U.S.-Mexico Contemporary Perspectives Series, 20
Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies
University of California, San Diego

CROSS-BORDER DIALOGUES
U.S.-Mexico Social Movement Networking

Contributors
Mariclaire Acosta
Emilio Álvarez Icaza Longoria
Sarah Anderson
Fernando Bejarano
Ron Blackwell
David Brooks
John Cavanagh
Jonathan Fox
Manuel García Urrutia M.
Susan Gzesh
Karen Hansen-Kuhn
Luis Hernández Navarro
Raúl Hinojosa-Ojeda
Mary E. Kelly
Karen Lehman
Ted Lewis
Bertha Elena Luján U.
Jesús Martínez-Saldaña
Gaspar Rivera-Salgado
Raúl Ross Pineda
Lynn Stephen
Heather Williams

Edited by
David Brooks and Jonathan Fox

LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA
Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies
University of California, San Diego
Acknowledgments

For over a decade, a diverse group of people helped to shape the contours and content of an evolving dialogue on binational relations between social actors. They were “conveners” of the Mexico-U.S. Diálogos series of exchanges and forums. Their generosity, courage, and integrity inspired the editors of this collection, and we can only hope that we have honored them with this small contribution.

Key contributors included:

John Coatsworth, formerly of the University of Chicago History Department and now director of Harvard University’s David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, encouraged “the most crazy gatherings of people I’ve ever been in” and provided wisdom and concrete space to launch and consolidate the Diálogos process.

Primitivo Rodríguez, former director of the American Friends Service Committee’s Mexico-U.S. Border Program, shared his insights from many years of work for immigrant rights and with cross-border social projects.

Barbara Dudley promoted and supported new thinking both within and across U.S. social constituencies, from her leadership positions within the labor movement (AFL-CIO and as a farmworker lawyer), the environmental movement (as director of Greenpeace USA), and the foundation worlds (through the Veatch Program).

Luis Hernández Navarro contributed his vast knowledge of the social universe of Mexico, as a strategist for and analyst of social movements (including movements for union democracy, coffee growers, peace in Chiapas, indigenous rights), and now as opinion editor at La Jornada. He was a pioneer in deciphering the potential nexus between social sectors in Mexico, the United States, and Canada.

Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, one of the initial participants in the Diálogos process, was one of the first policy analysts (as professor at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México [UNAM] and visiting scholar at various universities and think tanks in Mexico and the United States) to recognize and support the emergence of a “new interlocutor” in bina-
tional relations. He is currently Mexico’s permanent representative to the United Nations.

Ron Blackwell, director of corporate strategies at the AFL-CIO and formerly assistant to the president of UNITE/ACTWU, brought his strategic understanding of the emergence of a binational/transnational social realm. He made a key contribution toward deciphering the complexities of the role of U.S. social sectors in this new realm and forging some of the first transnational Western Hemisphere labor responses.

Mary Kelly, senior attorney at Environmental Defense and formerly executive director of the Texas Center for Policy Studies, made a long-term contribution toward defining the binational dialogue on environmental, social, and policy issues, including her unique insights into the articulation between the borderlands, Texas, and the national and binational arenas. Her humor and generosity rescued this process at many difficult junctures.

Mark Anderson (Food & Allied Service Trades, AFL-CIO) was one of the first movement strategists to analyze and frame the emerging debate on economic integration, seeing more clearly than most the nexus between the domestic and international implications of this dynamic. He had the guts to move massive institutions and to confront powerful players in this debate.

Manuel García Urrutia and Bertha Luján, both from the Authentic Labor Front (FAT) and the Mexican Free Trade Action Network (RMALC), sustained extraordinary courage in their challenge to Mexico’s then-dominant government and corporate consensus on economic integration. They took the initiative to lead one of the first explorations of the U.S. social universe, in their search for mutual understanding and coalition partners.

Cathryn Thorup, when she served as program director at the Overseas Development Council and then as research director of the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), recognized the emergence of a new social actor long before most policy analysts and gave her support to the Diálogos process.

Kim Stanton, formerly a program officer at the MacArthur Foundation and now deputy director of the Washington Office on Latin America, was one of the first in the foundation world to learn about and support binational and trinational exchanges among social constituency organizations.

Daniel Cantor of the Veatch Program was also among the first in the foundation world to recognize the domestic-transnational nexus of economic integration and the urgent need to develop the capacity for social constituency-based responses.

Others who generated and shaped the North American social dialogue on economic integration over the last decade include Robin Alexander (United Electrical Workers), Steve Beckman (United Auto Workers, International Relations), Antonio González (Southwest Voter Registration and Education Program), Karen Lehman (Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy), and Ken Traynor (Common Frontiers, Canada).

Participants in these efforts included rural policy analyst Armando Bartra (Instituto Maya); José La Luz (AFSCME/ACTWU); Ana de Ita (Center for the Study of Rural Change in Mexico); Baldemar Velásquez (Farm Labor Organizing Committee); political cartoonist El Fisgón (La Jornada); John Hansen (Nebraska Farmers Union); environmentalist Patricia Jerez; Francisco Hernández Juárez, Mateo Lejarza, and Rafael Limón (all of the Mexican Telephone Workers Union [STRM] and National Workers Union [UNT]); Joan Suárez (ACTWU); Maude Barlow (Council of Canadians); Benedicto Martínez (FAT); peasant leader Luis Meneses (National Union of Autonomous Regional Peasant Organizations [UNORCA]); Mark Ritchie (Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy); Peter Bakvis (Confederation of National Unions, Quebec); Roberto Sánchez (University of California, Santa Cruz [UCSC]); Harley Shaiken (director of the Center for Latin American Studies, University of California, Berkeley); Steve Abrecht (Communications Workers of America/SEIU); Art Schmidt (Temple University); Tony Clarke (Polaris Institute); Lori Wallach (Public Citizen); Ed Krueger (American Friends Service Committee); Adolfo Gilly (UNAM); Sandra Sorensen (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives/Action Canada Network); Jesús Martín del Campo (National Network of Education Workers [CNTE]); Carlos Arango (immigration rights advocate in Chicago); John Foster (then of Oxfam/Canada); Jack O’Dell (National Rainbow Coalition); Arturo Romo (Confederation of Mexican Workers [CTM]); Hugo Morales (Radio Bilingüe); Carlos Spector Calderón (League of United Latin American Citizens); Victor Suárez (National Association of Rural Marketing Enterprises [ANECENT]; Dan Seligman (Sierra Club); Margery Allen (AFSCME); Rick Lowerre (Texas Center for Policy Studies); and Mark Ritchie and Kristin Dawkins (Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy).

Carmen Lira (La Jornada) and Jim Cason (Mexico-U.S. Diálogos and La Jornada) were consistently helpful in advising, encouraging, and facilitating the Diálogos process.
Most of these folks and dozens more participated in the seven multi-sectoral Binational/Trinational Exchanges organized by the Mexico-U.S. Diálogos program between 1988 and 1997. The exchanges, which grew from some thirty to about ninety participants, took place in:

Chicago, September 1988 (University of Chicago),
Washington, D.C., June 1989 (Overseas Development Council),
Austin, June 1990 (Texas Center for Policy Studies),
Chicago, April 1991 (University of Chicago),
San Diego, June 1992 (Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego),
Austin, June 1994 (Texas Center for Policy Studies), and
Cuernavaca, 1996 (Hotel Maximiliano & Carlota).

In addition, two trinational sectoral exchanges on agriculture and the environment and one on human rights were organized as part of the overall Diálogos process. The agriculture/environment exchanges took place in Mexico City in November 1991 and in Lincoln, Nebraska, in January 1995. A trinational exchange on human rights was held in Reynosa, Mexico, in September 1992.

This book is in large part a result of a July 1998 conference, “Lessons from U.S.-Mexico Binational Civil Society Relations,” designed to assess a decade of binational social exchanges and efforts and hosted by the University of California, Santa Cruz. The conference was co-sponsored by Mexico-U.S. Diálogos and the Latino and Latin American Studies Program, the Chicano/Latino Research Center, and the Center for Global, International, and Regional Studies at UCSC. The conference was made possible by a grant from the MacArthur Foundation’s experimental New Partnerships program, led by Carmen Barroso. A grant from the University of California’s UC-MEXUS program supported the translation of several of the chapters.

Thanks are also due to the many undergraduate and graduate students who contributed to the organization of the conference, particularly Alexandra Armenta and Maylee Blackwell.

We are also very grateful to the other conference participants and panel discussants, including: Tani Adams (former director, Greenpeace Latin America, 1988–1994), Robin Alexander (director of international labor affairs, United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America); Mark Anderson (secretary-treasurer, Food and Allied Service Trades Department of the AFL-CIO); John Borrego (professor of Latin American and Latino Studies, now a full academic department at UCSC); Lance Compa (labor lawyer at Cornell University’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations and former director of labor law and economic research at the Secretariat of the North American Commissi for Labor Cooperation); Maria Lorena Cook (associate professor in the School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University); María Figueroa (former senior analyst, Research Department, International Brotherhood of Teamsters); Antonio González (president of the Southwest Voter Registration Project and the William C. Velásquez Institute); María Teresa Guerrero (Chihuahua Solidarity and Human Rights Defense Commission [COSYDDHAC]); María Jiménez (director, Immigration Law Enforcement Monitoring Project of the American Friends Service Committee); Marta Ojeda (director, Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras); Manuel Pastor (professor, Latin American and Latino Studies Department, UCSC). Roberto Sánchez (associate professor, Environmental Studies Department, UCSC, and former coordinator of transboundary issues, Commission of Environmental Cooperation); Víctor Suárez (director, ANEC); and Patricia Zavella (professor, Latin American and Latino Studies Department, UCSC, and co-director of the Chicano/Latino Research Center).

The reflections and analyses in this book are an attempt to both document and analyze the main lessons from this ongoing social dialogue, including the discussions that took place within the Diálogos exchanges as well as those occurring in myriad other forums and venues over the last decade.

The publication of this book was made possible thanks to support from the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, UCSD, with a timely additional contribution from UCSC’s Chicano/Latino Research Center. We wish to thank Wayne Cornelius, director of Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, former director Kevin Middlebrook, and editor Sandra del Castillo.

We would like to conclude by expressing our gratitude to our chapter authors for their near-infinite patience with the publication process.

David Brooks and Jonathan Fox (April 2002)
Movements across the Border: An Overview

David Brooks and Jonathan Fox

INTRODUCING THE NEW ACTOR IN MEXICO-U.S. RELATIONS

More than a decade ago, diverse social constituency responses to the accelerating Mexico-U.S. integration process helped launch what is now a broad international debate over globalization's winners and losers. This binational relationship—anchored in North America's uniquely intense convergence between the "developing" and "developed" worlds—provoked some of the first sustained cross-border encounters among social constituency organizations. Nongovernmental public interest groups had long been developing transnational issue networks; but now, directly affected social organizations were beginning to get to know their counterparts as well. If one wants to see where people-to-people "globalization from below" starts to sink roots, then this is where to look. The Mexico-U.S. civil society dialogue and coalition-building processes helped lay the groundwork for what we now refer to in shorthand as Seattle, Washington, D.C., Prague, and Quebec—place-names that have become synonymous with the emergence of civil society voices in the globalization debate.

This collection of essays presents a diverse set of perspectives from some of the key Mexican and U.S. participants involved in launching this new force in transnational politics. The authors include leaders and strategists of social organizations directly involved in setting the agenda for cross-border dialogues, as well as some of the researchers and intellectuals who have both participated in and studied the evolution of social constituency and civil society involvement in the bilateral Mexico-U.S. relationship.

Thanks very much to Barbara Dudley, Maria Lorena Cook, and Helen Shapiro for comments on previous versions of this essay, and to Angela Hollowell Fuentes for assistance with the bibliography. The authors bear sole responsibility for what follows.
To learn from more than a decade of cross-border relationships between social constituency-based actors, this collection includes both Mexican and U.S. perspectives from trade unionists, environmentalists, family farmers, trade policy campaigners, immigrant and Latino rights activists, and human rights and pro-democracy groups. They were involved in some of the first sustained civil society attempts in the Americas to address the most fundamental political challenge in the era of "globalization": democratization. This volume does not attempt to address the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the binational integration process more generally, nor does it cover the government-to-government relationship. Instead, the collection focuses on the nature and density of binational relationships between constituency-based social and civic organizations.

Starting from Scratch

A few years ago, a Kansas farmer who was meeting with his Mexican counterparts for the first time suddenly realized that the undocumented migrants who passed by his farm every day were not just "illegals" but farmers who had lost their land back home. "Those guys are me," he exclaimed. In Tennessee, dozens of women lost their industrial jobs when their company moved to Mexico's northern border region to set up a maquiladora factory, leaving behind a community that accused Mexicans of "stealing our jobs." When a Tennessee workers' delegation traveled to the border town where their old jobs were now located and met with the maquiladora workers, however, they immediately recognized that the Mexican workers were not so different from themselves. Realizing that the women of the Mexican maquiladoras were not the "enemy," working people in the mountains of Tennessee established an ongoing dialogue with their counterparts in the desert of northern Mexico.

1 This collection does not attempt to address all Mexico-U.S. social constituency interchanges. Some very significant kinds of binational exchanges are only discussed briefly—notably, the cases of faith-based, border, and feminist communities; the vast world of Mexican immigrant hometown associations; and the interactions between Mexican and U.S. rural communities that are experiencing waves of immigration for the first time.


3 For background and follow-up, see Gaventa 1990 and National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice 1998. For recent accounts of U.S. workers meeting Mexican workers who "got their jobs," see Adler 2000 and Baum 2000. Also see MacArthur 2000, chap. 1.

In Milwaukee, a Mexican trade unionist helped an American union organize Latino workers. The workers were surprised to find a "prisma" who had traveled to this cold place to help them gain their labor rights so far from home. With steps like these, a "strategic alliance" between two national unions from Mexico and the United States—each independent from their country's dominant national federation—pioneered at binational organizing coalitions.

Along the U.S.-Mexico border, U.S. environmental groups fighting to block the proposed Sierra Blanca nuclear waste dump found coalition partners among concerned environmental and community counterparts in northern Mexico. The nuclear waste, which was to be trucked all the way from states abutting the Canadian border, was targeted for burial so close to the Mexican border as to internationalize a classic environmental justice campaign. This binational network managed to block the project, despite its strong backing from then Texas governor George W. Bush and from powerful private corporations.

Although such stories abound, what do they add up to? They appear as isolated events in news reports—a brief binational effort here, a cross-border rendezvous around an issue there. But these engagements emerge from the broader, evolving interchange among representatives of social constituencies in Mexico and the United States. Over the past decade, social actors have had little choice but to acknowledge that the binational integration process increasingly has affected the immediate interests of broad social constituencies. The Mexico-U.S. exchange of goods, investment, people, and ideas grew broader as well as deeper, reaching regions and sectors in each country that had previously not been closely tied to the other side of the border. If the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, then together these interactions are transforming the U.S.-Mexico relationship from "below."

New Voices in U.S.-Mexico Relations

Diverse analysts agree that the economic, cultural, social, and demographic landscapes of both countries were becoming increasingly intertwined long before NAFTA institutionalized the process. National political and opinion-making elites have also made the transition from "distant neighbors" to close allies during the past decade (periodic...
misunderstandings notwithstanding). While NAFTA was both a cause and effect of a new bilateral consensus between Mexican and U.S. elites that strengthened their hand “from above,” at the same time it opened up unprecedented possibilities for civil society convergence “from below.”

When social actors in the United States and Mexico encountered each other for the first time, they began a transformation of the political landscape in both countries. Most social organizations were starting from scratch, and at first “citizen diplomacy” relied heavily on a very small number of individuals with binational experience as interlocutors. Looking back, the number, breadth, and density of cross-border social constituency ties were quite limited before the early 1990s.

Today, both U.S. and Mexican “policy elites” recognize the new presence of social constituencies at the transnational level. Even U.S. military strategists publicly recognize the presence of these social actors as a new key factor in assessing national security and international relations issues. The president of the World Bank acknowledges that the issues presented by working people and environmental actors must be integrated into the discussion of international development policy.

---

4 The reference is to New York Times correspondent Alan Riding’s bestseller (1986). See also Aguayo Quezada 1986a.

5 Aaronson (2001) and Frank (1999) show that public participation in trade debates has long roots in U.S. history, going back to the late nineteenth century and the Boston Tea Party. Aaronson stresses the concern of many organized constituencies around the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), preceding the NAFTA debate. As far as the late twentieth century is concerned, however, while the leadership of many “interest groups” certainly was very involved in lobbying around trade policy before NAFTA, outside of Detroit, broad public engagement was quite limited until NAFTA’s link with Mexico put a much more tangible public “face” on the trade threat to the security associated with the postwar U.S. social pact. It is probably not a coincidence that GATT in the 1980s failed to capture the public imagination in the way NAFTA did, despite its global reach and possibly greater impact on the U.S. economy. One would not guess from the difference in public concerns about GATT (or the Canada–United States Free Trade Agreement [CUSFTA]) versus NAFTA that most U.S. trade is with Europe, Canada, and Japan, in a world where most trade is between advanced industrial countries. NAFTA put a specifically brown face on the perceived trade threat.

6 On the first phases of contemporary binational “citizen diplomacy,” see J. Fox 1989; Thorup 1991, 1993; and Heredia and Hernández 1995. For the most comprehensive survey of what one could call the “pre-NAFTA baseline,” see the directory of organizations compiled by Hernández and Sánchez (1992). For later comparison, see Brown’s useful annotated directories (1996a, 1996b).

7 See, for example, Ronfeldt and Arquilla 1998, a study prepared for the U.S. military.


---

The former U.S. ambassador to Mexico during the NAFTA debate, speaking on behalf of the Council of the Americas, recognized that it was a mistake not to have incorporated these social interests into the economic partnership between both nations at the beginning. Policy-makers in both Washington and Mexico City now openly recognize the pivotal role of labor unions and Latino organizations in developing new immigration policy.

As Cathryn Thorup, one of the early analysts of this new factor in U.S.-Mexico relations, put it,

This explosion of citizen diplomacy requires a reexamination of some traditional assumptions about the way in which the United States and Mexico interact. Increasingly, instead of nationally rooted cleavages with U.S. actors on one side of an issue and Mexican actors on the opposing side, there is now a new configuration with U.S. and Mexican actors on one side of an issue, and an opposing constellation of U.S. and Mexican actors on the other (Thorup 1993).

These new civil society actors have begun to be heard. They have held innumerable conferences and workshops, made declarations and sent delegations, and even carried out joint campaigns. The question now is, can these new partners develop the capacity to sustain joint action across borders to be able to influence the transnational arena?

---

Domestic versus Transnational Perspectives

The possibilities for cross-border mutual understanding and collaboration among social forces were complicated by powerful historical legacies and deep cultural differences. These differences had led some national social actors to perceive one another more as threats than as potential allies. In both countries, civil society actors have often framed their concerns in the context of powerful nationalist ideologies—one interventionist, the other defensive. Neither society can easily escape the legacy of more than a century and a half of U.S. threats to Mexican sovereignty and self-determination. In the United States, Mexico was...
widely perceived as a dormant neighbor, a destination for American tourists on holiday, a direct threat to U.S. jobs, a source of immigrants and drugs in need of control, or as one more developing country in that alien universe of Latin America. For most U.S. opinion makers, especially on the East Coast, Mexico was just another Latin American country. These widely held perceptions, of course, had exceptions. Notably, social actors in the border region and around immigrant communities in the United States had more nuanced views. They understood the local dimensions of binational integration and how they spilled over into the domestic arena. These perceptions were to increasingly inform the emerging national consciousness on integration.

For social actors in Mexico, in contrast, the notion of an ever-present and all too proximate “U.S.” was not so new. Since the 1846–1848 “War of the North American Invasion”—known in the United States as the Mexican-American War—the United States’ economic and political interests have affected Mexican life at almost all levels, directly or indirectly. Several regions of Mexico have been sending workers to the United States for at least a century, and U.S. corporations were major players in Mexican industrialization, even during its nationalist phase. Following the 1982 debt crisis, however, Mexico’s economic dependency deepened, as national policies were increasingly defined by or designed to woo elites in Washington, D.C., and on Wall Street. What was new to Mexican social actors was the discovery that their U.S. counterparts were facing similar policies. The integration process provoked a simple but astonishing revelation for social actors in Mexico: they had counterparts in the United States. The challenges facing social movements in the “South” also confronted the “South within the North.”

In the United States, the dawning realization that the government’s international economic policies were increasingly being applied, or had direct consequences, “at home” was rather novel. For these social organizations, the most pressing issues—labor rights and wages, farm prices and supports, environmental regulations, civil rights issues—had always been resolved on the “domestic” political battlefield. For most broad-based national membership organizations, “foreign” policy issues—even international trade policy issues—tended to be left to a handful of staff based in their Washington headquarters, disconnected from the mainstream of the group’s internal life. Now and in the future, relationships with the “South”—that is, with anything south of the U.S. border, and particularly with Mexico—increasingly conditioned the nature of their domestic battles. Workers’ organizations, environmen-

---

Club’s 1997 controversial membership referendum on whether to take a position on the issue (the members voted to reject the anti-immigration proposition).

---

**Transnational Encounter: What Are You Doing Here?**

As “domestic” actors confronted the reality that their local destinies were increasingly determined by transnational processes, many realized that a response within national boundaries might work, at best, in the short term. Beyond that, they would have to engage in the international arena themselves—for many, for the very first time. Most did not come together as a result of a far-sighted strategy decision or ideological conviction, but out of necessity. This launched a search for counterparts and, in most cases, the first round of introductions among representatives of social constituencies from each of the “distant neighbors.”

Over the last decade, trade unionists, farmers, campesinos, environmentalists, Latinos, and immigrant communities from Mexico and the United States have found themselves in the same rooms, unsure what to say, how to behave, where to go, what to propose. Most did not know their counterparts from the other country; and national, racial, and linguistic differences were compounded by distances across social sectors. Some had been antagonists in the past—and not only across borders (for example, U.S. trade unions and Latino rights groups had long clashed over immigration policy, while Mexico’s trade union and environmental movements were both divided over how to relate to their government).

Years of local, regional, and national exchanges and campaigns to confront the dominant elite consensus made sectoral as well as national borders more permeable. Trade unionists discovered their counterparts in the same industries, if not the same companies, in the other country, confronting similar issues: anti-union policies, privatization, and deteriorating living conditions and job security for workers. Some in Mexico discovered a basic fact that was not so obvious when seen through the lenses of history and the border—that working people and social organizations existed and struggled in the United States (and that U.S. society was not populated exclusively by racist, individualistic con-
American trade unionists, long constrained by their leaders’ Cold War approach to international relations and tensions over immigration, discovered in Mexico a militant labor history that they knew little about, as well as a political system in which unions play key roles. Farmer leaders found that agricultural policies conditioning their survival in Kansas or Nebraska also affected their counterparts in Guanajuato or Chiapas. Mexican immigrants began to be understood more widely not as foreigners in the right, but as displaced farmers or workers in need of basic labor rights. Environmentalists quickly understood the binational impact of trade policies that promised to intensify the already alarming pollution of industrialized areas such as the border, that distorted resource use, and that risked bolstering corporate efforts to elude environmental regulations in both countries.

A broader understanding of the integration process also emerged through cross-sectoral encounters, many of which required intense behind-the-scenes debates to find common ground. Trade unionists fighting business-dominated integration policies found themselves sharing concerns with environmentalists; farmers found new areas of potential cooperation with labor as the food production industry consolidated operations and became increasingly binational; U.S. Latino rights organizations convened forums to bring together labor, environmental, and farmworker concerns. All these encounters generated new discussions between sectors as they engaged, at the same time, with counterparts across the border.

These efforts catalyzed and nourished what would later appear to be a sudden explosion of social responses to what had come to be called “globalization”—crystallized in the United States in Seattle during the 1999 World Trade Organization summit, later in the Washington, D.C., and Prague World Bank–International Monetary Fund protests, followed by the Quebec protests against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (see Brooks’s “Postscript” chapter for comparative reflections).

Initial Responses

These binational and cross-sectoral encounters did not necessarily imply agreement among the participants.\(^{13}\) Responses to integration issues by diverse social sectors ranged from proactive efforts to explore and promote binational alliances to “America first” reactive isolationism, from efforts to build new transnational networks to Mexico bashing. They also included organizing unprecedented encounters among civil society counterparts that began a dialogue about how to forge binational coalitions based on mutual interests, as well as the launching of more classic “solidarity” campaigns modeled on the Central America experience (a difficult fit, as Stephen’s chapter details). These new binational relationships also took surprising forms with such novel expressions of solidarity from the South to struggles in the North as the 1989 tour by Mexico City’s “Superbarrio” urban hero to investigate and support urban social movements in California (reported in People and the Los Angeles Times), and the support that Mexico’s Authentic Labor Front (FAT) extended to the United Mine Workers during a strike in the United States. There were also the more recent efforts by Mexican telephone workers and others in support of their U.S. counterparts. At the same time, the responses also have been expressed through a new passion for a return to localism (among both left and right in the United States) and a nationalism that conflated the interests of specific social groups with private corporations and national governments.

Part of the reason for the disparate responses was that social actors were entering previously unexplored territory. To a large degree, initial reactions were based on profound ignorance of the realities of their counterparts, mixed in with the long history of distrust and stereotyping of the people of the other nation. Social movements were also divided by very different organizing traditions, discourses, and tactics.\(^{14}\) Sometimes short-term campaign goals, such as influencing the media and the U.S. Congress, took precedence over grassroots organizing and cross-border coalition-building that promised uncertain results at best, and only over the longer term. The diverse set of priorities and strategies of the social actors involved generated responses that were sometimes downright schizophrenic—such as the Teamsters’ bashing of “dangerous” Mexican truckers at the same time that they were launching a campaign to defend and organize Mexican apple workers in Washington State. In the process, Mexican counterparts learned more about the ongoing struggle between nationalism and internationalism within U.S. trade unionism.

The NAFTA debate gave these diverse actors a common focus and, for many, a ready-made political target—something less abstract than “international trade policy” or the ongoing but unnamed process of

---

\(^{13}\) Some of these efforts were also trinational, involving broad-based Canadian social constituencies, but important differences in political priorities and styles led to less trinational cohesion than many had expected. For more on Canadian anti-NAFTA politics, see Ayres 1998. For a comparison of U.S. and Canadian union responses to NAFTA, see Drelling and Robinson 1998. On Canadian union internationalism, see Wells 1998.

\(^{14}\) See the chapters in this volume by Hernández Navarro, García Urrutia, and Fox on differences between frentes, redes, and coalitions in social mobilization on broad issues, versus issue-specific campaigns and “lobbying.”
"economic integration." But not even here was there broad agreement. A large part of the Mexican trade union movement supported the trade agreement (sold in Mexico as a jobs program), which split both domestic and binational social groups (and made discussions with militantly anti-NAFTA Canadian movement counterparts especially charged). Within the United States, different labor unions gave widely varying degrees of importance to the NAFTA opposition; the environmental movement also split on the deal, as did Latino civil rights organizations. Just like their Mexican counterparts, the leaderships of these organized U.S. constituencies had their national priorities on their agendas with their respective governments—priorities they were hesitant to completely subordinate to concerns about NAFTA. But the fact that there was a broad-based social debate at all, at least in the United States, was extraordinary in itself.

Never before had there been such a broad array of national and regional social constituency groups engaged with an issue of international economic policy, and never had there been this breadth of participation and popular debate on the pivotal issues of North-South relations. This fact literally made the political and economic establishment of each country tremble; this was an “actor” that had never before sat at the table where international economic and financial policy was negotiated.

The NAFTA debate promoted by social constituencies in both the United States and Mexico also made international economic policy a broad national electoral issue in the United States for the first time since the early 1930s, or possibly even the nineteenth century. The controversy had a direct impact on the 1992 U.S. presidential election. NAFTA was one of Reform Party candidate Ross Perot’s main issues, and it contributed to his surprising 19 percent of the vote. This may not seem like much, but without Perot splitting the potential Bush vote, Clinton would have lost the election (moreover, Perot’s 19 percent of the electorate looks strong in light of Nader’s poor showing in 2000). In the short term, conservative nationalists like Perot and Pat Buchanan dominated the public image of the NAFTA opposition, though at the same time the trade debate reenergized the internationalist wings of the labor and environmental movements, for the first time since the peak of the Central America anti-war movement of the 1980s. Within Mexico, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari made a huge political investment in NAFTA, linking his administration’s fortunes to Mexico’s “opening” to the United States. Pro-government media, along with the apparent macroeconomic stability linked to NAFTA, encouraged cautious public optimism about Mexico’s economic future, driving the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party’s (PRI) recovery in the 1994 presidential election. This mirage disappeared abruptly with the collapse of the peso in December 1994, revealing to the Mexican people that NAFTA had been oversold. For significant sectors of society in both the United States and Mexico, presidential legitimacy was closely linked to NAFTA’s fortunes.

The Incipient Democratization of the Transnational Arena

The social actors were not yet allowed at the table where policy was defined, but something had changed forever and with it came the opening of a new era in international relations. The politics of the U.S. debate shifted to the point where Clinton could not engage in the Seattle trade talks without promising to respect minimum labor and environmental standards. Social actors now joined the international economic policy club, where previously only diplomats, experts, economists, lawyers, and corporate executives had played. As a result, as the principal elite players have now recognized, subsequent debates on international economic policy could no longer ignore social issues such as labor and environmental rights in trade negotiations. In effect, social actors had made their presence felt at the table where international policies are negotiated and defined.

---

19 For very different overviews of the U.S. environmental movement's responses to NAFTA, see Audley 1997 and Dreiling 1997. On the reasons for widely varying degrees of U.S. labor opposition, see Dreiling and Robinson 1998. For pro-NAFTA U.S. policy elite strategies toward both sectors, see Mayer 1998.

20 From a mainstream point of view, Destler calls the NAFTA debate “the most prominent and contentious domestic debate on trade since the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930” (Destler 1995, cited in Scheve and Slaughter 2001: 6).

17 For nationalist reactions to free trade, see Nader et al. 1993, and Perot and Choate 1993. Cavanagh, Anderson, and Hausen-Kuhn (this volume) provide detailed participant insights into relations between the national and international wings of the U.S. opposition to NAFTA.

18 For overviews of the initial phases of this evolution, see Thorup 1991, 1993. For a discussion of the emergence of new bilateral actors from a Mexican foreign policy perspective, see Torres 1997.

19 On U.S. labor’s increased relative electoral weight within the Democratic Party in the late 1990s, see Schoch’s comprehensive analysis (2000).
ORGANIZED SOCIAL CONSTITUENCIES FACE BINATIONAL INTEGRATION

Labor

Workers and their organizations are the actors most clearly and directly affected by the process of economic integration between Mexico and the United States. Organized labor had to respond to the impact of integration in order to protect its interests, but it faced this challenge when it was suffering one of its weakest moments in modern history in both countries. The AFL-CIO could claim to represent less than 10 percent of U.S. private-sector workers. At the end of the 1980s, the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), along with most labor organizations in Mexico, was reeling from new policies that aimed to limit its once considerable political power, as well as the consequences of what today total more than fifteen years of economic crisis for the rank and file.

The policies of economic integration forced organized labor from both Mexico and the United States to an encounter in a context in which, objectively, they shared no common interest in the short term. NAFTA was widely seen by American workers as the devil incarnate, threatening their jobs, weakening their already limited bargaining power, and lowering labor standards and living conditions. For their Mexican counterparts, NAFTA was “sold” as a jobs program: it was perceived as a source of new employment, the “only” solution to years of economic decline and sacrifice.

At the same time, some individuals within both labor movements realized that, in the long term, the interests of Mexican and American working people are now inextricably intertwined: the impact of binational economic integration policies would define the future of working conditions, jobs, and labor rights in both countries. Thus only a cross-border response could confront the challenges of transnational economic policies and corporations, and permit organized labor to participate in forging the terms of the economic integration process. This perspective is not new: like “globalization,” international labor solidarity has had many previous incarnations. One of the most notable Mexican advocates of shared cross-border worker interests was anarcho-syndicalist Ricardo Flores Magón, exiled in the United States during the Mexican Revolution. Two decades later, when Mexican and U.S. labor movements experienced simultaneous upsurges during the mid- to late 1930s, political exchanges and mutual support reached what was probably their greatest intensity in the twentieth century. Internationalists were then simultaneously purged from both labor movements after World War II.

Before the NAFTA debate emerged, a very limited number of cross-border efforts involving labor already existed. One of the pioneers was the American Friends Service Committee’s (AFSC) Texas-based efforts in support of community-based maquiladora worker organizing on the border. After the 1985 Mexico City earthquakes, Mujer a Mujer pioneered cross-border feminist support for the independent Mexico City seamstresses union. In the first binational U.S.-Mexican union-to-union effort since the Cold War, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) coordinated in the late 1980s with a CTM-affiliated agricultural worker union in Sinaloa to offset the Campbell Soup Company’s efforts to divide and conquer unions in the United States and Mexico.

As the NAFTA debate evolved, one of the first major labor attempts to break out of a simple rejectionist approach was headed up by textile

---

20 On U.S.-Mexican union relations, see Armbuster 1995, 1998; Barry, Browne, and Sims 1994; Brooks 1992; Cook 1997; Carr 1996, 1998; Hallaway 2000a; Kidder and McGinn 1995; and E. Williams 1997. As an indication of how times have changed, a major collection was published in 1993 on North American labor movements, but it only discussed the United States and Canada (Jenson and Mahon 1993).

21 For a recent review of data on Mexican union membership patterns that suggest levels far below official claims, see Velasco C. 1999. For example, the CTM is reported here to have barely one million members.

22 As Flores Magón put it in 1914, in his remarkably prescient Los Angeles manifesto “To the Workers of the United States”: “The Mexican problem is not really a problem incumbent only to Mexico. . . . If the Mexican economic revolution is crushed, the American workingman will suffer the consequences . . . the manufacturers of the United States would be transplanted to Mexico, that would become an ideal land for business because of cheap wages, and the American workingmen will find their factories and firms . . . closed down because it will be more profitable to their bosses to open their business where they will pay twenty-five to fifty cents a day for the same kind of work for which they would have to pay two or three dollars in this country. Then, you see, American workingmen, that it is not only because they are members of your class and champions of the struggle of your class that you should help those in Mexico fighting for Land and Liberty, but for the fact, too, that they are laboring for your welfare while fighting for their own, which proves that the cause of the working class is but one.” The entire document is published in MacLachlan 1991. U.S. authorities perceived Flores Magón’s internationalism to be a major threat, especially his potential appeal to Mexican workers in the United States. He was jailed, denied medical attention, and died a political prisoner in the United States in 1923.

23 See Peterson’s history for details (1998).


25 On FLOC, see Neuman 1993; Barger and Reza 1994; and www.iupui.edu/~floc/.
unions in Latin America and the United States. Led by the Venezuelans and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) in the United States, they celebrated their first hemispheric summit in 1991 in Caracas. At this event, they reached a consensus on the need for labor to be at the transnational negotiating table for trade and investment policies, declaring “no economic integration without labor participation.”

Activist economist Ron Blackwell played an early and pivotal role in defining an internationalist U.S. union response to the issue of economic integration over the past decade. He was involved in forging new trade union approaches to the transnational economic and political arena. As an assistant to the president of ACTWU (later UNITE), Blackwell helped define a new labor discourse in multiple forums within and beyond the trade union universe, and he promoted some of the first North American and hemispheric labor and social efforts to engage with the issue of economic integration. With the shift in the national AFL-CIO leadership to reform hands in the mid-1990s, Blackwell became the AFL’s director of corporate affairs. In this volume, he assesses the nature and challenge of labor’s response from a U.S. perspective.

Manuel García Urrutia, a leader of the independent Authentic Labor Front and the Mexican Free Trade Action Network (RMALC), has also been a key actor over the last decade in forging binational relations among labor unions. In this volume, García Urrutia offers an independent Mexican union perspective on the potential and limits of acting as a new international interlocutor confronting the process of economic integration. Political scientist Heather Williams’s chapter follows with a comprehensive analysis of the first decade of perhaps the most sustained, multi-sectoral trinational coalition in any sector, the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM).

Blackwell offers a framework for interpreting the U.S. labor movement’s engagement with the integration process, particularly around the issue of trade and its crystallization in the NAFTA debate. A fundamental issue that became a key component of that debate, for both promoters and critics, was the concept of “protectionism.” Blackwell draws on the classic work of Karl Polanyi to challenge the term’s conventional backward-looking connotations, defining the concept as “society protecting itself from the utopia of the market as the only institution required to establish a just and sustainable economy.” From this premise Blackwell defends protectionism as the starting point for any labor strategy in response to economic integration. With this definition in mind, he notes that as a result of the NAFTA debate, some unions recognized that “the conditions of working people in the United States cannot be protected in the face of international integration without protecting the standards of workers in the South.” He also emphasizes the importance of identifying the forces that guide integration, and he points out that corporations today represent the most powerful “social force” and that the integration process is “their game, not ours.” Blackwell concludes that labor must find its points of agreement with its counterparts in Mexico and Latin America based on its own interests, and fully conscious of the nature of corporate power that it confronts in this arena.

In contrast to the United States, organized labor in Mexico was— with certain conditions—supportive of NAFTA and the policies to promote economic integration with the United States. In part, this was not surprising given that the largest unions in Mexico have long agreed to subordinate themselves to the current policy of the PRI-dominated government. But with the help of Mexico’s pro-government broadcast media, NAFTA was supposed to generate millions of new jobs in a country where almost half of the working population is either unemployed or underemployed. The protests of U.S. unions about the flight of “American” jobs to Mexico only served to confirm this idea. Indeed, maquiladora employment has grown dramatically since the implementation of NAFTA, although other (more unionized) Mexican industries have endured painful restructuring and downsizing.

As often happens in history, it was the small, independent, and progressive unions in Mexico and the United States that were among the first to define a basis for cross-border organizing and establish models that would become the basis for other binational efforts in the industrial sector. For García Urrutia and the FAT—a small, independent labor organization—the discovery of U.S. counterparts opened a new era for the reform wing of Mexico’s labor movement, which had seldom looked toward the North for alliances and solidarity. The process of economic integration, and particularly the evolution of the NAFTA debate, provoked Mexican labor to examine the largely unknown labor universe of the United States and Canada. Previously, labor relations


28 For the most detailed history of the FAT in English, see Hathaway 2000b. For background on the FAT-UE alliance, see Alexander and Gilmore 1994; T. Davis 1995; Rosen 1999; Hathaway 2000a, 2000b; and www.igc.apc.org/unitedelect/.
with the United States had been largely contained within a formal and mostly ceremonial setting established between the "official" labor federation (the CTM) and the AFL-CIO. Now the debate led to new encounters among diverse labor organizations and unions from both countries. This created an unprecedented space for a series of binational discussions and the exploration of potential areas of collaboration that began to take place in 1988.

It is important to note that, even before the NAFTA was conceived, some labor representatives had already recognized the need to examine the economic integration process between Mexico and the United States. First, various groups at integration's leading edge—on the border—were already concerned about the consequences of the maquiladora program and increased U.S. corporate investments throughout Mexico. Second, some trade unionists had already confronted the GATT negotiations. (Most U.S. groups ignored the Canada–United States Free Trade Agreement [CUSFTA], to the chagrin of their Canadian counterparts, who subsequently lost at least a quarter of their manufacturing labor force.) In the late 1980s, before the NAFTA debate, several national labor unions in the United States and Mexico began to deepen their interest and participated in initial discussions with their newly discovered counterparts. 29

García Urrutia tells this story from the particular experience of the Authentic Labor Front. He recalls that this dialogue was difficult at the beginning: "a protectionist animus and an anti-Mexican rhetoric dominated the climate in the United States. Finding allies in a place where Mexican workers were considered the enemy indicated just how difficult this task would be." But he adds that the multiple forums and interchanges with a broad array of U.S. labor organizations were an opportunity for Mexican labor activists to offer insights on what was happening in Mexico's labor universe and, at the same time, to gain a new understanding of the U.S. labor scene. Counterparts were identified, and discussions followed on potential areas of common work. The level of distrust lessened as U.S. unions began to understand that the flight of U.S. jobs and companies to Mexico did not imply that Mexican workers benefited at the expense of their U.S. counterparts. As García Urrutia observes, "Neoliberal policies have been the most important point of confluence among the different social movements of the three countries [of North America] because their effects are felt—despite many other differences that could exist—in the same manner on the people in all places, impacting their living conditions."

29 The U.S. unions included ACTWU, FLOC, ILGWU, UAW, NEA, CWA, IUE, and UE; those from Mexico were the FAT, STRM, SNTE, COR, and CTM, among others. See Mexico–U.S. Diálogos 1988, 1989.

García Urrutia describes the development of what became the "strategic alliance" between the FAT and the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers Union (UE), which continues to be the most consolidated binational union alliance to date. This process of identifying a specific counterpart and evolving a joint action program while respecting each other's autonomy provides insights into a model that many other labor organizations talk about but have yet to pursue consistently.

For the FAT, finding the existence of a "South" in the "North" was novel. Yet the next step of identifying common ground proved difficult. At first, rather than an encounter, counterparts experienced a series of "desencuentros" ("disconnects"), provoked in large part by nationalist, protectionist rhetoric and lack of experience or even shared knowledge about one's counterparts.

The search for alliances was based on a recognition of a common enemy and the promotion of internationally accepted labor rights principles. García Urrutia notes that the primary goal was that unions working binationally through collective action might attempt to regulate, at a minimal level, the behavior of capital. In this context, he describes the FAT's initiatives and its development into a very dynamic transnational interlocutor. One of the most notable results of this binational/trinational participation is that the FAT's role as a new transnational interlocutor catapulted the organization into a more prominent and powerful role within Mexico itself.

One of the most concrete ongoing binational efforts between labor organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with the conditions of working people evolved around the maquiladora sector along the border—a prototype for industrial integration between Mexico and the United States. Like the factories themselves, the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras pioneered patterns of binational integration that long predated NAFTA. 30 The CJM brings together a wide range of social justice activists in the United States and Mexico, including religious, environmental, labor, community, and women's rights organizations. Founded with leadership from U.S. religious activists on the border, the CJM has, over the years, become increasingly trinational, including a 1996 decision to require 50 percent Mexican representation on its board of directors.

Heather Williams analyzes the CJM with a comprehensive comparative analysis of a decade of diverse campaigns. She finds that the CJM

experience offers powerful lessons about how transborder labor-centered campaigns can generate pressure on both governments and private-sector interests "to reform practices and to uphold laws in a manner that they otherwise would not." Also, the CJM offers evidence about the need to integrate allies from other sectors—including religious, women’s, human rights, environmental, and other community groups and NGOs—in labor struggles against mobile capital. Finally, Williams points out that a "rights-based" organizing effort around a sector like the maquiladoras can be effective as a long-term, cross-border worker support strategy. This approach, though built on one campaign at a time, could ultimately transcend the frustration of a case-by-case effort in confronting mobile capital. Williams’s comprehensive comparison of a decade’s wide range of campaigns shows that the logic of cross-border approaches to worker rights campaigns is not simply driven by ideology but by its practical impact.

Despite diverse experiences and "cross-border" efforts among labor organizations, some observers have noted that, up until now, in many cases there is much more talk than action. As Maria Lorena Cook of Cornell University has pointed out, some of the talk itself has created obstacles to binational alliances:

 Some of the positions forged by NAFTA opponents in the United States have been too nationalistic and too little informed by the interests and needs of their Mexican counterparts. An anti-free trade ideology has often clouded actors' ability to capture the strategic opportunities to be found in engaging the trade debate. Actions have been inconsistent, reflecting short-term interests or conflicting priorities, rather than a thoughtfully crafted long-term strategy along transnational lines.

And some of the action was, in fact, contrary to the building of bina
tial ties, or it appeared to be even schizophrenic, as in the case of the Teamsters. As mentioned above, in their effort to stop the planned opening of the U.S. border to Mexican trucking companies, the Teamsters launched what was widely perceived as an anti-Mexican public campaign at almost the same time that they promoted a national effort to organize the mostly Mexican workforce in the apple industry in Washington State, inviting the aid of Mexican organizers. The apple campaign in Washington created an unprecedented partnership between former bitter rivals, with the Teamsters organizing the warehouse workers and the United Farm Workers (UFW) organizing the field workers. Most of the workers were Mexican, and Mexico was the largest export market for the apples, which led the U.S. unions to reach out to the FAT in Mexico. The FAT, in turn, organized a broad Mexican union coalition to support the campaign. This Mexican response included direct investigation of alleged violations of freedom of association, which led, in turn, to a formal complaint filed through the NAFTA labor side agreement. As Teamster researcher Maria Figueroa pointed out, the union’s contradictory positions regarding Mexico were expressions of internal tensions between the rival conservative nationalist and progressive forces in the union.

The pioneers in U.S. labor that attempted cross-border initiatives included the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, led by Baldemar Velásquez, followed by the UE, the Communications Workers of America, the ACTWU, and, more recently, the Service Employees Interna-
tional Union (SEIU), among others. In Mexico, the FAT was the first to open the door to binational efforts; it was followed by the Mexican Telephone Workers Union (STRM) and others. Among the most notable multi-union initiatives, the fight against U.S.-based Echlin Corporation’s Mexican labor rights violations forged a common campaign that brought together the United Steel Workers, United Auto Workers, UNITE, the Teamsters, and the UE, along with the FAT in Mexico. This campaign led to a complaint registered under the NAFTA labor side agreement, an effort involving a precedent-setting degree of trinational union cooperation.27

Communications and telephone workers from the United States and Mexico offer an example of the rapid evolution of potential alliances between labor unions. Despite their explicit differences over NAFTA during the heated legislative debate, both organizations kept talking, agreeing to disagree on NAFTA while searching for areas of common interest, such as the exchange of information and experiences around the impact of rapid technological change on their members. They signed a formal alliance in 1992, despite the NAFTA debate, and this relationship led in 1995 to the first NAFTA labor complaint from a Mexican labor union in support of U.S. workers’ right to freedom of association.28

More recently, Mexico’s new independent labor umbrella coalition—the National Workers Union (UNT), under the leadership of STRM leader Francisco Hernández Juárez and the FAT—has served as a new broad counterpart seeking industrial-sector union exchanges with parallel groups in the United States. The UNT has presented a number of proposals for joint initiatives to the AFL-CIO leadership, but the AFL-CIO was slow to take advantage of new opportunities for coalition-building in Mexico. This organization’s new reform leadership waited two years before replacing its old-style representative in Mexico, and most of the leadership’s first steps were more symbolic than tangible.30

In January 1998, John Sweeney became the first AFL-CIO president in thirty years to visit Mexico City. He met with the AFL’s “official” counterpart, the CTM, but he also broke for the first time with this exclusive relationship to meet with the leadership of the emerging National Workers Union and the FAT, among others. Sweeney proposed a “new internationalism” and called for renewed binational efforts to defend labor rights and confront NAFTA’s negative consequences on working people.31 Nevertheless, Mexican labor representatives were somewhat disillusioned that Sweeney and his team were not prepared to respond to concrete proposals presented to them during the trip, nor did they offer any proposals of their own.32

That there has been a change in the AFL-CIO’s policy toward Mexico and Latin America is not disputed. Over the last several years, the AFL-CIO’s office in Mexico has expanded relations with a broad spectrum of Mexican trade unions, including, notably, independent unions. Joint research projects have been promoted, and intense activities to inform U.S. union leaders about Mexico have generated new thinking and even some new actions. At the same time, there are few concrete examples of the development and implementation of sustained binational labor strategies that could put the “new internationalism” into practice. U.S. trade unionists and analysts continue to debate the degree, dimension, and practical implications of their leadership’s change toward a more internationalist discourse.33

Still, the AFL-CIO’s Mexico office is attempting to be more active in promoting binational campaigns, recently integrating a new actor—the anti-sweatshop student movement, active on at least two hundred campuses. In 2001, a new campaign to pressure a large Nike contractor in Mexico led to better monitoring and significant initial concessions to

27 This campaign led to the formation of the trinational Dana Workers’ Alliance (Echlin was sold to Dana), which has since been frustrated by the closure of UE’s plant and the ouster of the Teamster reform leadership, leaving up in the air the question of whether the UAW would fill the leadership gap on the U.S. side. Indeed, one of the U.S. plants whose workers were most supportive of their Mexican counterparts (mainly Mexico-origin workers) was shut down, allegedly in retaliation (Bacon 1998). In short, the broadest trinational industrial union coalition to emerge so far has not won any concessions. Also see the report in the joint autoworkers, machinists, and steel workers’ Unification News (Summer 1998): “Cross-Border Organizing: New Alliances with Mexican Unions by UAW/IAM/USWA.” On the labor commission more generally, see, among others, Compa 2001; Hinojosa-Ojeda and Boudreau 1998; Human Rights Watch 2001; and Martinez 2000.

28 See Sepúlveda 1998 for a STRM review of the alliance with the Communications Workers of America (CWA). See Cohen and Early 1999 for a CWA perspective. See Dubb 1996 for background analysis of the STRM.


30 See John Sweeney’s speech, delivered at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), January 22, 1998.


32 See Scipes 2000 and Ancel 2000. The AFL launched a Global Fairness Campaign, which is presented as a labor strategy to respond to globalization but has received little external attention.
Mexican union activists, including improved working conditions and the rehiring of fired workers.\(^\text{40}\)

Another important trend for U.S. trade unions is their much more active recognition of immigrants as a key to their own future. Service-sector workers, the food industry, and farmworkers have intensified their organizing efforts with a more explicit recognition of immigration's binational labor dimension. Recently, in separate visits, leaders of the Service Employees International Union, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE), and the United Food and Commercial Workers Union visited Mexico for the first time, to meet with both unions and government officials in a first step to act as an interlocutor in immigration policies as they affect workers in both countries.

It is important to note U.S. labor's identification of the administration of President Vicente Fox as a potential ally in defending immigrants in the United States, because this recognition potentially opens a new space for social actors to participate in binational policy in a new way. When Fox visited Washington for the first time as president-elect in August 2000, he convened a private gathering of representatives from U.S. social organizations, including the AFL-CIO. When Fox’s foreign minister, Jorge G. Castañeda, speaks in the United States, he repeatedly appeals to U.S. labor unions to support immigrants. In fact, in his keynote speech to HERE’s national convention, Castañeda called for a unified effort to defend immigrant workers’ rights. The fact that a union was hosting the foreign minister and that they were expressing a unified position on a highly controversial bilateral issue was of such note that it made the front page of the New York Times (Greenhouse 2001).

Labor union activists on both sides of the border are recognizing the importance of the point that Ron Blackwell makes in his chapter: that the objective conditions forged by corporations and government policies—what are referred to as “neoliberal policies”—directly threaten the living conditions of workers in both North and South. But, as Blackwell underscores, the free trade thrust of the neoliberal project pressed union organizations to find out more about their counterparts in the other country: “economic integration was something that immediately united our interests.” The free trade debate provoked new encounters; the effects of the neoliberal policies (in both North and South) and the extraordinary power accumulated by corporations and financial interests are increasingly evident in both countries. As a result, the “common ground” for labor alliances between Mexico and the United States is now more fertile than ever. The question remains as to the capacity of labor organizations in both countries to deepen and broaden their ability to act in the international arena. Key to the consolidation of the FAT-UE “strategic alliance,” for example, was a relationship based on more than instrumental, short-term campaign logic. As Robin Alexander of the UE pointed to as the premise for binational work, relations between U.S. and Mexican unions have to be “principled,” based on “respect for the autonomy of each union’s decision-making within its country.”\(^\text{41}\)

Many of the actors most deeply involved in binational organized labor initiatives have moved, in the course of the last decade, toward consensus around the importance of recognizing cultural and historical differences more explicitly. A core political principle in this process is “agreeing to disagree” on some issues in order to identify common interest around others. As Mark Anderson, leader of the food industry sector within the AFL-CIO, Manuel García Urrutia of the FAT, Martha Ojeda of the CJM, and Bertha Lujuan of the FAT and UNT have reiterated, the first union-to-union exchanges helped participants to understand “differences” more clearly. This paved the way for subsequent discussions about possible common interests. One of the most important differences involves potentially conflicting campaign goals and time horizons. As Martha Ojeda observed:

One major challenge is not only to find common ground between the cultures of the three countries but also between their strategies, because some have long-term strategies and others have short-term strategies.... Many U.S. groups had focused on corporate campaigns. Once we established a leadership from the three countries, then we began to define priorities.... As base groups [of maquiladora workers] began participating, the roles of the different members began to be clarified.... In terms of the environment [issue], there were no big problems, because different approaches were not seen as conflicting with each other; the same with human rights. There were more differences on labor.... It's a challenge, and we've been advancing little by little to establish trust and respect, to find what we have in common in terms of strategies. [In this context] the Mexican groups have tried to pursue long-term campaign strategies, rather than putting out fires in every campaign. Rather than being reactive, we need to be proactive.... A long-term approach means more than llamasadas [flare-ups], fires that catch but then go out. We should

\(^{40}\) For details, see the United Students Against Sweatshops' updates at: http://www.usasnet.org/campaigns/kukdang.html.

\(^{41}\) Discussant's remarks at the conference "Lessons from U.S.-Mexico Binational Civil Society Relations."
never lose sight of our goal, the organization of the workers.\footnote{Discussant's remarks at the conference “Lessons from U.S.-Mexico Binational Civil Society Relations.”}

Perhaps the most important discovery for labor—and for other social sectors—was that issues that once appeared exclusively “domestic” are now also international, and vice versa. There is a growing realization that attempts to defend labor’s interests in one country can no longer be accomplished without addressing the concerns of labor in other countries. That this dialogue has taken place over the last ten years is, in itself, extraordinary. In fact, because the Mexican and U.S. labor movements had hardly any substantive interchange within living memory, despite proximity and obvious interrelated interests, this brief history is just now beginning to write itself, starting from scratch.

Environmental Organizations

As U.S.-Mexican integration accelerated in the 1990s, the environment emerged from virtually nowhere to become one of the most important issues in the public debate surrounding NAFTA. During the heat of the debate, environmental issues shared top billing in the U.S. press with jobs and labor rights, converging on the issue of unregulated industrial toxic threats. At the same time, the Mexican government raised the scope and profile of its environmental policy reform commitments to an unprecedented degree.\footnote{In an effort to bolster the public credibility of NAFTA advocacy claims that trade and the environment were not in conflict, the World Bank provided record high levels of lending to the Mexican government for environmental infrastructure and anti-poverty investments (J. Fox 2000).} The images of border industrial pollution became the defining visual shorthand for the costs of rapid trade-led industrialization in Mexico.\footnote{See, for example, Verhovek 1998.} Industrial pollution on the Mexican border is cross-border in both its origins (toxic inputs are imported from the United States and used in production for export to the United States, mainly by U.S. firms) and its effects (polluted air and water come back to the United States). As with so many costs of corporate-led integration, however, the most serious damage has been inflicted on Mexicans in their workplaces and communities. Such damage was not a high policy priority among large U.S. conservation organizations, which have long been criticized in the United States for their narrow approach to biodiversity protection through parks, rather than a broader approach to environmental justice and public health. For Mexico’s environmental movement, these are primary concerns, as anti-toxics activist Fernando Bejarano stresses in his chapter. The following chapter, by Mary Kelly, environmental lawyer and former director of the Texas Center for Policy Studies, provides the perspective of a public interest group that links local, state, national, and cross-border policy arenas.

These two environmental chapters suggest that binational environmental networking and advocacy have been marked by very significant differences within, as well as between, national movements. First, both U.S. and Mexican environmental movements are characterized by high levels of internal diversity, including groups that see economic growth as the answer to environmental needs, and groups that see (conventional, unregulated) economic growth as the problem. Second, the experiences and priorities of groups working directly on the border, from both countries, are often quite distinct from larger, national environmental organizations that enjoy better access to the media, funders, and policymakers. Third, striking differences emerge between the periods before and after the governmental decision to sign NAFTA. Neither Bejarano nor Kelly, for example, focuses primarily on NAFTA in their overview assessments of the lessons from binational work. For both authors, implicitly, NAFTA accelerated long-standing, preexisting trends, and the debate around it was more the exception than the rule in cross-border environmental politics. Indeed, despite the prominent role that U.S. environmental organizations played on both sides of the NAFTA debate, none of the large U.S. groups devoted significant sustained attention to limiting the environmental costs of the North American integration process after NAFTA’s passage in the U.S. Congress.

There was one recent and important exception to this generalization—the campaign to block the joint Mitsubishi-Mexican government industrial saltworks targeted for Mexico’s largest biosphere reserve. Taking advantage of the public’s sympathy for whales and Mexico’s environmental protection laws, this campaign was initially led jointly by Mexico’s Grupo de los Cien; it was later joined by many local and national Mexican groups, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the International Fund for Animal Welfare. The national/international Coalition in Defense of San Ignacio Lagoon was unusually balanced in terms of relations between local, national, and international groups,\footnote{See Dedina’s useful overview (2000), which points out that the whales are “Mexican by birth,” which encouraged major conservation policy initiatives in the early 1970s. On the Mexican coalition, see http://www.csi.org.mx/. For U.S. participants, see http://www.nrdc.org/wildlife/marine/nbaja.asp. Spalding and Rozental (n.d.) provide an overview of the coalition.}
and its success was a major breakthrough. On the other hand, the role played by the charismatic mega-mammals of the San Ignacio Lagoon makes this campaign exceptional. In general, once Washington's legislative agenda moved past NAFTA, most national U.S. environmental organizations did too.

While it was not surprising that the more traditional U.S. conservation organizations supported their allies in both governments on the issue of border pollution, they did not seriously question the implications of the dominant economic model for their ostensible issue of primary concern: Mexico's natural resources. The major U.S. conservation organizations chose to follow the official logic that Mexico needed trade-led economic growth to generate the resources needed for environmental investments. By the early 1990s, most of the major U.S. conservation organizations had come to espouse "free-market environmentalism." Not coincidentally, the boards of directors of the seven most powerful pro-NAFTA U.S. conservation organizations included prominent corporate representatives, some of whom were simultaneously active within the pro-NAFTA corporate lobby.

Following the U.S. park model for natural resource conservation, some large U.S. environmental NGOs (Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, World Wildlife Fund) have found Mexican partners (such as Pronatura) and now provide financial and management support for Mexican government "protected areas," thanks largely to long-term funding from USAID. This strategy is quite limited, however, because Mexico's relatively few parks are not very effective at protecting the small fraction of Mexico's biodiversity they cover. In most of the countryside, the main defenders of Mexico's natural resources are the grassroots communities that inhabit, and often have title to, these lands.

They organize for sustainable livelihoods and to promote the enforcement of Mexico's environmental laws. However, few major U.S. environmental organizations have sustained partnerships with potential social counterparts involved in natural resource management in the Mexican countryside, such as the vast community forestry movement or Mexico's densely organized smallholder coffee co-op movement.

Recently, however, the Sierra Club—one of the few large U.S. environmental groups to oppose NAFTA—has campaigned strongly in defense of the human rights of Mexican environmental activists. The Sierra Club took up the cause of two "peasant ecologists" imprisoned on trumped-up charges for challenging well-connected loggers on Guerrero's coast. Amnesty International characterized the ecologists as "prisoners of conscience." Yet despite a high-profile international campaign, they were sentenced to long prison terms. Their case provoked one of the few recent sustained binational human rights campaigns, and the prisoners ultimately won the high-profile Goldman Prize, the alternative environmental "Nobel Prize." Ethel Kennedy delivered the award check to their jail cell, and Hillary Clinton embraced prisoner Rodolfo Montiel's wife. Mexican human rights groups and environmental groups united in support of the prisoners. President Fox received a delegation of concerned U.S. and Mexican environmental and human rights leaders and expressed his concern about irregularities in the case. Mexico's new environmental minister visited the prisoners, and the country's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) concluded that the charges were without basis. The prisoners' release was opposed by the Fox administration's attorney general, a ranking mill-

---

49 Interview with Serge Dedina of the NGO Wildcoast, July 2000.
50 Smaller exceptions to this generalization include, for example, the Sierra Club's work with RMAC on a NAFTA impact evaluation. The Environmental Defense Fund's Austin, Texas, office has been involved in modest efforts to promote better pollution practices in the maquiladora industry, and the National Wildlife Federation has also engaged in some border work.
51 For example, in 1992 the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) received US$2.5 million from Eastman Kodak, whose CEO was a co-founder of USA*NAFTA and later received a seat on the WWF board of directors (Cookson 1993). This stance left little room for WWF's Mexican affiliate to take its own position on NAFTA, even though some staff predicted privately in 1993 that NAFTA would seriously threaten Mexico's primary forests. At the same time, Mexican environmentalists in these networks were able to use their insider connections to help suspend a plan to build a highway through Oaxaca's endangered Chimalapas forest. For background on this primarily national environmental advocacy network, see Umas 1998.
52 In some cases, protected areas that are co-managed by U.S. conservation organizations have even been targeted by peasant community protest because of their management style, as in the case of the Montes Azules and Lacandón reserves in Chiapas. See, for example, the confrontation covered by La Jornada in August 2000.
53 For further discussion, see Fox, this volume, and Rice, Harris, and MacLean 1997, among others.
55 See www.sierraclub.org/human-rights/. As John Ross reported, "the internationalization of Rodolfo's plight appears to have made no dent on the Zedillo regime and may, in fact, have dictated the harsh sentences handed down by Judge Murillo on Aug. 28. For the past seven decades, the Mexican government ... has fiercely resisted what it considers to be foreign intervention in its internal affairs—particularly in sensitive human rights cases like Montiel's. Zedillo's administration has been no exception" (J. Ross 2000b).
tary officer who had previously served as the prosecutor within the armed forces. They were released only after their human rights lawyer was killed in Mexico City.

Perhaps one of the most striking features of binational environmental politics is the contrast between the extraordinarily high profile of the issues and the relatively low level of consolidated cross-border partnerships of national scope. The major exception is on the border itself. As Mary Kelly notes, environmental activists on both sides of the border began their sustained struggle to sink roots and strengthen ties prior to the NAFTA vote, and they have deepened their commitment since then.

This political distance between national and local, border-based organizations reflects a more general pattern. The politically moderate, professional, Washington-oriented policy advocacy and conservation groups often follow rhythms and priorities that differ from the diverse, often more radical grassroots groups mobilized on a broader range of environmental issues, such as pollution and environmental justice. Mexico’s environmental movement includes a similar range of organizations and approaches, although Bejarano suggests that the balance between them is somewhat different. In Mexico, groups that are concerned with deeper ecological change and that question the dominant economic strategy are relatively more prominent. Mexico’s environmental movement also tends to question unilateral nationalist approaches by many U.S. counterpart groups, as in the case of the tuna-dolphin dispute. Greenpeace sided with its Latin American environ-

mentalists counterparts on this issue, in contrast to the unilateral approach favored by many other U.S. environmental organizations. Kelly takes stock of the dramatic increase in the breadth and depth of environmental organizing and advocacy in both countries and between countries at the border. She notes that several key binational coalitions began long before NAFTA, on environmental, health, and workers rights, and on indigenous issues. Not only have the pace and intensity of binational collaboration on the border increased significantly since NAFTA, there have also been some important, tangible policy successes, ranging from blocking controversial projects to establishing new standards for public participation in local and binational policy processes.

Most environmental organizations on the border are especially sensitive to interlocking human health and natural resource concerns, which facilitated coalition-building. U.S. and Mexican border groups also share their distance from—and, to some degree, their alienation from—national elites (opposition as well as official) in both countries. Kelly also takes note of border groups’ willingness to accept the difficult challenge of recognizing and overcoming cultural differences. This commitment is crucial because—as the history of the border shows—proximity does not necessarily lead to mutual understanding.

Trade Policy Advocacy Campaigns

NAFTA provoked one of the broadest popular debates on international economic policy in the United States since the Boston Tea Party. Across the country, trade unionists, farmers, environmentalists, consumer advocates, Latinos, and other social constituencies participated in one way or another, to the surprise of government functionaries, think-tank

---

56 For extensive sources on environmental organizations on the border, see www.irc-online.org/bios/ and http://www.greenbuilder.com/rioweb/index.html.
57 On different currents within U.S. environmentalism, see, among others, Dowie 1995 and Dreiling 1997. Several of the large U.S. national environmental organizations had begun to engage on the trade issue as early as 1990, during the GATT negotiations that later led to the WTO, following European public interest concerns about corporate attacks on social and environmental standards as “nontariff barriers to trade.” This approach carried over into the NAFTA negotiations as well, with even stronger provisions allowing corporations to sue foreign governments directly, without the intercession of their own government (Chapter 11). According to Barbara Dudley, former director of Greenpeace USA, “In their misplaced loyalty to Clinton and Gore and their desire for access to power, they settled for fairly meaningless environmental and labor ‘side agreements’ to NAFTA, which required only that participating nations enforce their own laws and provided nothing in the way of sanctions if they didn’t. Of the national organizations, only Greenpeace, Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, and Defenders of Wildlife continued to oppose NAFTA, along with innumerable local and grassroots environmental organizations” (personal communication, June 10, 2001).
technocrats, and private-sector representatives who never suspected that trade policy would generate a national debate. In fact, that debate is a direct precedent for the "globalization" debates that reached the mainstream media agenda in Seattle in 1999, and for the still-evolving international convergence of social movements that question the elite consensus on global free market policies.

The anti-NAFTA movement in the United States dates its inception from public forum organized in Congress on January 15, 1991, called "U.S.-Mexico Free Trade: Opening Up the Debate." This event was sponsored by some twenty national agricultural, environmental, and labor organizations, along with policy think tanks and nongovernmental public interest groups. The forum's breadth and intensity sent a shot across the bow of the insulated trade policy establishment. Most significantly, the core issues of the debate, themes that would intensify for the next three years in the United States, concerned the domestic implications of the North-South relationship and the nature of the United States' relations with the developing world, especially Mexico. Mainstream policy analysts agree that the pro-free trade forces were caught off guard by the deep public skepticism and concern surrounding NAFTA.

In Mexico, opposition to the signing of the free trade agreement was much more limited, but NAFTA did serve to generate a wide-ranging social and elite debate on matters with "el norte." The notion that a formal economic integration mechanism with the United States was Mexico's road to the future had not been promoted this intensively since the years immediately preceding the Mexican Revolution. As the debate expanded, the nature and potential implications of what was presented as foreign economic policy also became a key domestic issue. Grassroots Mexican skepticism about free trade was largely invisible until the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) launched its uprising on the eve of NAFTA's implementation. This event followed Subcomandante Marcos's widely cited warning that NAFTA would be a "death sentence" for indigenous people. The Zapatista uprising, with its undeniable combination of legitimacy and cross-cultural message against social exclusion, turned out to be the "shot heard 'round the world" for what came to be the transnational wave of protests against top-down globalization.

After the 1994-1995 peso crisis, many Mexicans began to question NAFTA. The currency crash broke the technocrats' promises of prosperity and indirectly cast doubt on the benefits of increased economic integration with the United States. The debate in Mexico and the United States has both transnational and multisectoral dimensions. Domestic constituency organizations, meeting their counterparts in the neighbor country, often for the first time, were forced to understand one another's reality in order to engage in joint activities and contribute to each other's efforts. Furthermore, because so many diverse actors saw their interests directly affected by the trade debate and NAFTA, unusual "citizen" coalitions formed, comprising local, regional, and national organizations representing labor, farmers, environmentalists, consumer rights, immigrant rights, Latinos, and human rights organizations. Many of these organizations had never worked with each other or had long histories of mutual mistrust, if not outright antipathy. They were suddenly brought together by a debate on something as conceptually and politically remote from their reach as international economic policy.

Issues once considered to belong solely to international relations were understood as domestic issues as well. Unwittingly, the consensus forged from above by policy elites and transnational Mexico-U.S. corporate interests opened an unprecedented space "below." A dialogue among social organizations at the broadest levels between the two countries evolved in that new space. Social constituency organizations that once saw themselves solely as "domestic interest groups" now en-
they were not against trade but for “fair trade.” Yet as the legislative debate over NAFTA heated up, the “No to NAFTA” slogan prevailed.

The NAFTA opposition movement launched what was perhaps the most ambitious U.S. popular education campaign on economic policy in recent decades. Its resonance alarmed NAFTA proponents, who feared for the legislative survival of their project, and compelled then presidential candidate Bill Clinton to incorporate—at least symbolically, and for the first time anywhere—the notion of labor and environmental rights in trade policy. The political pressure from the opposition led to the creation of the labor and environmental side agreements to NAFTA, as well as the launching of regional development institutions such as the North American Development Bank (NADB). Clearly the broad social coalitions around NAFTA influenced and changed the elite agenda on trade and investment strategies for North America and beyond.62

The U.S. campaign tradition of building broad, often contradictory coalitions around specific legislative conflicts dominated the process. As Manuel García Urrutia observed:

The real debate was concentrated in Washington. In the United States there was a prior experience in the fight against GATT, and there was an organizational culture ... that has nothing to do with the organizational culture we have experienced in Mexico—a culture that functions around limited campaigns, where all who are in favor of the campaign participate, regardless of their political stripe. These are campaigns organized around immediate demands, around coalitions with two arms, one concentrated on political pressure, lobbying legislators and their electoral clientele, and the other educational. This was the way of doing politics that predominated during the NAFTA debate, and it didn’t exist in Mexico... We have few coalitions; what we had are networks, or coordinators, or fronts, and they follow a different logic—not around immediate goals, with rare exceptions, and much less to pressure legislators in Congress, who don’t count.63

Because the U.S. political dynamic revolved around specific congressional decisions, such as yes-or-no votes on fast track and then NAFTA itself, nationalist and international NAFTA critics, as well as

6 For the most comprehensive insider analyses of how the debate over the side agreements fit into the broader interest group conflict around NAFTA in the United States, see Mayer 1998 and Audley 1997.

6 Panel presentation at the conference “Lessons from U.S.-Mexico Binational Civil Society Relations.”
the right and left, could come together in an intense, short-term campaign. Cavanagh, Anderson, and Hansen-Kuhn explain this political logic, which requires very different groups to come together if anti-free trade forces are to win political battles in the United States. As a result of this contradictory combination of political ideologies under the anti-NAFTA umbrella, much of the anti-NAFTA discourse was reactionary, sometimes even with racist undertones. "Mexico bashing"—Mexico as drug exporter, corrupt, child exploiter, polluter, authoritarian, and so on—dominated the public discussion of why Mexico was not a worthy trade partner. National leaders in the fight offered images of Mexico as a direct threat to Americans. Ralph Nader stated, "NAFTA is a giant Mexican truck in your rearview mirror as you're driving down the road." Ross Perot made his most famous reference to NAFTA when he characterized the trade deal as a "giant sucking sound" as U.S. jobs drained away to Mexico. Moreover, NAFTA was blamed for a host of long-standing U.S. domestic problems: job insecurity, runaway shops, lower wages, immigration and its domestic "costs," food safety, and deteriorating environmental and labor standards. Only some of these were related to trade policies. NAFTA was not necessarily their main cause nor, in many cases, even a contributing factor. Yet it served as a lightning rod for many entrenched economic insecurities in the United States.  

Short-term nationalist politics reemerged again after Seattle, when the AFL-CIO's China-bashing campaign took precedence over the post-Seattle possibility of a more internationalist response to globalization (see, for example, Klein 2001).

Remarks broadcast on C-Span at a press conference convened by the Coalition of Americans, jointly with right-wing activist Paul Weyrich, held at the National Press Club, November 4, 1993, and cited in Kingsolver 1995. Also see Kingsolver 2001.

For example, U.S. manufacturing job losses have been quite significant over the past decade (almost one million jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, reported in the Christian Science Monitor, September 20, 1999). This steady stream of job losses continues to be at the political center of the U.S. trade policy debate (see Adler 2000; Baum 2000; MacArthur 2000; and Scheve and Slaughter 2001). Though trade with Mexico, or even trade more generally, is not the only cause of job losses, more diffuse factors, such as technological change, provide much less clear-cut political lighting rods than "foreign" trade agreements. On the complex issue of measuring net job loss linked to NAFTA, see Hinojosa-Ojeda et al. 2000. In the case of threats to food safety, increased imports have clearly overwhelmed the government's monitoring capacity, but domestic sources of contamination have been much more deadly than imported products, most notably in the case of hamburger. Even in the widely publicized 1997 case of "tainted Mexican strawberries" found in Michigan, the berries were processed in the United States and the source of the contamination was never determined. Nevertheless, anti-free trade campaigners portrayed the threat to food safety as primarily a trade issue rather than one of weak public health regulations. As one leading anti-free trade campaigner responded, "[it doesn't matter where the strawberries were contaminated]. The point is that foreign imports are the problem... Quit asking picayune policy questions" (personal e-mail communication, August 1997).

Also see Frank 1999.

Given that racism and nationalism had been used systematically since the nineteenth century to divide U.S. workers, nationalist NAFTA critics found it easy to transmit their message of blaming foreigners. As the U.S. economy underwent a rapid restructuring, which provoked widespread uncertainty despite macroeconomic stability, many working families had good reason to fear integration. This was especially true in light of the finding by NAFTA's Commission for Labor Cooperation that many U.S. employers systematically use the threat of flight to weaken union organizing and contract campaigns (McKenney et al. 1997). The environmental and food safety critiques also resonated with stereotypes embedded in popular culture, such as "dirty Mexicans." The internationalist wing of the NAFTA opposition, by working with Mexican counterparts and anti-racist social movements in the United States, attempted to counter these tendencies, but they did not lead the movement. Moreover, their goal of people-to-people education required sustained long-term investments, whereas the legislative campaign imposed a short-term, base-broadening logic.

In Mexico, NAFTA's first glow waned for most social sectors, even those that enthusiastically embraced it, as the 1995 economic crisis continued to deprive the vast majority of working people of any tangible economic benefit. The active anti-free trade forces in Mexico coalesced around a small but dynamic core of independent labor, campesino, and NGO groups that effectively used their growing relationships with counterparts in the United States and Canada to magnify their political weight and influence in Mexico. In fact, despite their relative weakness as domestic social actors, this network of activists was able to force senior government officials, and even cabinet ministers, to engage in ongoing dialogue with them during the trade negotiations, something that would have been unimaginable previously.

One overriding political fact conditioned the NAFTA debate in Mexico: that the life or death of the trade deal resided in Washington—in the U.S. Congress—and not in Mexico. That is, the organizing around NAFTA was not guided by efforts to defeat it in Mexico because, though difficult to imagine in retrospect, President Salinas's political hegemony made that scenario unthinkable. Further, the strategy that guided NAFTA's critics was not premised on a rejection of a trade deal per se; rather, the aim was to provoke as wide a debate as possible on international economic policy and its domestic consequences. The
focus was on the notion of trade and the nature of its relationship with development, and on forging a discussion with NAFTA opponents in the United States that might influence Mexico's economic policy. The Mexican trade activists saw integration as inevitable (and already well under way), but they questioned the terms of the process. They had more in common, therefore, with the "Not this NAFTA" position in the United States than with the dominant anti-NAFTA forces. The most militant anti-NAFTA groups in the United States and Canada did not initially welcome this position, but some U.S. groups were obliged (sometimes for the sake of appearances) to engage with their Mexican counterparts to discuss an alternative proposal or, at minimum, to influence the shape of the elite proposal.

Out of this came an extraordinary process of consultation in which several groups worked to forge an "alternative" counterproposal through broad public forums and intense efforts among working groups within each nation and at trinational working meetings. Documents outlining alternatives were produced. The most important of these was "A Just and Sustainable Trade and Development Initiative for North America," produced by three North American NGO trade coalitions (the Alliance for Responsible Trade [ART], the Mexican Free Trade Action Network, and a group within Action Canada Network [ACNI]). This initiative was somewhat overshadowed in terms of public attention by the highly polarized climate of the final phase of the NAFTA debate in the United States, but its innovative trinational consensus-building process set a historic precedent. The three networks worked from drafts that bracketed points of difference, in conscious imitation of the treaty negotiating process. One of the most important points of contention was whether (implicitly Mexican) failure to meet minimum environmental and social standards should be punished with trade sanctions. Even U.S. internationalists tended to support what their Mexican counterparts perceived as an unduly blunt approach. Mexican advocacy groups did not want to strengthen U.S. government power over Mexico. Despite the alternative proposals' limited political impact, the process of producing them forged principles of unity and generated multiple specific policy recommendations that entered the public debate. Furthermore, it established a precedent for multinational negotiations and compromise among social organizations and public interest groups. This process has continued to evolve over numerous social forums and alternative civil society "summits" celebrated in Chile, Brazil, Chiapas, Quebec, Prague, and Genoa.

John Cavanagh, Sarah Anderson, and Karen Hansen-Kuhn—key players in the evolution of the trade debate among social constituencies and public interest groups in the United States—offer a synthetic and comprehensive evaluation of this extraordinary national and transnational popular debate on international economic policy. Bertha Luján, one of the central movers of the debate in Mexico in her capacity as leader of the FAT (the most important grassroots membership organization in the Mexican opposition to NAFTA) and founder and coordinator of RMALC, offers a unique view into the evolution of this movement in Mexico. Binational policy analyst Raúl Hinojosa-Ojeda then draws important lessons from the experience of a precedent-setting campaign led by U.S. Latino rights organizations to influence the terms of the NAFTA debate and to open up the side agreements to more civil society participation.

Cavanagh, Anderson, and Hansen-Kuhn review three phases of the "cross-sectoral, cross-border dialogue" among social activists and researchers around the trade debate: (1) NAFTA and the building of alternatives, (2) the phase in which the NAFTA debate became hemispheric among social actors, and (3) the second fast track battle. The authors remind us that the free trade debate in North America was sparked by Canadian activists who visited Mexico City and Washington in 1990 to brief groups on their sustained fight against the CUSFTA. The Canadians issued a call to action against the expansion of the CUSFTA to all of North America and ultimately to the entire hemisphere, although few U.S. counterparts listened until the inclusion of Mexico became a real possibility.

Cavanagh, Anderson, and Hansen-Kuhn candidly review the tensions among sectors within the U.S. anti-NAFTA movement, explaining why no central national coordinating body could be maintained in the

---

66 See Cavanagh, Anderson, and Hansen-Kuhn 2001. The first counterproposal during the NAFTA debate came from center-left opposition leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who presented his Continental Development and Trade Initiative to U.S. policy and business elites and to labor and NGOs in 1991. This marked the first time that a leading national opposition figure from the Third World offered a policy proposal to the United States that incorporated the interests of working people in the First World (aside from anarcho-sindicalist Ricardo Flores Magón's appeal to U.S. workers in 1914 [MacLachlin 1991]). Cárdenas's proposal was based on the notion that the debate could not be limited to trade per se but must envision trade as an instrument of development. That is, once one determined the preferred development model, then, and only then, could one identify the appropriate trade proposal. Only in this way, Cárdenas argued, could you ensure that the policy debate and its results were democratic, given that the guiding purpose would be to determine economic policies that benefited the majorities of people in both North and South. See Cárdenas's statement to the Council of the Americas and to a citizen forum at ACTWU on February 8, 1991, in Cavanagh et al. 1992.

67 On their home organizations, the Institute for Policy Studies and the Alliance for Responsible Trade, see www.ips-dc.org/ and www.isc.org/dgap/art/index.html, respectively.
United States (in contrast to Mexico’s RMALC and Canada’s Action Canada Network). These authors also note that the differences in strategies between the rejectionist forces and those who favored proposing alternatives hindered the anti-NAFTA fight in Washington. Also, the different approaches of the U.S. and Mexican activist networks handicapped effective cross-border dialogue and action at various times, highlighting the need to further develop an “infrastructure” for binational work. Despite these limitations, the authors note the extraordinary experiences of developing joint transnational work, particularly around drafting of an alternative proposal to economic integration through free trade policies, and the growing hemispheric dimension of this effort.

These authors recognize the contradictions inherent in pragmatic coalitions between internationalists and nationalists. In 1997 the U.S. House of Representatives defeated Clinton’s request to renew fast track trade negotiating authority (243 to 180), illustrating that the NAFTA debate remained unresolved and that it still united U.S. critics on the right and left. The U.S. president paid this high political price, generally attributed to the bitter NAFTA fight and ongoing public opposition to free trade. At the same time, however, U.S. trade critics’ relations with Mexican civil society counterparts involved significantly less coordination in 1997 than had been achieved in 1993, at the peak of the NAFTA debate. This fact reveals the limited influence of internationalist trade advocacy forces in both countries, and it confirms that binational advocacy cooperation is not on an inevitable, onward and upward trajectory. Indeed, one of these authors’ most important findings is that the same pragmatic right-left coalition politics that threatened NAFTA’s passage and defeated fast track authority for Clinton in 1997 and 1998 may have impeded more balanced Mexico-U.S. coalitions in favor of alternatives.

Berta Luján’s chapter traces the evolution of the Mexican Free Trade Action Network, founded in 1991. She notes that the process of “social convergence” among the countries of North America in response to the free trade agenda is in essence “a construction of a social force that transcends borders,” and she offers an evaluation and chronology of this process from RMALC’s perspective. The interaction at the tri-national level, and later at a hemispheric level, required intense activity by RMALC, which strained the network’s capacities. RMALC’s need to maintain a high public profile and a plural political space—while simultaneously developing the capacity to be an effective interlocutor in international forums and produce consistent proposals—was constrained by the network’s lack of the minimal institutional capacities that could guarantee continuity, permit a stronger impact on the agenda of broad social movements, and, as with its U.S. counterparts, support the development of a long-term view and a broad strategy for deepening alliances.

Raúl Hinojosa-Ojeda, a policy analyst at the University of California, Los Angeles, documents the role of social actors in influencing elite policy formulation in the context of the NAFTA and post-NAFTA debates. He focuses on the way in which the “nontraditional” issues of labor, environment, and sustainable development were pushed to the top of the elite international economic policy agenda and resulted in specific institutional proposals known as “NAFTA-plus.” Hinojosa-Ojeda’s insider account shows how U.S. environmental and Latino public interest groups, traditionally excluded from international economic policy debates, were able to gain direct access to this process for the first time. Their goals were ambitious—to create a series of North American institutions that recognized and attempted to buffer the social and environmental costs of integration. They included not only the hotly debated environmental and labor side agreements, but also the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC) and the NADBank. Although the institutions that were created fell short of the original vision, they are among the only institutional levers that civil society can use to influence the integration process. Hinojosa-Ojeda notes that the Clinton administration’s strategy vis-à-vis new social actors did succeed in the short term by gaining NAFTA’s passage. But that success in limiting civil society’s participation and the implementation of its proposals “led to a weakness of the sustainability of the NAFTA consensus.” Moreover, some of the reform promises the administration made to Latino constituencies in order to gain their support for NAFTA were broken. Notable among these is the agonizingly slow empowerment of the NADBank, which was originally envisioned to encourage community-based job creation in sectors and regions hurt by trade.

See Shoch 2000. Scheve and Slaughter’s recent study, published by a prominent pro-free trade think tank, provides a comprehensive overview of U.S. public opinion toward globalization. In contrast to the typical free-trader view that only a few narrow-minded interested parties oppose globalization, Scheve and Slaughter’s review of the survey data finds consistently broad-based skepticism toward both NAFTA and its proposed extension to the hemisphere, with U.S. opinion generally split over whether NAFTA has been positive or negative (2001: 30–31).

For assessments of the NAFTA social and environmental institutions, see, among others, Compa 2001; Hinojosa-Ojeda and Boudreau 1998; Herzenberg 1996; Kelly, Reed, and Taylor 2001; Mumme 1999; E. Williams 1997; and regular coverage in the bulletin Borderlines.
The breaking of this promise led a prominent congressional architect of NADBank, Esteban Torres (D-Los Angeles), to oppose the renewal of fast track authority in 1997, contributing to Clinton's embarrassing defeat. As Congressman Torres explained his opposition to fast track:

Whatever you think of NAFTA, no one can deny that it has forever changed the way in which we view international cooperation. Never again will the United States enter into a trade agreement, without first insisting that the rights of workers are secured and our environment is protected.... President Clinton learned this lesson the hard way. Last fall, [he] tried to obtain fast track authority to negotiate new trade agreements with Chile and the rest of Latin America.... His efforts failed for two simple reasons: he failed to fulfill his commitments on NAFTA [reforms] and he sought legislation that fell short of the minimum labor and environmental standards established by NAFTA. 73

Hinojosa-Ojeda concludes by reflecting on the need to expand transnational social participation in ongoing debates on international economic policy: "The new political arena of international economic policy is still very fluid and is being reshaped by ongoing strategic interactions between national societal actors, governing states, international institutions, and transnational activist networks in ways that are setting new norms, principles, and terms of the coming debate on future trade agreements."

After NAFTA’s passage, trade policy advocacy took somewhat different paths in the United States and Mexico. In the United States, the 1997 debate over the renewal of fast track authority took place largely outside of the binational coalition-building process that had peaked during the NAFTA debate. The WTO and China then came to dominate U.S. trade policy campaign agendas. In Mexico, although RMALC continued to closely monitor NAFTA’s effects, their advocacy efforts turned to Mexico’s negotiation of a free trade agreement with the European Union (which led to high-profile provisions in favor of human rights). The WTO was not as high a priority for Mexican advocacy groups as it was for their U.S. counterparts. Perhaps negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas will bring the two trade advocacy communities closer together. A Chinese revolutionary leader, when asked for his assessment of the long-term implications of the French Revolution, responded, "It’s too soon to tell." The same may be true of assessments regarding the degree to which internationalist approaches will dominate national responses to free trade.

Small Farmer Organizations

Thousands of Mexicans are streaming into Iowa and Nebraska—the heart of U.S. agriculture and epicenter of the current farm crisis—to work in the (once heavily unionized) meatpacking industry. "Most of these people coming from Mexico are busted farmers, just like us," said John Hansen, president of the Nebraska Farmers Union. 74 Indeed, many Mexicans working in the poultry industry in Maryland and Georgia or picking apples in the U.S. Northwest are campesinos who can no longer subsist on their own land.

U.S. farmers and farmworkers in California, Florida, Ohio, and Texas have long worked alongside of, or hired, immigrants. What is new is the recognition among family farmers that these workers are, or were, farmers themselves. In some U.S. regions, immigrant farmworkers are even becoming small farmers once again as the children of U.S. farmers leave rural America to seek less insecure careers. 75 At the same time, U.S. farmers developed an interest in the experiences of their counterparts on the other side of the border. This interest was sparked by small agricultural producers' growing awareness of the international implications of agricultural policies, the corporate concentration of agribusiness in the hands of multinational enterprises, and the growing economic links between agricultural sectors in the United States and Mexico. As the debate on economic integration and NAFTA intensified, this identification with the farming sector on "the other side" became pivotal in promoting an unprecedented cross-border dialogue among small agricultural producers and their organizations.

When the uprising by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation erupted in 1994, the first U.S. organization to respond was not a solidarity group, human rights activists, Mexico specialists, or even a religious group. It was the Nebraska Farmers Union, which sent a simple message: we hear that the Mexican government is attacking farmers and we oppose that and express our protest. This statement was not so surpris-

73 "Remarks of Congressman Esteban Torres before the Conference on the Role of the New NAFTA Institutions: Regional Economic Integration and Cooperation," North American Integration and Development Center, University of California, Los Angeles, June 20, 1998. For context, see Bluestein 1997.

74 Recounted by John Cavanagh at the conference "Lessons from U.S.-Mexico Binational Civil Society Relations."

75 Brooks interview in Lincoln, Nebraska, June 1999. Published in the special supplement to La Jornada, on the U.S. Midwest, October 14, 1999.

76 The 1997 U.S. Census of Agriculture found a 32 percent rise in Latino-run farms in only five years (Kilman and Millman 1999).
the two countries. Moreover, organized smallholders take very different kinds of political action to defend their interests. Political cultures and repertoires are quite distinct between counterparts in most social sectors in the two countries. This is especially true of farmers, whose crops may be in direct competition in the market (as in the case of corn). As a result, the first cross-border small producer encounters had to overcome huge obstacles just to convene a dialogue to explore possible common interests.

Peasant organizations in Mexico, overwhelmed by extensive reforms of the domestic rural sector, did not see NAFTA as a priority. Moreover, as Hernández Navarro notes, Mexicans perceived NAFTA as a done deal, even as they observed some farmer organizations in the United States fight to defeat it through domestic political action and coalition-building. Furthermore, with the notable exception of corn, most of Mexico’s agriculture sector was already wide open to U.S. imports, thanks to previous unilateral Mexican government concessions. From the viewpoint of Mexican peasant organizations, even independent ones, making a large political investment in the fight against NAFTA seemed to carry very high costs for very slim prospects of success.

Hernández Navarro offers a comprehensive review of the exchanges and binational initiatives with which rural actors responded to trade policies’ impacts on agriculture. He describes some specific projects and the obstacles that farmers faced at both the domestic and international levels. He concludes that some binational and trinational sectoral efforts “helped the leadership of producer organizations obtain a much more complete and critical vision of the process of globalization and integration of agriculture than what they had” ten years previously. “Simultaneously, it has permitted a discarding of prejudices and an identification of common agendas and enemies.” Although Hernández Navarro points out that these alliances have yet to generate a sustained organizational presence that can affect national policies, they have established the conditions for this to be achieved. Perhaps most importantly, such alliances have helped both sides think more broadly about what types of public policy proposals are needed in the short and long term.

Lehman identifies the shift in the locus of agricultural policymaking from domestic to international levels as the moment at which U.S. farmers found themselves obliged to understand the regional and global context that increasingly defines their living conditions. She

77 The terms being used differ further down the class hierarchy as well, even within Spanish. In Mexico, farmworkers are usually referred to as jornaleros (day laborers), whereas field-workers in California are often called campesinos. This makes sense, insofar as many were small farmers back home.

78 For an overview of the major changes in Mexican agricultural policies during the early 1990s, involving an abandonment of past policies to support family farming, see J. Fox 1994.
traces this evolution before, during, and after the NAFTA debate, describing farm organizations' first steps as interlocutors in an increasingly transnationalized environment. She also presents a chronology of U.S.-Mexican agricultural exchanges and events from 1991 to 1996. This wealth of experiments in binational discussions, actions, and encounters has largely been invisible, but it has profoundly changed the ways in which farmers in Mexico and the United States think about each other. As Lehman recounts, it also led to increased participation in regional and hemispheric initiatives that continue today.

Recognition of the mutual problems and common concerns that have emerged as a result of the application of neoliberal policies in countries of both the North and South has changed the social and political terrain in which agricultural actors now engage. As John Dittrich, a Nebraska corn grower, pointed out, farmers in Mexico and the United States are now directly affected by the same forces—in some cases, the same corporate interests. Or as a Mexican farmer said after visiting his counterparts in the United States:

In Mexico they would tell us that U.S. agriculture was our future, and when we visited here, we found that you are busted, bankrupt, that the big corporations are making you pay. This isn't a future we want in Mexico; this is more like our past. We have discovered that we share a nightmare. Now, together, we must build our dream for the future.

Based on this recognition, the fight for "food security" as a requisite for "self-determination" in the North or the South has become a central premise in farmers' transnational dialogue. Along with food security, a call for "fair trade" policies to defend small producers from the intense concentration of agribusiness at a global level is now part of the common agenda for farmers in their capacity as social interlocutors in the international arena.

What have been the results of these efforts? They include basic relations among key actors, discovery of "the other side," and, finally, recognition of common aspirations. Although a binational coalition of farmers has not emerged from these interchanges, Víctor Suárez, of the

---

79 Brooks interview on Dittrich's farm in Nebraska, special supplement to La Jornada on the U.S. Midwest, October 16, 1999.
80 Recounted by Luis Hernández Navarro at the conference "Lessons from U.S.-Mexico Binational Civil Society Relations."
81 Another important cross-border small-producer coalition-building effort has been led by Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural. This diverse group dates from 1978, and now at least sixteen of its ninety organizational members are Mexican campesino and environmental groups. For more information, see: http://www.ruralco.org/.

---

Movements across the Border

National Association of Producers' Marketing Organizations (ANEC), noted that a network of relations has been established among organizations from both countries, providing direct knowledge—"un conocimiento vivo"—of the struggles of the other side. This is a fundamental step, not just with the agricultural sector but with all social sectors. As Suárez points out: "In the United States there is also a people.... Before, those from the United States were perceived simply as the enemy; all Americans are bad, the enemy ... and this has changed as we discovered allies, friends, compañeros, real brothers and sisters on this side."

Latino Immigrant and Civil Rights Organizations

Discussions of U.S.-Mexico relations, even those focused on civil society groups, often leave out the complex relationships between Mexico, Mexican immigrants, and U.S. Latinos. In both countries, and especially in their national capitals, immigration is still seen as somehow separate from economic and foreign policies. For many private U.S. foundations, energized by concern about globalization, trade advocacy now has an obvious place on the agenda, but immigrants do not. Yet the triangular relationship between Mexico, immigrants, and U.S. Latinos is the nexus where U.S. and Mexican civil societies come together. And it is in this realm that the economic integration process has its most concrete social manifestation.

As the twentieth century drew to a close, immigration policy debates were in the midst of a seismic shift in the United States. The country's largest nonreligious membership organization, the AFL-CIO, announced a reversal of its previous position and called for a broad amnesty program for undocumented workers and an end to the employer sanctions provisions it had helped make into law in 1986. Record low unemployment rates empowered immigrant rights advocates within labor, and labor leaders came to understand that immigrants are key to organized labor's survival. In addition, broad sectors of private industry, the service sector, and agricultural interests turned firmly pro-immigrant, helping to force a new political debate that has largely quelled anti-immigrant forces around the country. Growing Latino electoral empowerment also encouraged political parties to change their tune. This new atmosphere represents an extraordinary space in which to address the human dimensions of economic integration for diverse social sectors and for social and political actors in Mexico. As of

---

82 Discussant's remarks at the conference "Lessons from U.S.-Mexico Binational Civil Society Relations."
mid-2001, the policy outcome of this debate remained open-ended, putting immigrant rights and binational advocacy coalitions to the test.65

The Fox government came into office in Mexico launching an ambitious policy initiative on immigration, calling for a “long-term” view that includes the notion of a free flow of labor in twenty to thirty years. In the shorter term, the Fox administration called for a bilateral immigration agreement, in contrast to traditional unilateral approaches. A cabinet-level working group in the United States was launched to fashion a bilateral accord. High-profile binational proposals on a new immigration policy are also circulating in both capitals (see, for example, Papademetriou 2001), further opening political space for immigrant rights groups in both countries—as well as labor and Latino organizations—to promote new approaches and demands (such as amnesty for undocumented workers). At the same time, pro-business approaches, such as the proposal by Senator Phil Gramm (D-Texas), are competing to occupy the new political space.66

As Susan Gzesh notes in her contribution to this volume, early U.S. efforts to defend immigrant rights were led by a convergence between exiled Mexicans, Chicanos, and other U.S. progressives. Gzesh provides a comprehensive overview of recent immigration policy trends, as well as the main U.S. advocacy approaches. On the Mexican side, NGOs have increasingly come together to deal with the rights of immigrants on Mexico’s northern and southern borders, as well as immigrants in transit through Mexico. Gzesh’s account shows that broad and deep advocacy institutions and coalitions to defend immigrant rights have developed in the United States over the past twenty years. At the same time, she makes clear that joint U.S.-Mexican efforts to develop binational civil society approaches came together organizationally only recently, with the formation of the broad-based Mexico-U.S. Advocates Network.67

Binational, constituency-based organizing among immigrants themselves has followed diverse paths, marked by the difficult choice of whether to participate primarily in U.S. 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. At the same time, non-U.S. citizen Mexican immigrants still lack the formal political right to participate in either electoral system, and they remain excluded from both. These immigrants face the challenge of developing participation strategies that can close this double-sided “representation gap.”

In addition to the formal obstacles to participation, immigrants confront powerful political-cultural legacies that oblige them to choose either the United States or Mexico as their main frame of reference for possible collective action. Dominant conceptions of Mexican national identity—which have long portrayed immigrants as automatically “less Mexican” once they cross the border—are slowly changing. Nevertheless, sophisticated arguments have emerged to justify denying them the right to participate in Mexican society’s debate over its future. For example, as Martínez and Ross note in their chapter, prominent immigration expert Jorge Bustamante led Mexican opposition to the absentee ballot movement on “national security” grounds (alleging that complications abroad would be unduly vulnerable to U.S. manipulation).

Distinguished Mexican intellectual Jorge Castañeda made a different argument after the NAFTA debate but years before he became foreign minister in the Fox administration. Castañeda claimed that the division between “those Mexicans plugged into the U.S. economy and those who are not” is a key cleavage in Mexican society, and that “the minority whose fortunes are not dependent on Mexico’s development is large enough to prevent a social cataclysm in the country, and while it will not hamper reform, it also will not facilitate it.” He went on to contend that immigrants and their families are “indifferent” to Mexico’s open-ended economic and political future, presumably because income sources determine political consciousness (Castañeda 1996:95).68 Subsequent research questioned this framework. Mexico’s independent Federal Electoral Institute (IPE) convened a major independent Mexican policy research commission to inform the national policy debate over the absentee ballot; this commission found that an estimated 83 percent of Mexican citizens in the United States wanted to vote in the 2000 elections if they could do so from the United States. The commission also estimated that between 1.3 and 1.5 million emigrants in the United States already hold valid Mexican voter registration cards.69

Within the United States, Mexican American organizations have long grappled with the dilemma of how to gain full equal rights while defending their right to ethnic self-expression.70 Because of persistent

---

65 For recent overviews, see Bacon 2001 and Quiroz-Martínez 2001.
66 Note: The events of September 11, 2001, closed this space, at least until after the 2002 elections.
67 See www.mexicousadvocates.org.
68 For his earlier efforts to link NAFTA to democratization in Mexico in the U.S. debate, see Castañeda 1993 and Castañeda and Heredia 1993.
70 There is a rich, diverse literature on relations between Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans. See Flores and Bennmayor 1997; García Acevedo 1996; Gómez Quiñones 1990; Gutiérrez 1995, 1996; Maciel and Herrera-Sobek 1998; Sánchez 1993; Santamaría Gómez 1988; Sierra 1999; Vila 2000; and Weber 1998.
dominant perceptions of "foreign-ness," the U.S. Latino movement's struggle to gain recognition as a legitimate actor in the process of U.S. foreign policy-making has been especially challenging. Both traditional approaches to U.S. assimilation and some contemporary strategies for Latino empowerment promote disavowal of home country social and political commitments. For example, political scientist Rodolfo O. De la Garza, of the University of Texas at Austin, has expressed concern about the possible threat that Mexican absentee voting might pose to Mexican Americans. "The implications of all this are frightening," he said, adding that "an extended display of Mexican politicking on U.S. soil would provoke a nativist fury in the United States directed not only at migrants but also at Mexican-Americans" (Dillon 1998: 3).

In contrast, Antonio González, director of the William Velásquez Research Institute and longtime voting rights activist, stated, "I just don't see any kind of competition or negative effect in terms of U.S. Latino political empowerment, versus Mexican political empowerment. I think they're complementary." Even as Latino civil rights activists continue to debate whether and how immigrants and U.S. Latinos should forge binational coalitions for social change, increasing Latino political empowerment in the United States has created new political space for cross-border coalitions.

The effects of the dramatic increase in immigrant naturalization on U.S. politics are only beginning to be understood. In 1996 more than two-thirds of Mexicans in the United States were potentially eligible for citizenship, yet less than 7 percent had become U.S. citizens (Mexico—United States Binational Commission 1997). Since then, Mexico-born immigrants have become U.S. citizens at much greater rates than in the past, and newly naturalized citizens vote at higher rates, on average, than U.S.-born Latinos. Latino voting made a key difference in the 1998 California state elections, not only in the high-profile governor's race but also in the defeat of Proposition 226, which would have dealt a dramatic setback to trade union rights nationally. (Indeed, Latinos reportedly voted against the initiative at higher rates than trade union households.) The pace of immigrant naturalization could well determine electoral outcomes in key states such as California, Texas, and Illinois.

At the same time, many Mexicans in the United States continue to identify more with Mexican politics than with U.S. politics. U.S. immigration reforms in the late 1980s legalized millions of Mexicans, who were then free to reinforce their home ties by more frequent travel between Mexico and the United States. The significant minority of immigrants who remain undocumented are still denied the option of U.S. naturalization.

Since 1996, when the Mexican Congress granted its citizens abroad the right to vote (at least in principle), Mexican U.S. residents have mobilized creative new advocacy networks to encourage the Mexican state to comply with this commitment. As Martínez and Ross show in their chapter, this was the first major organized civic campaign by immigrants to influence Mexican government policy toward them. In contrast, these authors point out, the Mexican state's strategy has been to encourage emigrants to become U.S. citizens and participate in U.S. politics—instead of including them in the national electoral process.

The absentee ballot issue did not divide Mexican political elites along conventional lines; indeed, despite supportive discourses, the three major Mexican political parties split internally on the issue. Migrants nevertheless came remarkably close to winning the right to vote in 2000; the key reform provision managed to pass the federal Chamber of Deputies before stalling in the Senate, which was still controlled by the PRI. Nevertheless, the fact that political rights have been won in principle has permanently redrawn the boundaries of the Mexican immigrant civic arena, with very open-ended consequences.

Despite the lack of immigrant voting rights, Mexican political candidates have carried out open electoral campaigns in the United States.
for more than a decade (Dresser 1993). In response, the Mexican government has paid a great deal of attention to Mexican immigrant associations, using its extensive network of consular offices to create semi-official channels for growing cross-border participation. Some immigrant organizations respond vigorously to the opportunities for engagement with Mexican authorities; others prefer more autonomous paths. Most hometown associations are quite engaged in Mexican politics but remain relatively disengaged from U.S. politics, even at moments of important public debate, such as California’s anti-immigrant Proposition 187.

Within Mexico, it is increasingly difficult to understand the politics and governance of states with high rates of out-migration without taking into account their “paisanos” in the United States. Several state governments have developed immigrant outreach programs that parallel federal efforts, including matching-fund programs to encourage (and influence) hometown association fund-raising for social projects. For example, Vicente Fox, first as governor of Guanajuato and now as Mexico’s first opposition party president in seventy-one years, has emphasized his strong support for emigrants’ right to vote. As governor, Fox was well aware that much of Guanajuato’s population works in the United States, and their economic, social, and political ties are essential to the process of democratization and economic investment in the state. It is no coincidence that his state government promoted the creation of more than thirty Casas Guanajuato, especially in Texas. Although the Casas Guanajuato are all organized along the same formal principles, each is relatively autonomous in practice. With Fox’s entry into the presidency, immigration and its relationship to economic development in Mexico have been elevated to a national policy priority and have been made an explicit part of negotiations with the United States.

Hometown associations and federations of hometown associations range across the Mexican political spectrum. For example, the independent Zacatecas Civic Front in southern California split from the pro-government Zacatecas Federation, reflecting divisions within Zacatecas’s ruling party that led to one of the first gubernatorial victories for Mexico’s center-left opposition. Other hometown federations focus more on public accountability than electoral politics; Chicago-based Durango Unido lobbies their home state authorities to improve police treatment of returning migrants as they deal simultaneously with community economic development issues in Chicago.

As Mixteco sociologist Gaspar Rivera-Salgado explains in his chapter in this volume, Oaxacan immigrants have formed diverse networks of hometown organizations, ranging from those focused on indigenous cultural expression to others, such as the Binational Oaxaca Indigenous Front (FIOB), that identify with the political opposition. The FIOB, which mobilizes binationally to defend immigrant and indigenous rights, represents thousands of families throughout the migrant circuit that runs from the Mixteca region of Oaxaca to Baja California and southern and central California. In California, the FIOB’s work includes advocacy, providing indigenous language translation in the criminal justice system, calling for indigenous Mexicans to identify themselves as such on the 2000 U.S. census, and defending Mexican immigrants’ political rights to absentee voting. In its home region in Mexico, FIOB leads a broad civic movement for democratic and participatory governance and for community-based economic development, such as women’s micro-credit co-ops. FIOB works for indigenous self-governance both inside and outside of formal institutions, and it won an opposition-majority seat in Oaxaca’s state legislature. In the process, FIOB draws on the multiple meanings of the concept of paisano, which can refer, in different contexts, to compatriots from the same community, from the same ethnic group, or from the same state.

Finding strategies that incorporate immigrants’ multiple identities has been a challenge for social and political movements in both countries. When U.S. immigrant organizing strategies do not incorporate the transnational dimension, the results can be problematic. For example,

---

* "They are independent of the state of Guanajuato but depend on the other social groups that maintain and support them, such as city leaders, businesspeople, chambers of commerce, churches, soccer clubs, religious and cultural groups, media, colleges, even supermarkets and poodle stores" (personal communication, Dr. Laura González, University of Texas-Dallas, August 1999). Also see the state government’s magazine for migrants, Pa'l Norte.

---

* See Goldring 1998, 2002. Goldring underscores the differences between state-led and migrant-led immigrant organizations. Most federations appear to be state-induced, while the experience of more local migrant clubs is more varied. For background on Zacatecas organizations, see Mociezuma 1998.
* The 2000 census recorded 154,362 indigenous migrants from Latin America, primarily from Mexico, in California. These "Hispanic Indians" accounted for almost half of the state’s Native American population (San Jose Mercury News, August 4, 2001). For proceedings of a conference on indigenous Mexican migrants in the United States, see www.lais.ucsd.edu/conference.
* Fox interview with Juan Romualdo Gutiérrez, state congressman and FIOB leader, Huajuapan de León, Oaxaca, April 1999.
close observers of the large-scale campaign to organize central California strawberry workers note that the union strategy's greatest weakness was that it did not take the immigrants' own forms of self-organization into account (including powerful patron-client dependence on fellow immigrant labor contractors and Mexico-origin farmers). Since this three-year effort was widely publicized as a model initiative for unionizing Latino immigrant workers, its setbacks had national implications.

Some of the most promising new organizing strategies actively encourage immigrants to participate simultaneously as Mexicans and as U.S. residents or citizens. Though often based on informal kinship and religious networks, binational immigrant participation in broader kinds of organizing primarily involves labor unions, hometown associations, and Mexican electoral politics. The U.S. labor movement has become significantly more open to immigrant organizing strategies, although major obstacles remain. Most notable among these organizing strategies is the SEIU's multi-city Janitors for Justice campaign, along with significant efforts by the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union and the Carpenters Union. Other examples include the Teamsters' apple worker organizing campaign in Washington State. Although this campaign was defeated, it was reportedly well attended by Mexican immigrant experiences and perceptions. The campaign was dropped after the national reform leadership was removed from office, but the new Teamster leadership later passed a remarkably pro-immigrant policy statement.  

Mexican Democracy and Human Rights Movements

Although influential international human rights reports about Mexico began to appear in the mid-1980s, most U.S. civil society organizations concerned with democracy and human rights abroad did not focus on Mexico until relatively recently. Even Mexico's 1988 electoral conflict did not lead to a sustained strategy of binational pro-democracy or human rights coalition-building. As Mexican human rights leader Mariclaire Acosta (now deputy minister for human rights and democracy at the Mexican Foreign Affairs Ministry) notes in her chapter, the NAFTA debate was a major opportunity to strengthen these civil society ties, but it was constrained by the narrow confines of the official policy agendas. Although most Mexican civil society organizations were wary of proposing direct pro-democracy or human rights conditionality on the trade agreement, the NAFTA debate did make these issues more visible in the United States. Nevertheless, Acosta concludes, this political moment did not produce a major convergence between U.S. and Mexican human rights groups, with the exception of organizations involved with election monitoring. While human rights groups were important actors in the Mexican coalitions dealing with trade, "this had little relevance" for U.S. trade advocacy groups and the issue was a low priority within the trinational coalition-building process. Moreover, human rights groups in each country had different views about the relationships between economic, social, and political rights. Acosta notes further that when U.S. groups raise Mexican human rights problems to bolster their own nationalistic agendas, they increase the Mexican advocates' vulnerability to nationalist attacks.

It took the Chiapas rebellion to make human rights in Mexico a priority on the binational civil society agenda. Many U.S. groups responded quickly, contributing to the international pressure for a political solution. University of Oregon anthropologist and human rights activist Lynn Stephen examines many of these diverse approaches and initiatives, and draws important lessons. She reviews the activities of

102 According to John Borrego, University of California, Santa Cruz professor and longtime Watsonville resident, the AFL-CIO (which invested at least $12 million in the three-year campaign and brought in numerous outside organizers) and the UFW were "not willing to allow for the fact that these were Mexicanos who had networks which allowed them to survive, and they didn't know how to utilize these village networks in order to organize" (comments at the conference "Lessons from U.S-Mexico Binational Civil Society Relations"); see Purdum 1999. Contractor-led patron-client networks appear to have provided the social base for the anti-UFW union that later won two bitterly contested elections. For related background on the UFW's approach to Mexico, see Faulkner 1998.


105 For one exception, a notable Mexican effort to link NAFTA to Mexican democratization in the U.S. NAFTA debate, see Cañizares and Heredia 1993. Heredia, a key Mexican NGO strategist of what he called "citizen diplomacy," was based in Washington for key periods during the NAFTA debate, hosted by a partner international advocacy group, the Development GAP. Heredia was one of the few consistently critical Mexican voices in the U.S. media during this period. He was a leader of Equipo Pueblo, a Mexican NGO that had pioneered outreach to potential U.S. allies with a bilingual social movement bulletin, The Other Side of Mexico, launched by a binational team in 1987. See Heredia and Hernández 1995, and DECA 1997.

four main national U.S. organizations and networks, as well as smaller local experiences, and reflects on the limitations that have prevented the consolidation of a more cohesive and effective movement in support of peace and justice in Chiapas. Most U.S. support initiatives drew 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. This legacy was a strength in the short term, but it carried medium-term weaknesses, including the strategic limitations associated with interpreting Mexico through Central American lenses. Stephen also reflects on the famous “Internet war” and questions the widespread assumption that more and faster activist access to information necessarily leads to greater impact.

The chapter by Global Exchange’s longtime Mexico campaigner, Ted Lewis, further probes these issues, analyzing the dilemmas posed by the campaign against U.S. military aid to Mexico. Lewis underscores the limits of focusing on Chiapas outside of the national/binational context, and he notes that the lack of coordination in the United States also reflects different approaches within Mexican support groups. One powerful symbol of the relative weakness of U.S. human rights concern for Chiapas is that the state governor who presided over the infamous 1997 Acteal massacre, after being forced to resign, ended up as agricultural attaché at the Mexican Embassy in Washington, D.C.

The Chiapas rebellion also focused the attention of U.S. pro-democracy groups on Mexico’s 1994 presidential election. This was the high point of U.S. 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 efforts to monitor controversial state-level elections. Emilio Álvarez Icaza, a leader of Alianza Cívica (and currently head of the Human Rights Commission of the Electoral Institute in the Federal District), reviews some of Mexico’s experiences with citizen electoral observation beginning in 1991. U.S. participants—traditional human rights groups, university groups, peace groups, Latino rights advocates, and trade unionists—accounted for a large fraction of the international observers. Álvarez Icaza concludes by suggesting that binational exchanges need to be more balanced, taking account of the differences between a rich and a poor country. Learning could be made

more reciprocal by including Mexican observation of human rights and electoral processes in the United States (as when Mexican unions observed U.S. union elections in the Washington apple worker organizing campaign, and when Global Exchange hosted a Mexican NGO election observation team in the United States).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: FRAMING THE NEW BINATIONAL SOCIAL TERRAIN

Fox and Brooks each conclude with overviews of broad trends in binational relationships between social movements and civil society actors. Fox’s chapter reviews coalition dynamics across sectors, as well as their diverse impacts. In the process, he proposes that we recognize clear distinctions between qualitatively different kinds of binational civil society relationships, ranging from networks (loose, by definition), to firmer and more cohesive coalitions (based on actual agreements and joint actions), and, finally, to much rarer “fully binational” social movement organizations. These distinctions are not merely semantic. So far, most cross-border networks have not generated sustained, balanced coalitions or movements. This is not surprising, given that historical legacies, cultural differences, and multiple power imbalances make U.S.-Mexican social movement coalition-building especially challenging. One of the most important lessons from the experiences of the last decade is the importance of recognizing differences in order to come to agreements. For organized social constituencies, intentions and ideologies are not enough to sustain partnerships; shared campaign targets and realistic expectations are often needed to sustain joint action.

Brooks’s postscript, based on his first-hand news reporting for La Jornada in Seattle and Quebec, reviews the evolving binational social dialogue experience within the context of the broader movement against corporate-led globalization. The Mexico-U.S. social initiatives, Brooks contends, nourished and generated part of this new popular expression. The North American economic integration process holds many lessons for further integration strategies in the Americas and elsewhere, both for elites “above” and for grassroots contenders “below.”

Perhaps the most important legacy of this process is a broader internationalist perspective among local and nationally based social constituencies in both the United States and Mexico. Until recently, it was not only commonplace and politically legitimate to define interests within a narrowly domestic context, it was pragmatic as well. Nationalist strategies and discourses often made—and still make—political sense, at least in the short term. Increasingly, however, that approach is

107 These U.S. movements of the 1980s were remarkably broad-based and partly influenced U.S. Central America policy. See Gosse 1988, 1995; and Smith 1996.
109 For an overview, see Aguayo Quezada 1998b. Dresser (1996) provides additional details on the international dimension.
being transcended by a recognition that civil society strategies need to take counterparts across borders into account. Nationalist political discourses that rely on constructing homogenized external threats, such as the undifferentiated “gringo” versus “Mexican” enmity, resonate less and less widely. Within civil society, the local is increasingly understood as inseparable from the global.

The future of the bilateral relationship will no longer be defined only within the corridors of power in Mexico City or Washington, D.C., nor will it be interpreted and reviewed exclusively by policy “experts,” nor will its direction be determined by powerful private-sector interests alone. Now, despite the lack of a formal invitation, there are new participants at the binational bargaining table. The challenge for social constituencies is how to sustain joint action—across sectors and across borders—that can influence the powers that be and promote creative, viable, and more democratic approaches to social and economic integration.

References


Instituto Federal Electoral. 1998. “Informe final que presenta la comisión de especialistas que estudia las modalidades del voto de los mexicanos residentes en el extranjero,” *Perfiles de la Jornada*, November 16.


