature on relations between Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans. See Flores and Benmayor (1997); García Acevedo (1996); Gómez Quiñones (1990); Gutiérrez (1995; 1996), Maciel and Herrera-Sobek (1998); Santamaría Gómez (1988); Sierra (1999) and Weber (1998).

⁶⁴ On Latinos and US foreign policy, see De la Garza et al (1998); González (1999) Public Agenda/Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (1998)

⁶⁵ 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: “the implications of all this are frightening.” According to the New York Times, he contended that “an extended display of Mexican politicking on US soil would provoke a nativist fury in the United States directed not only at migrants but also at Mexican-Americans” (Dillon, 1998: 3). However, according to leading voting rights activist Antonio González, director of the William Velásquez Research Institute, “I just don’t see any kind of competition or negative effect in terms of US Latino political empowerment, versus Mexican political empowerment. I think they’re complementary...” (Discussants’s remarks, “Lessons from Binational Civil society Coalitions,” University of California, Santa Cruz, July, 1998)

⁶⁶ This was quite visible in the visit of the California’s speaker of the house Antonio Villaraigosa to Mexico, where he promoted US support for Mexican immigrant-led community development initiatives as a policy alternative to Proposition 187-style approaches (Romney, 1999). 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 “metro” section. See also Villaraigosa and Hinojosa Ojeda (1999).

⁶⁷ On naturalization and political attitudes, see Pachon and DeSipio (1994) and DeSipio and De la Garza (1998). On Latino voter turnout, see DeSipio (1996) and Arvizu and Garcia (1996).

⁶⁸ Interview, Raul Ross, American Friends Service Committee, Chicago, May, 1999

⁶⁹ Another recent binational immigrant organizing campaign involves a mobilization of thousands of elderly former Bracero program workers now living in Mexico. Through archival research, immigrant rights activists discovered that the Mexican government received from the US government and then retained 10% of Bracero worker wages, ostensibly as a contribution to a domestic crop loan program. Some policymakers at the time conceived this program as an innovative cross-border community investment program, but government apparently simply kept the money. The organizations involved include the Red Internacional en Defensa de los Derechos Plenos de los Trabajadores Migrantes y sus Familias, which claims 20,000 members, as well as the Unión Campesina y Emigrantes Mexicanos (UCEM) as well as the Unión Sin Fronteras. For details, see Salinas (1999).

⁷⁰ For a comparative study of the transnational advocacy network efforts to reform the World Bank, leading to the setting of new environmental and social standards, followed by further campaigns to meet those benchmarks, see Fox and Brown (1998).

⁷¹ This hypothesis resonates with the World Bank campaign experience, where transnational networks were critical for explaining why the Bank decided to make environmental and social reform commitments, while national factors tended to determine the degree to which states met those commitments in practice (Fox and Brown, 1998).

⁷² For many organizations, the lower levels of commitment involved in networks may make much more sense than coalitions. Relatively few binational interlocutors can draw “strength from weak ties,” 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. On the “strength of weak ties,” see Granovetter (1973). For an application of this concept to transnational advocacy networks, see Fox and Brown (1998).

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