

My dissertation examines whether the incorporation of labor rights provisions into trade agreements promotes labor rights enforcement in developing countries. It analyzes how the institutions linked to trade agreements are engaged by civil society to most effectively encourage domestic labor rights protections. I use the transnational advocacy framework as the starting point to investigate how labor's allies engage the trade mechanisms as a means to protect labor rights when domestic enforcement is weak.

Using original quantitative data, field observation, and interviews with key participants, I examine these issues through a research design that incorporates mixed methods. One chapter employs Heckman selection models in a large-N statistical analysis of the U.S. Generalized System of Preferences program, a unilateral trade promotion initiative extended by the U.S. to 140 less-developed states. My analysis of the factors that explain both case selection by transnational advocates and country decisions by the office of the U.S. Trade Representative suggests that enforcement of the GSP labor clause is driven less by the consideration of labor rights practices in partner states than by U.S. foreign policy objectives. The GSP analysis is followed by a quantitative study of labor rights enforcement within a specific regional trade regime, NAFTA. In this chapter, I use probit analysis to show that transnational advocacy is a key factor that explains which cases are reviewed by the national NAFTA panels, and further, that the use of worker testimony in the petitions -- a strategy used almost exclusively by transnational advocates-- is associated with outcomes that favor workers. The final substantive chapter describes the independent effects of transnational support and the use of the NAFTA labor rights clause in conditioning outcomes for workers. It draws on field observation in Puebla, Mexico, and the comparative case study features interviews with workers and labor organizers as they attempt to unionize six garment factories in the face of government opposition.

My dissertation is unique in that it represents an attempt to quantify decisionmaking outcomes by U.S. trade officials around labor rights issues. As such, my work takes a different tack than others in the transnational politics area by examining the responses by states in their interactions with non-state actors, rather than focusing on the experiences of network participants.