Persuasion, Coercion and the Domestic Costs of Compliance: Evaluating the NAALC Resolutions against Mexico

Importante
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De acuerdo con esta práctica internacional congruente con el trabajo académico contemporáneo, muchos de estos documentos buscan convertirse posteriormente en una publicación formal, como libro, capítulo de libro o artículo en revista especializada.
Abstract

Why have some of the cases filed under the dispute resolution mechanisms of the NAFTA labor side agreement precipitated changes in labor practices within Mexico, while others have had little or no impact on domestic labor rights regulation? The paper draws on the literature on state compliance with international institutions to problematize the range of outcomes that have resulted from the labor dispute resolution procedures. Competing political and economic interests at federal and subnational levels of governance lead some domestic actors to prefer to continue to violate labor rights. Once disputes are filed at the NAFTA labor boards and violations are made public, states are compelled to answer for their role in allowing violations to occur. I trace out the domestic context of labor jurisdiction in Mexico to show that the split between federal and subnational labor offices helps account for some of the variance in case resolutions. As such, the paper attempts not only to account for the positive resolutions associated with the labor clause, but also asks what the labor dispute process can tell us about how states respond domestically to transnational pressures for political change, including coercive pressures.

Resumen

¿Por qué algunos de los casos tramitados a través de los mecanismos del acuerdo laboral del TLCAN precipitaron cambios en las prácticas laborales en México, mientras que otros han tenido poco o ningún impacto sobre la regulación interna de los derechos laborales? El documento se basa en la literatura sobre el cumplimiento del Estado con las instituciones internacionales para problematizar el rango de resultados de resoluciones en el el campo laboral. Los conflictos de intereses políticos y económicos llevan a algunos actores nacionales a preferir continuar violando los derechos laborales. Una vez que los conflictos se presentan en los paneles del TLCAN y las violaciones se hacen públicas, los estados están obligados a responder por haber permitido que las violaciones a ocurrieron. Identificamos el contexto interno de la jurisdicción laboral en México para demostrar que la división entre los agentes federales y subnacionales ayuda a explicar las variaciones en las resoluciones de casos del TLCAN.
Introduction

Social clauses that tie the benefits of trade to demonstrated respect for labor rights are now a prominent feature of US trade policy.\(^1\) The perception in the industrialized states is that labor rights abuses are perpetrated in less-developed states to gain an unfair comparative advantage in trade, not because of wage differentials based in labor productivity, but from labor policies that artificially suppress wages in less-developed states (Rodrik \textit{et al.}, 1996). Lowered standards in poor countries are a cause for concern for rich countries. They fear that trade between them will place downward pressure on working conditions and wages world-wide because of the ability of capital to relocate production to areas that offer cheap labor, fewer regulations or fewer inspections, and where unions are marginalized. Trade-based conditionality is a way to re-establish the minimum standards of employment for all workers party to trade agreements, in an effort to protect the most vulnerable workers from the pressures of competition from trade and investment.

If the erosion of labor rights globally is a consequence of the evolution of trade and integration, and may be used as a comparative advantage in trade by states, labor standards should be subject to dispute resolution just like other trade issues, like tariff assessments, intellectual property rights and investment rules (Ehrenberg, 1996; Moorman, 2001). When labor conditionality is attached to trade agreements, labor rights become enforceable through similar mechanisms of trade compliance as in trade-related disputes. States that relax labor standards face strong incentives to improve labor rights performance and conform to policies supported by industrialized countries, or suffer the potential costs from the loss of markets or trade sanctions (Rodrik \textit{et al.}, 1996). Trade agreements not just compel states to meet those obligations, they often provide the complaint procedures that unions and their allies can use to keep states accountable to their public commitment to improve labor rights enforcement. Indeed, in the Labor side clause of the North American Free Trade Agreement, the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC), transnational advocacy networks

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\(^1\) These include the US and EU Generalized System of Preferences Programs, and the Caribbean Basin Initiative, the African Growth and Opportunity Act, and the Andean Trade Promotion Act/ Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act, all of which allow for the duty-free importation of a number of goods to the US from less-developed states. A number of US bilateral agreements feature labor rights clauses as well, and until 2007, fast track authority to conduct trade negotiations was conditioned on securing an agreement with labor rights guarantees (Weiss, 2003). Investment insurance in less-developed states under the OPIC program in the US has labor rights restrictions attached to it as well (Douglas, Fergusson and Klett, 2004; Amato, 1990).
are at the forefront of filing labor rights petitions, and more often have their claims selected for a formal review than other filing groups (Nolan, 2011b).²

While the literature on transnational advocacy claims that transnational pressure can be effective in securing changes in state behavior (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), pressure alone cannot predict which states will give in to transnational arguments. Rather, the degree to which states are sensitive to their international reputation, that is, how other states perceive state behaviors, also conditions state response (Price, 2003; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Transnational advocacy networks can shift the costs to states of continued violation on one hand, or the benefits of compliance on the other, by applying strategies based in moral persuasion and economic coercion. Transnational advocacy networks are probably best known for their persuasion strategies, by which they pressure states to improve labor rights practices using normative arguments to convince states that labor rights violations are unacceptable, and attempt to get states to commit to policy changes that instead promote labor rights norms. What are less studied are the ways that transnational advocacy networks apply coercive tactics. Working through regimes whose purpose is to enforce international agreements, like the labor dispute resolution venues attached to trade agreements, such as the NAALC, transnational advocacy networks can shift the costs to states of continued labor rights violation on one hand, or the benefits of norms compliance on the other, by introducing additional material costs. While persuasive tactics require that advocates convince governments and agents to change their preferences for violation (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui, 2005), coercion induces compliance by changing the cost-benefit calculations by states for continued violation (Cárdenas, 2004).

While much of the literature on transnational advocacy centers on how networks emerge and function, or where they are successful in promoting behavior changes, very little is written on how states respond to transnational pressures. Rather than merely react to transnational claims, I argue that policymakers will respond to the moral and material pressures promoted by advocates according to political preferences and domestic incentives for compliance. Further, this paper argues that the incentives for compliance may not be held consistent across all levels of government. Federal and state governments may hold different interests in compliance with labor rights norms —potential costs to reputation and to the economy— based on how those costs are incurred at local versus federal levels. Thus, government response to transnational advocacy networks may vary not just according to the cost and benefit calculations of continued violation, but also how the federal government responds to international demands for labor rights

² Transnational advocacy networks are networks of political activists operating across national borders, differentiated from other transnational groups by their motivation by “principled ideas” and values (Keck and Sikkink, 1998).
enforcement on one hand, and domestic preferences to continue to violate labor rights on the other.

The paper brings together theories of transnational advocacy around labor rights issues and compliance with international trade regimes to investigate these questions for the Mexican case. I consider Mexico’s experience with the NAALC exclusively here because while the Mexican Federal Labor Law is more ambitious than either Canadian or US labor codes in terms of protecting workers’ individual and collective labor rights, Mexico suffers most from uneven enforcement. During the negotiations of NAFTA’s parallel accords, the discussion of regional standards focused mostly on raising labor standards in Mexico to the US and Canadian levels (Cook, 1997; Mayer, 1998). The case set too reflects this preoccupation with Mexican labor practices: most of the NAALC cases —24 of 37— are filed against Mexico. Previous work on the institutional design of the NAALC, the cases filed to date, and their outcomes for labor all suggest that the NAALC agreement, in both design and implementation, limits the ability of states to enforce labor rights standards in third countries, or punish states for violations of labor rights (Weiss, 2003; Graubart, 2008; Finbow, 2006; Compa, 2001; Buchanan and Chaparro, 2008). Yet in a limited number of cases, the NAALC has spurred policy changes that in effect have promoted worker’s interests in Mexico. How do we account for Mexico’s response to both persuasive and coercive transnational pressures to promote labor rights enforcement, and what can the NAALC process tell us about how states mediate transnational pressures for political change at different levels of government?

The paper begins by discussing how transnational advocates apply both persuasion and coercion to induce states to conform to international norms around labor rights. I then describe how those pressures are received differently at the federal and subnational levels of government, and apply these theoretical insights to the Mexican case. I predict federal government response to transnational pressures using a qualitative analysis of the cases filed by transnational advocates against Mexico that have been accepted for a formal review to assess how well the mechanisms I propose predict government response to transnational claims, including compliance through policy change at the federal level, and interventions in local labor disputes in specific cases. I analyze both persuasive tactics (measured as the intensity of transnational political activism associated with each case), and coercive

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3 Even Mexico recognizes this as such. In interviews, the Mexican NAO stated that labor rights enforcement is one area where it was acknowledged that improvement is needed, but that the Secretariat for Labor and Social Welfare was working towards better enforcement by increasing the number of workplace inspections (Interview, the Mexican NAO, Mexico City, Mexico, 2006). Since 2007, STPS has increased the number of inspectors and inspections each year, though Mexico still ranks low in Latin America for inspection capacity (STPS inspection data, on file with author).

4 Eleven cases were filed about US practices, and 2 about Canada. Canada participates less in the NAALC filings as labor law is reserved to the provinces, and jurisdiction is thus reserved for the three provinces that ratified the side accord.
tactics (measured as the possibility that a labor dispute could potentially end in trade sanctions) to help understand which types of strategies are more likely to promote government responses. The paper begins with a review of recent literature on the trade and labor linkage and a theoretical discussion on the ways that transnational advocacy networks disseminate labor rights norms.

**Persuasive and Coercive Transnational Strategies**

Transnational advocacy networks (TANs) are best known for the roles they play in disseminating international norms, and reporting to international observers the violation of norms by states (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Transnational advocacy networks have become key players in pressuring states to adopt policies that protect citizens’ rights, including labor rights (Kidder, 2002; Anner, 2003; Armbruster-Sandoval, 2003; Frundt, 1998). Most of the literature that explores the mechanisms by which TANs induce policy changes by states centers on TAN strategies that employ normative arguments to convince states that rights violations are unacceptable in the international system, while at the same time proffering alternative practices that are in line with accepted international standards of behavior, a process known as socialization (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, 1999). TANs can mobilize international pressure on norm violating states through “naming and shaming”, the process of revealing and condemning norms violators (Hafner-Burton, 2008).

These persuasive strategies are intended to induce reputational costs to states for continuing to violate citizen’s rights, by creating pressure from the public to stop the violations and hold governments accountable for breaking legal commitments to uphold those rights. The international system creates divisions between states that share normative understandings and those that do not, thus determining who belongs to the community of states (Kowert and Legro, 1996). State identities in turn shape state interests, guiding states towards choosing policies that signal their preferred state identity to other states and non-state actors (Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein, 1996). Transnational advocates thus promote behavior change by disseminating norms around what types of behavior can be expected from liberal states, thus allowing states to signal their preferred identity by taking on those behaviors (Price, 1998; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Joppke, 1998; Haas, 1989). In turn, the negative effects of shaming can prompt norms violators to pursue policy goals based not just on their domestic interests, but also on how

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5 I refer to norms here as “collective expectations about proper behavior for a given identity,” following Jepperson et al. 1996: 54; and Risse et al., 1999: 7.

6 Hafner Burton (2008) however notes that in terms of responses to “shaming”, states are more likely to continue to violate rights after being singled out, or may increase some rights violations while reducing violations in those areas put in the international spotlight.
government actions may be perceived by others (Price, 1998), and especially when those perceptions are negative. Earlier empirical work has found that states are acutely aware of how they are perceived by other states, and will adapt behaviors in order to create an image more in line with international norms (Finnemore, 1996; Price, 1998; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Clark, Friedman and Hochstetler, 1998; Gurowitz, 1999). As such, by creating reputational costs for negative behaviors on one hand, and providing information about acceptable alternatives on the other, networks can persuade states to change their policy preferences, and are sometimes successful in doing so.

Transnational advocates also employ coercive strategies, by which they leverage material costs on states for continued norms violations. For example, though transnational advocates have a long history of using brand-based publicity campaigns and boycotts to pressure companies to promote labor rights (Ross, 1997; National Labor Committee, 1997; IRCC, 1998; Rosas, 2003), sanctions and boycotts have been used only occasionally to pressure states to abandon particularly egregious behaviors, and economic sanctions in general have not been very effective means for inducing shifts in policy preferences (Hufbauer, Schott and Elliott, 1983). More recently, transnational advocacy networks and their allies in government have pushed for the inclusion of labor rights guarantees into trade agreements to provide those sources of economic leverage (Hafner-Burton, 2009).

A number of US and European trade agreements now feature “social clauses” that tie the benefits of trade to demonstrated respect for labor rights and human rights, and further, a number of US trade promotion initiatives condition access to the US market on labor rights guarantees. Voluntary commitment with international labor rights conventions suffers overall from the same enforcement weaknesses as those associated with human rights treaties (Olson, 2001; Collingsworth, 2002, 1996). However, once tied to trade agreements, labor rights commitment conforms to the “hard” enforcement mechanisms of dispute resolution provided to protect commercial rights, intellectual property, and investor’s rights in trade regimes. Worker protections may already be written into constitutions and domestic labor law, but might not be enforced adequately by states. Trade

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7 For more on the logic of tying trade benefits to labor rights conditionality see Rodrik, Lawrence and Whalley (1996); Chan (1998); Chan and Ross (2003) and Frundt (1998).
8 Like labor rights conventions, human rights treaties often lack clear channels for enforcement, as the councils established to monitor compliance often lack the capacity to do so, or the mechanisms to induce compliance are absent (Hill, 2009). Instead, states are allowed to self-monitor and report, with predictable results. Even when states report violations, international organizations are powerless to punish violators other than to file a formal complaint. Essentially, compliance is voluntary, and states could sign onto human rights commitments without ever intending to comply with their recommendations. Recent work on human rights compliance indeed shows that government ratification is followed by either no change in human rights protections (Camp, 1999; Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui, 2005; Hathaway, 2002), or that some countries that ratify human rights treaties commit more human rights violations than before ratification (Hill, 2009; Hathaway, 2002b).
9 As compared to the “soft” mechanisms that are largely voluntary, as described in the previous footnote (Abbott and Snidal, 2000).
agreements compel states to meet those obligations, and often provide the complaint mechanisms—in the form of dispute resolution channels—that serve to keep states accountable to labor rights commitments. Though only few of the existing trade-based labor rights conditionality clauses feature formal dispute mechanisms, transnational advocates have been at the forefront of filing petitions and securing reviews of country practices in a number of US trade clauses (Nolan, 2009). Because labor rights violations can have consequences for trade relationships, including potential trade sanctions, states are compelled to respond to claims of labor rights violations even when they do not value labor rights protections, because ignoring such claims may put states interests at risk in areas that they do value: trade and investment. Thus, engaging the labor clauses by filing petitions is one strategy that can potentially supplement the persuasive aspects of transnational advocacy with a coercive capacity to enforce compliance.

While transnational pressure, whether persuasive or coercive, can be effective in pressuring some states to change their behavior towards greater respect for citizens’ rights (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), including labor rights, pressure alone does not predict which states will respond with changes in policy or practices. While transnational advocates have developed sophisticated persuasive and coercive strategies to engage states and push norms compliance, states vary considerably in the ways that they respond to these strategies. Whether and when transnational networks can achieve behavior changes varies according to both the degree to which states are susceptible to the persuasive and coercive pressures from transnational advocates (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), and how domestic policymakers then weigh the incentives for compliance with international norms against the costs of continued violation (Cárdenas, 2004). States are more susceptible to the persuasive strategies presented by transnational advocates when they are sensitive to their reputation in the international community of liberal states (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). This is especially pertinent for newly democratic states and those in transition, as these states are the most eager to establish democratic credentials (Graubart, 2008), and therefore likely to adopt liberal behaviors that signal liberal states identities.

Second, whether or not persuasion or coercion is effective in promoting compliance with labor rights protections further depends on competing domestic interests, including incentives for compliance as calculated by policymakers, compared with domestic preferences for continued violation (Cárdenas, 2004). However, interest in compliance at one level of government

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10 Cortell and Davis (2000) argue that norm salience conditions whether or not a norm is ultimately adopted by states, and refer to the importance of the norm in public discourse among other measures of salience. Norm salience may further condition how vulnerable states are to transnational pressures, in that states are more likely to cave in to pressure around especially relevant norms. For now I hold norms salience around labor rights constant, as labor rights protections become important considerations for all parties (where they may not have been before), once included in the trade agreement text.
As pressures from transnational advocates mount, States must decide how to respond to both their international critics and political subordinates, placing the federal government in the dilemma of resolving how to weigh the costs and benefits of compliance against the interests of actors at subnational levels.

**FIGURE 1. TRANSNATIONAL STRATEGIES AND COMPETING INTERESTS IN COMPLIANCE**

As the figure illustrates, transnational labor rights advocates engage targeted states, pressuring them to improve labor rights protections. State agents then respond to these transnational pressures, either through compliance with labor rights norms, or by continuing to violate labor rights. As pressures from transnational advocates mount, States must decide how to respond to both their international critics and political subordinates, placing the federal government in the dilemma of resolving how to weigh the costs and benefits of compliance against the interests of actors at subnational levels.
First, the reputational costs associated with labor rights violations are borne almost exclusively by federal governments, even when federal agents are not responsible for or acting in the labor disputes. While the allegations of labor rights violations in many cases center on actions that occurred at a workplace, factory or firm, it is often governments that are held to blame for not upholding labor laws, or allowing for lax enforcement.11 At the same time, campaigns aimed at shaming governments into ending violations may also center on the role the federal government has played in allowing violations to happen. To the extent that responsibility for labor rights abuses is directed at the federal level, reputational costs to states for violating labor rights norms, leading states to prefer compliance. At the same time, as long as the federal government is held responsible for right abuses, even when committed by subnational actors, the reputational costs to subnational actors are low, leading these actors to prefer to continue to violate labor rights.

The material costs for violation, as presented by transnational advocates, reinforce the preferences for continued violation at the subnational level, and compliance at the federal level. Further, economic costs may stem from differing aspects of the political economy at the subnational and federal levels. Where economic coercion may become most important in conditioning states interests at the subnational level is in the potential effects of labor rights compliance on foreign investment. At the subnational level, local agents may allow labor rights violations when doing so promotes business interests, including investment decisions. Mexico provides an important example here, as the historic corporate control of Mexican labor unions has been an important selling point in attracting foreign investment, in part because local governments can guarantee labor peace and limit wage increases through control of unions (Quintero, 2001; Sklair, 1989; Nolan, 2009).12 Thus at least at the subnational level, governments face incentives to continue to violate labor rights, if doing so will help to continue to attract and keep foreign investment. In the context of competition for the same investment with neighboring states for capital that is more mobile, these interests become more salient for subnational agents.13 For subnational agents, the loss of FDI can be very important when it implicates the loss of employment opportunities and tax revenues, and thus can motivate local agents to act to retain investments, even when that means suppressing labor.

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11 During human rights campaigns transnational advocates tend to paint responsibility for violations with a wide brush, saying that Mexico is violating human rights. In the context of the NAFTA side accord, the NAALC agreement holds governments responsible for enforcing labor rights protections, not the firms that violate them (NAALC, 1993).
12 In the Mexican case, the incentive is to limit guarantees of freedom of association and curb the ability for workers to form unions of their own choosing, so to maintain worker representation in the corporatist unions linked to the government and share their interest in maintaining a favorable labor climate for investors (Nolan, 2009).
13 In Puebla, Mexico, for example, union representation in new maquiladoras was assigned to local unions friendly to the Governor by the Ministry for Economic Development to fulfill Mexico’s closed shop clause (Nolan, 2009).
When subnational governments face high material costs for the loss of FDI if they improve labor rights protections (comply), they instead prefer to continue to violate labor rights.

The concerns at the federal level are instead placed at the linkage of labor rights guarantees to trade sanctions, which threatens market access, not FDI investment. Labor conditionality clauses oblige states to commit to stronger labor rights enforcement, whether or not they embrace the norm itself. Where they are compelled by treaty to enforce labor laws, and where the cost of not doing so involves important economic consequences like potential trade sanctions, states should at least take note of the consequences. Further, the extent to which states are vulnerable to these coercive pressures will vary according to dependence on partner states for export markets. Given that the US is Mexico’s most important export market, accounting for at least 85% of exports since 1994, we should assume that the Mexican government would rather address critiques on any issues that could implicate trade relations with the United States. However, the NAALC labor agreement allows for fines and trade sanctions only after an extensive series of negotiations, and some authors have argued that in practice, the NAALC process is designed to avoid trade sanctions (Weiss, 2003; Buchanan and Chaparro, 2008). Thus while all three governments must still recognize trade sanctions as a distinct possibility under the NAALC, the probability that a labor case would end in trade sanctions is relatively low, meaning that the material costs of compliance with labor guarantees at the federal level, at least in Mexico, is low.

To summarize, interests in compliance with labor rights norms can vary among federal and subnational governments, and these interests are conditioned by the costs of compliance across both actors’ concerns about their international reputation and material concerns over consequences for compliance or continued violation. While at the federal level, agents face high reputational costs for continuing to violate labor rights norms, but low material costs for compliance, federal governments will prefer to comply with labor rights norms. At the subnational level, agents instead face low reputational costs for continuing to violate labor rights norms but potentially high material costs for compliance, leading these agents to prefer to continue to violate labor rights norms.

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14 At the federal level, the loss of FDI is a material cost that is important in the aggregate, but it takes on less salience when investments stay in the country, but move to other areas. Federal governments thus face low material costs for compliance in that the loss of investment is instead felt locally, and will instead prefer compliance.

15 Data from the IMF (International Monetary Fund), Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook, various years. Data on file with the author.
The NAALC Cases against Mexico

At the end of the negotiations of the NAFTA accord, the three states began to open talks on the content and form of two side accords, the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC) and the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC) (Cameron and Tomlin, 2000). The labor accord sets forth the rights and obligations of states to promote labor rights under the accord and outlines the labor dispute resolutions process. Under the NAALC, any citizen or group can file a complaint with a National Administrative Office (NAO) regarding labor law enforcement in Canada, Mexico, or the United States, across 11 labor rights principles (NAALC, 1993). Once filed, the NAO makes a decision on whether to examine the allegations presented in the case further. If the case is accepted, the NAO then conducts a formal review that can include discussions with the NAO of the country in question, affidavits from workers and other interested parties, and in the US, a public hearing. At the conclusion of the review, the NAO issues a public report with its findings, and recommendations on how the states in question can resolve the issues presented in the case. NAOs can suggest a number of possible resolutions, but these are limited further by the categories of violation charged in the petition. These resolutions can include Ministerial Consultations between the respective Ministers of Labor, evaluation by a convened committee of experts (the ECE), panel arbitration, and if still unresolved, fines and trade sanctions.

Transnational advocates have been at the forefront of filing cases at the NAALC arbitrary panel since its inception in 1994, accounting for 27 of the 38 filings received to date. Further, the NAALC process overwhelmingly centers on Mexican practices, and thus Mexico is more often put in the spotlight than either the US or Canada. Once confronted with formal allegations through the dispute resolution process, how does the Mexican government respond to resolve these cases?

While the dependent variable in this study is federal response to allegations of labor rights violations within the context of the NAFTA labor side agreement, a number of independent variables are considered. This first

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16 All three NAFTA partners have NAO offices. Cases must be filed at an NAO in a state other than where the violation takes place. The US NAO is now the OTLA, and is charged with following labor issues in all US agreements with conditionality clauses. I will continue to refer to it as the US NAO to keep consistent with the parallel institutions in Mexico and Canada.
17 Public hearings are not included in the text of the agreement, but the US conducts them in nearly every case, much to Mexico’s protests.
18 A full accounting of the NAALC institutional structure is found in Nolan-Garcia 2011a.
19 An accounting of the filing dynamics and transnational linkages of filing groups can be found in Nolan Garcia 2011b.
20 The majority of cases filed at the NAALC have been filed targeting Mexico (24 of 38 petitions).
is whether local or federal actors have jurisdiction for resolving the allegations. While Mexico has aspired to develop liberal credentials by showcasing political reforms that promote democracy, and disseminates an official discourse about reinforcing a culture of democracy (Zedillo, 1994), the NAALC filings instead reveal that within Mexico, government officials have acted in ways that suppress democratic tendencies within the Mexican labor movement. Further, the majority of the cases against Mexico center on freedom of association issues, and more specifically, attempts by local labor officials to prevent independent unions from gaining legal registration. The potential reputational costs to Mexico’s efforts to develop an international identity as a democratic state are high. Therefore, at the federal level, an interest in maintaining the veneer of democracy, or more cynically, an interest in avoiding reputational costs, should motivate the central government to instead prefer compliance, and lead federal agents to seek changes in labor policies that promote labor rights. Therefore we should expect that if the labor rights event that provokes transnational pressure is within the jurisdiction of federal labor officials, federal agents will answer international critics with policy changes that are within their legal reach: a reform of labor policy or practices.

Where the central power is charged with representing Mexico in the international system, but the actions of subnational agents complicate efforts to create the image of an emerging liberal democracy, local actors create a disjuncture between official discourse and domestic practices. In turn, the inconsistencies between governmental promises and actions are easy targets for transnational advocates, who can and have used such discrepancies as examples of where states waver on norms adoption, compelling governments to act to deflect such criticism (Risse et al., 1999). If the labor rights violation is caused by actions under jurisdiction at the local level, federal actors will answer international critics by intervening in local labor disputes in order to resolve the labor situation. However, the degree to which local actions have created reputational costs to the federal government is also an important factor that conditions state response. This suggests that where transnational efforts to publicize the case and organizational support to local workers are more intense, the probability that the federal government will intervene locally increases.

By filing labor rights complaints at the NAALC, transnational labor rights advocates groups present Mexico with incentives for compliance using both persuasive and coercive strategies. NAALC filings introduce coercive elements in that at the end of a series of steps, fines can be assessed for non-

21 Of the 19 cases that allege violations of the right to association or collective bargaining, there are 14 cases that implicate the local or federal labor board officials in limiting the right to organize unions.
compliance, and eventually, trade sanctions (NAALC, 1993). As argued above, Mexico should be susceptible to these potential material costs because trade with the US is the engine of the Mexican economy, and Mexico’s most important concern in its bilateral relations with the United States (Domínguez and Fernandez de Castro, 2009; Alejandre, 1995). The persuasive aspects are produced through the ways that labor rights violations in Mexico are publicized during the NAALC process. NAALC filings and the labor rights violations that generated them are made public not just through NAFTA’s formal institutional proceedings, but also in national newspapers and websites. In effect, filing a case brings awareness to labor rights abuses, publicizing the events and increasing access to information about labor practices within Mexico. Often the reporting of events as they unfold in Mexico is accompanied by political mobilization in the US and Canada, which increases the pressure on Mexico to resolve the labor dispute (Carty, 2004; Williams, 1999; Bandy, 2004).

Jonathan Graubart (2008) has attempted to synthesize the degree of political activism to publicize the labor rights violations as they unfolded, including during the periods before NAALC cases were filed. For Graubart, cases coded as high “build on ongoing extensive domestic political efforts” and “a range of political tactics” mixing protest and symbolism, promoted by broad international coalitions. Cases coded as low featured few supporters and a lower range of political tactics. The middle cases include “a modest range of political tactics” and light networking (2008: 86). Thus the coding reflects not just the range of the transnational coalition that formed to publicize labor rights violations, but also the intensity of their efforts. Here, this measurement is used as a proxy for reputational costs to Mexico for labor rights violations, and it operationalizes the intensity of the activities transnational advocates used to shame the Mexican government into compliance with internationally recognized labor rights norms. We would expect that the federal government is most likely to respond to claims by transnational advocates, whether through policy change or intervention where cases are coded as high along this dimension.

Two controls are included: the identification of industrial sector where violations allegedly took place, and whether or not the factory in question was a maquiladora, or in-bond assembly plant. Jurisdiction in Mexico’s labor regulation system is divided between State and Federal level boards according

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22 Cases that claim violations of health and safety standards are eligible for trade sanctions, freedom of association cases are not.
23 Sometimes, filing the NAALC case is the event that can draw media attention to a labor rights situation as it unfolds in Mexico, which otherwise would have no coverage inside or outside of the country. Interview, AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, Mexico City, Mexico, July 2006.
24 The Puebla and Hidalgo cases were coded by this author using Graubart’s codification and the case files for both submissions.
25 For an early description of Mexico’s maquila sector and a discussion of the sector’s role in economic development, see Sklair (1989).
to industrial sector (Curtis and Gutiérrez, 1994), and so sector also conditions
the dynamics of federal versus local actors and interests. At the same time,
there may be marked differences on how cases are resolved given the specific
industry where violations occur. The maquila indicator is included to also
control for sectors where capital mobility is high, and thus capture potential
interest in continuing to violate labor rights at the local level. Finally, federal
government response to transnational strategies serves as the dependent
variable, and can include a range of outcomes, including no response or
compliance, and types of compliance that include interventions at the local
level, policy change, or compliance through reversals of labor board rulings.

The table of NAALC cases below includes every case filed by transnational
advocates against Mexico that was accepted for review under the NAALC
process from 1994 to 2005:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAALC CASE</th>
<th>LABOR JURISDICTION</th>
<th>TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM</th>
<th>TRADE SANCTIONS</th>
<th>SECTOR</th>
<th>MAQUILA</th>
<th>FEDERAL RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUTSP</td>
<td>FEDERAL</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>NOT ELIGIBLE</td>
<td>FEDERAL BUREAUCRACY</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>COMPLIANCE (RULING REVERSAL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAESA</td>
<td>FEDERAL</td>
<td>MEDIUM</td>
<td>ELIGIBLE</td>
<td>AIRLINES</td>
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In predicting how Mexico’s federal government will respond to
transnational pressures, we have two possible mechanisms. In the first, where
the effect of transnational activism serves as our proxy for persuasive
techniques, we would expect a government response for cases where transnational activism is high, and no response in those cases where transnational activism is low. Here, the chart shows that this expectation generally holds for both types of cases, with three important outliers, the Sony, Auto Trim and Puebla cases. What is interesting is that the chart also shows that in most instances, even medium levels of transnational activism are associated with a government response, and further, these patterns cannot be explained when adding the potential for trade sanctions. Rather this seems to suggest, as described above, that when federal agents feel pressure from transnational advocates, they are likely to respond using the policy competencies that within their reach: policy changes in two of these particular cases, and mandating reversals of previous labor board rulings in two additional cases.

Across the second mechanism, coercive pressures—captured here by the possibility that a case would end in trade sanctions for Mexico—we would expect that Mexico’s federal government would respond for cases where trade sanctions were a possibility and not respond where trade sanctions could not be levied.\(^{26}\) However, the chart shows that coercion is not enough to explain these case resolutions. Among cases under federal jurisdiction, federal agents respond to advocacy strategies whether or not trade sanctions are at stake, and among the cases with jurisdiction at the local level, we do not see a federal response in a number of cases where trade sanctions remain a possibility, such as in the Auto Trim, Puebla and Hidalgo cases. Variance in industrial sector does not seem to affect whether Mexico responds to these strategies, and the chart shows only that plants in the maquila sector tend to make up the bulk of cases that against Mexico that are ultimately accepted for review.

The table also suggests that the forms that federal response will take follow the predictions advanced here. Where labor rights violations occur under federal jurisdiction, we expect that federal agents will respond with any policy tools that are within their competency. This includes policy changes in the way that Mexico regulates labor, as in the TAESA and Gender cases, and mandated reversals to prior federal labor board rulings, as in the SUTSP case. At the local level we would expect that federal response would be to intervene at the local level to resolve these situations, and we see that in the Han Young and Maxi Switch cases, where federal labor officials intervened to overrule prior decisions made by the local labor boards, in areas where the federal labor law award competency solely to the local level labor arbitration authorities within Mexico’s labor justice system.

In sum, the table gives some support to the dynamics of persuasive tactics as a potential catalyst for Mexico’s federal response among these NAALC

\(^{26}\) As mentioned above, not all violations are eligible for trade sanctions, only cases that allege health and safety, child labor, and minimum wage violations.
cases, and less so for the argument that coercive strategies will push governments to respond to transnational pressures. Further, the dynamics of coercion and persuasion cannot explain some important outliers, including the Honeywell/GE, Auto Trim and Puebla outcomes, and can only partially explain the Sony and Hidalgo cases. While some authors have argued that coercion is likely to provide stronger incentives for compliance than persuasion alone, as persuasive tactics require that advocates successfully convince actors to change their preferences for violation (Hafner-Burton, 2005), this study suggests that persuasive transnational strategies may be the more effective tools to promote compliance with labor rights norms. Mexico’s experience with the NAALC shows that in this case, in leveraging important economic consequences like potential trade sanctions, the labor conditionality clause alone is not enough to induce compliance.
Conclusions

Transnational pressures on states to conform to international labor rights norms can take the form of either moral persuasion or material coercion. While transnational advocacy networks pressured Mexico with normative arguments as to why labor rights protections were necessary, they also introduced coercive elements by filing petitions on these cases at the NAALC. The specter of sanctions may have increased the costs of continued violation in Mexico at the federal level. At the state level, however, the need to maintain a stable investment environment creates preferences for continued violation.

Whether or not these pressures led to policy change in Mexico further depends on how these pressures shifted the costs of compliance within states. In some of the cases presented here, the federal government stepped in to force resolutions when doing so would help them deflect international criticism brought by actions by local actors. In other cases, the NAALC process pointed out the major issues and areas where Mexico could improve its labor rights enforcement, and Mexico addressed these gaps with efforts to improve labor rights protections. However, the analysis shows that coercive strategies in these cases do not fully predict when Mexico will respond to transnational claims with compliance, but rather that persuasion better accounts for these areas of policy change. More work of course should be done, starting with an interrogation of the outlier cases, to assess more deeply the explanatory power of the mechanisms suggested here.
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