

Globalization and Transnational Social Movement Mobilization, 1963-2003

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Acknowledgements

The bulk of the data collection effort was supported by the National Science Foundation (#SES 03-24735). Support for the early phases of the work came from the American Sociological Association/NSF Funds for Advancing the Discipline Program and from the World Society Foundation.

Project Description

The protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle and subsequent resistance to global trade and investment liberalization highlight the growing centralization of economic and political power in entities that transcend nation-states. These protests also challenge traditional approaches to the study of social movements, which portray movements as bounded by national or sub-national political arenas. Globalization, or the expansion of social interactions across national borders, leaves few areas of social life untouched, and sociologists are beginning to pay closer attention to how it affects our understanding of social and political processes. While globalization is not new, its relatively recent acceleration and expansion to new social domains calls for greater sociological attention. This project builds upon existing sociological research and brings new data to the investigation of relationships between globalization, social movements, and political change.

While many Americans were surprised by the size and vigor of the recent protests against the global trade regime, these events should be seen as part of a long and growing stream of protest targeting global policies. This resistance has been most visible in the global South, where the effects of global financial policies have triggered the most militant responses. The protests have broadened geographically and gained momentum since the late 1970s (see, e.g., Keck 1998; Fox and Brown, 1998; Walton and Seddon 1994). They also build upon a more extensive network of transnational organizational and informational ties among activists in a wide range of countries (Khagram, Riker and Sikkink 2002; Smith 2001a). This organizational infrastructure began to expand in the latter half of the 20th century, and its roots took hold and generated more rapid transnational organizational expansion in the 1970s and 1980s (Smith 1997a; Sikkink and Smith 2002).

This project seeks to enhance our understandings of the organizational foundations for transnational social movement activism, namely the population of transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs). While not all transnational activism depends upon the existence of formal transnational organizations, social movement research suggests that SMOs (and in this case, transnationally organized SMOs) play important roles in developing movement frames and strategies, cultivating activist identities and commitment, and in sustaining movements through periods of abeyance (McCarthy 1996; Rupp and Taylor 1987). We also know from national level studies that social movement activity both shapes and is shaped by political institutions (McCarthy, Britt and Wolfson 1991; Minkoff 1995; Clemens 1996). Therefore, understanding this organizational population will contribute to our ability to both explain and anticipate global changes.

The study is divided into two basic components, both of which require the collection of organizational, country, and global level data over time. The first component will examine the dynamics of the TSMO population over four decades, using longitudinal data to assess how changes in the global political environment and in the transnational social movement sector impact growth and change in the population of organizations. The second phase will cover the same time period, but it will use data organized at the country level to assess the relative importance of domestic and international factors (and their interactions) for explaining varying levels of participation in transnational social movement organizations across different countries. This project proposes to expand existing cross-sectional data sets into a longitudinal data set on transnational social movement organizations. It will also compile longitudinal data on country level factors that prior research has associated with participation in voluntary associations. The central aim of this study is to identify relationships between changes in the population of transnationally organized SMOs and the globalizing political environment, which is characterized by increasingly intertwined national and global level politics.

This project will contribute to the process of accumulating social scientific knowledge about political mobilization and its relation to globalization. Existing data on the population of transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs) tells us that people have been organizing across borders more frequently to address a changing array of problems during the past four decades, but especially since the 1970s. It also suggests that participation in transnational SMOs from the global South, or periphery, has been on the rise, despite a continuing majority of Western European and North American participants. But while we know the broad make-up of this organizational population, we have yet to assess how the shape of the population is related to other features of global integration, such as levels of state integration into the global economy, participation in international treaties, variations in states' regime types, or changes in the transnational social movement sector itself. By addressing some of these questions at a macro-level, this study will provide an empirical basis for more narrowly focused case-study and comparative research on particular instances of transnational political mobilization.

The various aspects of globalization, in short, touch upon social dynamics that social movement scholars have found crucial to explaining national level social movement emergence and impact, namely the structures of political opportunities and resources available to potential challengers (McAdam 1982; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996). Nevertheless, systematic efforts to understand how these global economic, institutional, and social transformations affect possibilities for social movements remain relatively under-developed (for further discussion, see Tarrow 2001a). In particular we need to understand better the specific mechanisms that connect changes in the global political and economic system with new forms of collective political engagement (cf. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 2001b; McCarthy 1997). By providing longitudinal evidence about transnational organizing, this study will help us begin to assess relationships between globalization processes and an important component of social movements, that is the formal organizations that serve as social infrastructures for transnational political mobilization.

Data and Methods

Why Transnational Organizations? This study builds upon a strong tradition in the study of social movements that treats formal social movement organizations (SMOs) as important components to social movement mobilization. While clearly not the only actors in social movements, SMOs serve as social infrastructures that routinize communication and coordination

among activists, facilitate resource mobilization and the development of shared identities and activist cultures, and provide sites where activists can learn important skills (see, e.g., McCarthy 1996; Zald and McCarthy 1987; Gamson 1990; Gamson and Schmeidler 1984). Moreover, transnational organizations are indicators of global integration, as they represent collections of various transnational interactions among individuals and groups. By bringing together people from different countries for the purpose of advancing common aims through coordinated if not collective action, TSMOs help further globalization as they attempt to shape its course.¹

Data Source: The main dependent variable for part one of the study – changes in the size and structure of the TSMO sector over time– will come from the annual records of TSMOs drawn from the *Yearbook of International Associations*. The *Yearbook* is edited by the [Union of International Associations](#) (UIA), which was formally charged by the United Nations with the task of assembling a regular database of all international and transnational organizations– that is (by UIA’s definition), all organizations involving different national governments and/or citizens from at least three countries. The UIA makes extensive efforts to identify new groups and to identify inactive or disbanded groups. Once identified, responsible authorities within each organization are asked to complete an annual questionnaire that details the organization’s work, its members, its links with international organizations and NGOs, among other information. The UIA has made systematic efforts to improve its data collection methods, and as a result we can be quite confident about their accuracy for more recent years.² While it is not a perfect census of all transnational organizations – and it is likely to be comparatively less accurate in tracking the less formal and more fluid social movement groups we’re interested in here³ – it remains the best record we have over a long period of time of transnational organizational activity. One systematic omission from the *Yearbook* is obviously the groups that do not seek international legitimacy or publicity; especially those engaging in illicit activities or that explicitly espouse the use of violence as a tactic. Interpretations of these data will account for this omission.

From the organizational records, we have also assembled a second database that tells us the aggregate number of TSMOs that claim members in a given country. That database also includes variables from other sources, such as the World Bank, United Nations, and elsewhere, indicating measures of internal political conditions, ties to the global economy, historical relations to the global system, and integration into the global political and institutional order, among others.

A team of coders identified organizations to be included by reviewing the lists of active groups from the previous year and by searching the *Yearbook’s* index for organizations that entered or exited the population in the subsequent year. The cases we selected for inclusion were non-governmental, non-profit organizations with memberships in at least three countries whose

¹A similar argument is advanced by Boli and Thomas (1999) and their colleagues, as they consider the broader set of all voluntary non-governmental organizations as important carriers of “world cultural values.”

²From personal communication with Anthony Judge, the editor of the *Yearbook of International Associations*, letter dated 16 November 1993 (from Brussels). The UIA now has an extensive website that details some of its mission and procedures: www.uia.org.

³While the comparatively informal structures and the lack of major or sustained resources of SMOs makes them more difficult to track, their interest in gaining public attention to their work for the purposes of attracting external funding or gaining allies and networks gives them incentive to actively seek inclusion in the *Yearbook*, which is a widely known source of information for these groups.

principal aims involve some social or political change.⁴ For each organization, we collected information about their headquarters location, issue focus, founding year, structure, membership type, change strategies, ties with other organizations, and countries of membership. Because the *Yearbook* entries for individual organizations are typically updated every 2-3 years,⁵ we will separately code only each new organizational entry, replicating duplicate entries from adjacent years.

Once the organizational records are entered, work can begin to organize the data longitudinally by year, which will involve both assembling annual counts of various organizational changes (i.e., numbers of organizational formations and disbandings overall as well as by region, issue, and structure) for each year of the study. An organizational density measure will reflect the total number of groups active in the population for that year. The predictor variables will be lagged where appropriate, and analyses will be done to determine the directions of the relationships between TSMO formation and the independent variables, such as the numbers of inter-governmental organizations. Data on changes in the political environment over time will be collected from both the *Yearbook* (numbers of inter-governmental organizations) and from various United Nations sources, including *Multilateral Treaties Deposited with the United Nations Secretary-General* and official records on multilateral financial contributions and global conferences. Measures of integration into the world polity—indicated by participation in international organizations and treaties—will be tested in the aggregate, but will also be disaggregated according to the top three or four issues around which TSMOs have mobilized. This will allow us to test for different patterns or institutional effects across various movement issue-areas.⁶ Data on regime types from Jagers and Gurr (1995) will help us assemble counts of the numbers of democratic states in the world.

For part two of the study, we will organize the data by country/year for pooled time-series analysis. Most of the independent variables will be lagged by at least one year. The degree of global political integration is measured using counts of a country's participation in international organizations (available from the *Yearbook*) and of signature/ratification of international treaties. Economic variables such as levels of international trade, debt, and foreign direct investment, will be collected from World Bank and United Nations sources, and these will help capture levels of integration into the global economy as well as the access to global communications and transportation. Many of the political variables, such as measures of political openness or respect for human rights, are available for many of the years of this study in data sets such as that of Jagers and Gurr (1995), Bollen (2001), Poe and Tate (1994), and we will update these sources where necessary. Measures of the strength of domestic voluntary sectors are much more difficult to find, but there are some global sources that can serve as proxies for this measure, including the International Labor Organization's database on rates of unionization (see Roberts 1996) and the Human Rights Internet's database of national human rights organizations (see Ball 2000). Additional UN and other multilateral organization sources provide multi-country but not

⁴Smith did the independent review and selection for the years 1983, 1988, and 1993, and she supervised coders doing the selection for 1953, 1963, 1973, and 2000. Selection was independent each year, and was double-checked for accuracy, in part by tracing organizations across different time periods in order to record whether they survived or disbanded during the period.

⁵The *Yearbook* staff attempts to obtain annual updates for every organization, and each organizational entry indicates when that entry was last updated. A review of past records shows that most entries were recorded at least 1-2 years prior to the *Yearbook's* publication date.

⁶Most studies focus on a single movement, which prevent ready comparisons across different movements or issues.

comprehensive counts for various countries (see, e.g., Fischer 1993; 1998), and I will seek to make use of these data to the extent that is feasible. We will use the most recent updates of accepted rankings of world-system (e.g., ranks based on Snyder and Kick 1979; Arrighi and Drangel 1986) to rank countries' position in the world economy. Measures of dependency will be based on levels of international debt and severity of the conditionalities placed on a country's loan agreements with the International Monetary Fund and/or the World Bank (e.g., Walton and Seddon 1994).

For more details on the database structure, contact Jackie Smith.

Current Work in Progress

- *Changing the World: Struggles for Global Democracy*, by Jackie Smith
- "The Geography of Collaboration in Transnational Social Movement Networks and Coalitions" by Dawn Wiest, Ph.D. dissertation, SUNY Stony Brook (May 2006).
- *Organizing for Change: Transnational Social Movements and Network Politics in a Global Era*, by Jackie Smith, Kiyoteru Tsutsui, and Dawn Wiest
 - This book will report the overall trends we find in this dataset, exploring changes in the population of TSMOs between the 1960s and today, and offering comparative analyses across issues, regions, and countries to identify what factors are shaping the ways people organize transnationally.

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