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Two Logics of Labor Organizing in the Global Apparel Industry

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What factors account for labor strategies in global industries? While some scholars point to economic factors and others look to political opportunity structures, an examination of union actions in the Central American apparel export industry over a 14-year period suggests that activists' historical experiences and ideological orientations also strongly influence union dynamics. Left-oriented unions tend to form unions through transnational activism whereas conservative unions most often turn to plant-level cross-class collaboration. Moreover, these two union strategies are interconnected. Successful transnational activism facilitates conservative union formation through a ''radical flank'' mechanism; the threat of left-union organizing motivates employers to accept unionization by conservative unions to block left unions from gaining influence in the plant. To examine these arguments, this article employs pooled time-series statistical analysis, structured interviews with labor organizers, and process tracing that draws on nine months of field research in Honduras and El Salvador.

The transformation of economic relations and state structures has forced labor unionists to dramatically re-think their strategies, most especially in global industries. For some unionists, the most adequate response to economic globalization is the globalization of union activism. For others, a better response entails new forms of collaboration with capital at the plant level. Why do unionists choose such opposing strategies? This article argues that labor unions have a range of potentially-effective responses from which to choose. The choice of response is shaped by structural constraints, state institutions, and *perceptions* of opportunities. The success of these different choices is a function of domestic and transnational opportunities, and a radical flank mechanism—the process by which the ''moderates'' are strengthened by the presence of ''radicals.''

This argument challenges economistic arguments and modifies dominant social movement frameworks. For scholars with an economistic orientation, labor's strategies may be linked to national factor endowments (whether labor in society is scarce or abundant relative to other productive resources), sectoral conditions (the abundance or scarcity of skilled versus unskilled labor), and unemployment and economic growth rates (Frieden and Rogowski 1996; Katz and

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Kochan 1992; Rogowski 1989, 10). Social movement scholars emphasize that grievances emanating from economic structures are mediated by political contexts (McAdam 1982; Meyer 2004; Tilly 1978). Aggrieved resource-poor sectors of society—with the right political openings (or opportunities), resources, and cultural frames—can be expected to mobilize and place collective demands on elites (Tarrow 1998).

While both approaches can explain the actions of *some* labor organizations, neither approach provides a full explanation for the different actions pursued by most labor unions in global industries. An examination of labor actions in the apparel export industry reveals that, while some unionists pursue cross-class collaboration, other unionists *in the same country and in the same industry* will pursue transnational activism.

This article argues that domestic and transnational opportunities shape the range of actions open to labor, while labor ideologies and historical experiences influence perceptions of opportunities and thus the final choice of strategies within that range of options. Left-oriented unions, influenced by their class-based world view and historical experience of political exclusion, are more likely to pursue transnational activism. Conservative labor unions, influenced by their reformist orientation and favorable historical experience with national corporatist pacts, are more likely to pursue plant-level cross-class collaboration.

Argument and Methods

While democratization has swept developing countries since the early 1980s, labor's access to the domestic political process still varies considerably. In some countries, labor parties are in power and collective labor laws are favorable to labor, whereas in other countries, labor has no meaningful political allies in power and labor laws and their enforcement mechanisms are deficient. Where labor's access to the traditional political process is curtailed, I argue that labor will have a greater incentive to pursue two nontraditional strategies, transnational activism and plant-level cross-class collaboration.

The decision regarding which nontraditional strategy to pursue is shaped by idea sets that filter how labor perceives new threats and opportunities. Labor unions in developing countries have been influenced by a range of action-oriented ideas. To simplify, I group these ideas into those that seek to maintain the status quo (conservative) and those that seek significant social transformation (left-oriented). I argue that left-oriented unionists are more likely to pursue transnational activism based on a class-based world view and historic exclusion from state structures. To the contrary, conservative unionists—building on their moderate world views and historically positive experiences with national corporatist arrangements—are more likely to pursue pacts with factory owners through what I have labeled as plant-level cross-class collaboration. As we will see, the success of this conservative strategy depends on the threat created by successful transnational activism in the form of a radical flank effect.

I probe these arguments via triangulation. That is, I combine three different research methods to address the same problem (Tarrow 1995). First, based on a 14-year unionization dataset that I constructed, I employ pooled time-series regression analysis to examine the variables that influenced left and conservative union formation in Central American apparel export factories. Second, I analyze results from 25 structured interviews that I conducted with labor organizers on all labor actions in Salvadoran and Honduran apparel export plants between 1990 and 2003 to examine their strategic actions. Third, I used process-tracing via field research, in-depth interviews with union leaders, and factory visits to examine the causal mechanisms that explain the shift in union strategies.

Economic Interests and Political Opportunities

Frieden and Rogowski (1996, 40) argue that, in the context of increased international trade, unskilled workers in developed countries are expected to ''heighten their demands for protection or compensation,'' while unskilled workers in developing countries ''are predicted to mobilize on behalf of liberalization.''[2] This labor market sectoral approach may explain why, much to the dismay of the American labor movement, the largest unions in Mexico joined with their government in supporting the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), while apparel unionists in the United States opposed the agreement. Yet, it cannot explain why important labor federations in El Salvador, which represent apparel workers, protested against free trade with the United States (FEASIES 2004). Or why labor protests in Honduras against free trade with the United States were so intense that they escalated to the point of violent opposition.[3]

One limitation to an economistic-focused approach is the lack of attention to the role of political opportunities. Here, social movement scholars of the political process tradition provide a needed corrective by emphasizing the importance of domestic institutions in shaping actor strategies (Gamson and Meyer 1996; McAdam 1982; Meyer 2004; Tarrow 1989; Tilly 1978). Movement emergence is based not only on economic grievances but also on shifts in political opportunities. That is, actor responses ''are shaped by the broader set of political constraints and opportunities unique to the national context in which they are embedded'' (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 3).

Labor movements in states with relatively open political opportunities can be expected to work within the domestic political process to find relief of their economic grievances. Where domestic political opportunities are closed, labor movements may resort to a more contentious course of action, such as militant strikes. And, according to scholars of transnational activism, they may also pursue their grievances through transnational advocacy that target international institutions or states with more open political structures (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse-Kappen 1995; Tarrow 2001). This suggests that we can anticipate a greater degree of labor transnationalism—or (as I will argue) other alternative labor strategies—in countries were labor's political access is more curtailed.

Yet, while domestic political access provides a more complete explanation of labor strategies than economic factors alone, it does not explain variations within the country. For example, while the AFL-CIO opposed NAFTA, some American unions took a more nationalistic approach, others expressed mild opposition, and others became extremely involved in anti-NAFTA transnational activism (Dreiling 2000; Dreiling and Robinson 1998). This difference in strategic choice did not correspond to skill levels or to levels of job loss due to trade liberalization (Dreiling 2000:44).

In Mexico, while the politically moderate Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) supported the government's free trade policies, the leftist Authentic Workers' Front (FAT) joined the transnational anti-NAFTA coalition. We see a similar pattern in Central America, where left-oriented unions opposed the free trade agreement with the United States, while conservative unions declared their support. What this suggests is that, while economic structures and domestic politics explain the threats and the range of opportunities facing labor, the historical

[2] This argument is based on Frieden and Rogowski's observation that developed countries like the United States have a paucity of unskilled labor whereas developing countries are abundant in unskilled labor. Increased trade will hurt unskilled workers in developed countries since they stand to lose the most, and benefit unskilled workers in developing since they stand to gain (Frieden and Rogowski 1996:40).

[3] See Carlos Enrique Girón, ''Honduras, segundo en ratificar el TLC,'' *La Prensa,* March 4, 2005. Available at http://www.laprensahn.com/. (Accessed October 27, 2006.)

experiences and idea sets of labor union organizations also influence labor's strategic choices.

Labor Ideologies

To the extent culture is explored in the dominant social movement paradigms, it is often only used to explain how movements utilize or create mobilizing frames (Snow and Benford 1988, 198). In this view, culture is used strategically by actors; it does not shape the range of threats and opportunities they perceive. Yet, as Gamson and Meyer (1996, 283) note, ''an opportunity unrecognized is no opportunity at all.'' A more complete cultural analysis needs to examine how historical experience and ideological influences shape movements' *perceptions* of threats and opportunities.

Ideology here is understood as ''the collective understanding of individuals who, being conscious of each other's roles, beliefs, expectations, and purposes, offer strategies for action or solutions to problems that can be used to change reality'' (Adler 1987, 17). That is, ideology entails action-oriented ideas. It provides not only a framework for understanding grievances, but it also influences how opportunities are acted upon.

Scholars have long debated the nature of worker consciousness, from those who emphasized workers' potential for class-based solidarity (Marx and Engels [1948], 1992) to others who expected a more liberal world view (Kerr et al. 1960). Yet, as Charles Sabel notes, workers are ''neither a homogeneous class united in opposition to management nor a mass of individuals eager for their own reasons to cooperate, even in limited ways, with the bosses.'' (Sabel 1982, xi). That is, both class reductionism and individual rationality fail to explain workers' actions. Instead, a range of world views influence how workers respond to new challenges.

Margaret Levi finds that the American labor movement is divided between those unions that adhere to a business union orientation and those with a social movement orientation. She argues that these orientations influenced whether unions pursue strategies that fail or succeed in responding to new economic challenges (Levi 2003). Richard Hyman refers to the battle of ideas in Europe between those unions that focus narrowly on material interests and those that incorporate broader demands for social justice (Hyman 1999). Latin American labor movements have a long history of ideological diversity, with anarcho-syndicalism, communism, socialism, Catholicism, and corporatism all influencing labor's strategic choices (Godio 1985; Zapata 1993).

The end of the Cold War lessened the ideological divisions among labor unions (Ashwin 2000). Most notably, the ideological battle between the three main international labor confederations largely dissipated as the communist World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) faced dramatic loss of members and influence, and the Social Christian and Social Democratic confederations merged and formed a new organization, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Yet, in Latin America, while ideological differences are now less extreme than in the past, labor organizations have not experienced a convergence in their world views, nor have labor center mergers been a common trend. To the contrary, most countries have three or more national labor centers divided along political and ideological lines, *and this number appears to be growing.*

To simplify, I have grouped these different labor organizations into two categories, ''left-oriented'' and ''conservative.'' I define ''left-oriented'' as any organization that rejects the social status quo and adheres to some form of class-based world view. Many of these unionists have their roots in Marxist labor groups and political parties. Over time—and most particularly since the end of the Cold War—these groups have moderated their views, but they have not abandoned their belief in radical social transformation. I argue that the class and

anti-capitalist orientation of left-oriented unions, combined with a historic distrust of state institutions, makes them more pre-disposed to reject domestic cross-class alliances and to pursue transnational activism.

In the apparel sector, this transnational activism is a very particular form of internationalism. It is ''transnational'' in that it involves activists in two or more countries. And it is ''activist'' because it involves some form of protest and member mobilization with labor and non-labor alliances, such as anti-sweatshop activist organizations. The role of foreign activists includes putting pressure on multinational apparel corporations through protests outside their stores and media campaigns. The multinational corporations (MNCs) are then expected to put pressure on their contractors in Central America to respect basic labor laws, including the right to organize trade unions, in order to avoid further tarnishing their image in the media.

I define ''conservative'' labor organizations as ones that accept the social status quo. These groups adhere to a more class-accommodationist world view, and (at best) the pursuit of modest social reforms. Many of these unionists have their roots in macro-corporatist and Catholic labor organizations that rejected class conflict. Over time, these groups moderated their extreme anti-communism but maintained their collaborationist world view. I argue that conservative labor unions are less likely to establish sustained transnational alliances. Rather, these unionists are more likely to build on past forms of collaboration and pursue cross-class collaboration with employers at the plant level. This form of collaboration is different from traditional corporatist collaboration because it takes place predominately at the plant level, whereas traditional (or macro-level) corporatism took place at the national level between national union leaders and state representatives.[4]

What this discussion indicates is that while unionists are facing common challenges presented by economic globalization, the nature and the degree of their responses to those challenges are shaped by access to domestic political structures and ideological orientations. Indeed, there is no one dominant union response to globalization. Unionists in the same global industries facing the same domestic structures will opt for very different strategies.

The Economy, the State, and Labor in Central America

Early economic histories of El Salvador and Honduras were influenced by the amount and type of land that was available, how it was distributed and used, and who had access to it. El Salvador's small, relatively well-connected, and mountainous territory was conducive to the growth of a powerful agrarian elite based on coffee production who were able to create relatively strong and repressive state structures (Mahoney 2001, 211). In Honduras, there was more than adequate land for a variety of agricultural activities, but the good land was spread out and disconnected due to poor infrastructure. As a result, a strong national agrarian elite failed to develop. Foreign investors, mostly in mining and bananas, filled the void, while the country was ruled by personalistic dictators (Mahoney 2001).

The Salvadoran coffee elite and the militarized state used their power to systematically repress labor (Anderson 1971; Dunkerley 1982). In Honduras, as James Mahoney finds, ''dictators were far more oriented toward buying off societal loyalty through reform than toward pursuing the harsh repression of political opponents that marked Guatemala and El Salvador'' (Mahoney 2001, 253). This laid the foundation for a state that, while weak, was more open to labor's demands.

[4] This is not to say that plant-level corporatism did not take place under traditional, macro-corporatism. Yet, under traditional corporatism, the macro-level was favored over the micro-level.

Growth in the manufacturing sector in the region did not begin until the 1960s. In part, this was the result of a new United States foreign policy. Following the 1959 Cuban revolution, the U.S. government was preoccupied with stifling social discontent through economic development. President John F. Kennedy launched the Alliance for Progress, which promoted structural reform through a development strategy based on Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) and a Central American Common Market (LaFeber 1984). As a result of this policy shift, the number of manufacturing plants in El Salvador grew from 430 in 1961 to 1,482 in 1970 (Molina 1995, 57). Manufacturing also grew in Honduras, although to a more limited degree. In both countries, industrial development focused on low-end industries like food, drink, tobacco, textiles, clothing, and shoes (Bulmer-Thomas 1987, 211).

At the same time, these countries developed their first comprehensive labor legislation. Labor laws in both countries combined extensive individual labor rights protections with limited collective rights, reflecting the corporatist tendency to prefer state control over independent collective action (Blanco 1997, 10). Yet the new laws and limited industrialization allowed for growth in union membership in El Salvador, where membership went from 25,917 members in 1962 to 64,186 members in 1972 (Menjívar 1987, 98). In Honduras, more limited industrialization, labor law reform, and a boom in rural organizing resulted in an increase in union membership from 56,602 in 1972 to 131,377 in 1975 (Meza 1991, 153).

Salvadoran union activism was divided into two distinct groups. A pro-government sector, organized in the General Confederation of Trade Unions (CGS), aligned itself with the governing, militaristic Party of National Conciliation (PCN). The CGS sought a redress of grievances through non-confrontational, collaborative means. The left union sector had been dominated by the Communist Party for much of the 20th century, but following the Cuban Revolution and the growth of liberation theology in Latin America, new left union groups emerged. Most notably, in 1972 unionists formed the National Federation of Salvadoran Workers (FENASTRAS) which pursued sit-down strikes and other confrontational tactics (Menjívar 1987). FENASTRAS, together with the teachers' union (ANDES), public sector employees, rural workers, student activists, and many others, formed the basis for a powerful social movement in the 1970s.

As repression escalated and the country descended into civil war in the 1980s, these activists allied with the guerrilla opposition movement organized in the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) (Montgomery 1982).[5] In 1986, another left-union federation was formed, the Federation of Independent Unions and Associations of El Salvador (FEASIES), which also aligned with the FMLN (Fitzsimmons and Anner 1999).

In Honduras, three union tendencies competed for workers' allegiances. In 1964, with support from the American union movement—which was then in the midst of its anti-Communist crusade—the conservative Confederation of Honduran Workers (CTH) was formed. In 1970, progressive unions left the CTH to form the General Confederation of Workers (CGT), which, at the time, adhered to a moderate Christian Democratic orientation. Finally, the Marxist left formed the Unitary Federation of Honduran Workers (FUTH) in 1978 (Armbruster-Sandoval 2005; Meza 1991; Posas 2000).

In the 1990s, as the war ended in El Salvador and democracy began to return ever so precariously to the region, local governments began a dramatic transformation of the region's economies. Enthusiastic about the perceived success of the Asian tigers, the goal was to establish Export Processing Zones (EPZs), large

[5] The Communist Party also changed its tactics and joined the guerrilla movement at this time.

industrial parks where factories produced (mostly) apparel under contract for foreign corporations (Arriola 1993).

With generous fiscal and international incentives, production boomed. While in 1975 there was only one EPZ in El Salvador with 150 workers, by 2002, total employment in the apparel-export sector reached 86,000, and the value added generated by apparel export production reached $475 million, surpassing that of coffee, which had been the biggest Salvadoran export for over a century (BCR 2002). In Honduras, by 1996 apparel-export jobs represented 34.2 percent of manufacturing jobs, or 65,950 out of 192,982 jobs (BCH 1997). In 2000, 106,530 workers were employed in 24 EPZs, and value added in the sector surpassed the combined value of major agro-export crops (BCH 2002).

In both El Salvador and Honduras, protected, full-production manufacturing systems were replaced by these industrial parks, which functioned as global outsourcing centers for manufacturing. Employers in this system faced high competitive pressures to lower labor costs. In this new context, neither the traditional conservative nor the traditional left labor strategies were as effective. Conservative labor unions could no longer count on the state to ensure their ability to unionize work centers; the state was more preoccupied with attracting foreign investors, and macro-corporatist pacts went against their market-oriented inclinations. For left labor centers, strike activity and membership mobilization no longer provided the same leverage in decentralized assembly plants as in traditional manufacturing facilities. And for both groups, the high competition faced by industry and lower profit margins increased employer resistance to unionization. At the same time, resources dedicated to labor law enforcement declined, and the old labor laws proved unable to respond to the new challenges faced by workers in the EPZ sector (Anner 2008).

One left-oriented labor union in El Salvador went through a process of transformation during this period. The once-militant FENASTRAS abruptly broke relations with the political left and dramatically shifted its political and organizational goals. The leader of FENASTRAS, Juan José Huezo, had spent one and a half years in prison and believed that his organization and the opposition movement in general did not do enough to get him out. When he was finally released, he turned against what he viewed as the false idealism of the political left and began to focus on pursuing economic goals, mostly of a personal nature.[6] And, as Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval notes, ''[t]he former left-leaning labor federation [became] more conservative and friendly toward the business sector'' (Armbruster-Sandoval 2005, 73).

At the same time, with the end of the war, the AFL-CIO lost interest in its anti-communist crusade in El Salvador and dramatically cut its support to the old collaborative union movement. Many of these unions lost strength as a result. But several of the old collaborative unionists regrouped and established the National Confederation of Salvadoran Workers (CNTS), which maintained a moderately reformist platform. FEASIES maintained its left orientation, identifying itself as an ''anti-neoliberal'' organization (FEASIES 1994). In the 1990s, it joined the other left-oriented unionists and formed the Trade Union Coordinator of Salvadoran Workers (CSTS).

In Honduras, in the late 1980s, the Social Christian CGT aligned itself with the conservative National Party (Schulz and Sundloff-Schulz 1994, 211). The conservative orientation of the CGT provoked a split in the organization that resulted in the formation of the Independent Federation of Honduran Workers (FITH) (Armbruster-Sandoval 2005). The FITH later joined the FUTH to establish the left-oriented United Confederation of Honduran Workers (CUTH), which defines itself as anti-capitalist (CUTH 1996).

[6] See ''Delatan oscuro plan sindical,'' *El Diario de Hoy,* November 15, 1995, p. 12.

In the global apparel export industry, what all Honduran and Salvador labor organizations have in common, as we will see below, is that traditional organizing strategies resoundingly failed.[7] The challenge for all these organizations was to find new strategies that would allow for the unionization of workers in this highly competitive, export sector.

Two Logics of Labor Organizing

There are several core union activities that remain relevant regardless of the economic context or the political orientation of labor unions. These include organizing new members, bargaining on behalf of those members, pursuing collective actions when necessary, and developing some sort of political relationship with governing elites. But what additional strategies might labor pursue in global industries, and how might varying political and ideological legacies influence variations in new labor strategies?

Much of the literature on labor and the recent phase of economic globalization debates whether labor will or will not pursue international strategies. Some optimists see labor actions becoming increasingly more international (Frundt 1998; Waterman 1998). Perhaps the best depiction of a mechanism conducive to transnational strategies is the Keck and Sikkink boomerang pattern (1998). Here, an inability to pursue demands through the domestic political process pushes actors to seek out international allies that can put pressure on external states—or, as is more probable for labor, the foreign headquarters of multinational corporations that can in turn put external pressure on local factory owners.

Yet, transnationalism is not the only labor strategy. The fragmentation and polarization of movements present elites with new opportunities via a radical flank mechanism. According to Herbert Haines, a positive radical flank effect exists ''when the bargaining position of moderates is strengthened by the presence of more radical groups'' (Haines 1984, 32).[8] Doug McAdam adds, ''Radicalness provides strong incentives to the state to get to the bargaining table with the moderates in order to avoid dealing with the radicals'' (cited in Gupta 2002, 4). Radical groups can also increase the perceived legitimacy of moderate groups (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 14).

No doubt, fragmentation and ideological polarization are not sufficient conditions for a radical flank effect (Gupta 2002). In the case of union formation, I argue that for a positive radical flank effect to occur, it is first necessary for the political process to entail some degree of blockage. If the labor laws and enforcement mechanisms are strong and favorable to labor, management would have little discretion in choosing which union should represent its workers. Only when the laws are deficient, enforcement uneven, and the process lacks transparency can management adequately intervene in the internal dynamics of union formation and ensure it gets the union it wants.

Second, the threat created by the radical unions has to be sufficiently strong for employers to consider permitting the unionization of their enterprises by conservative unionists. This is not simply a matter of who gets funding from elite institutions, as in Haines' radical flank dynamic in the American civil rights movement. In the case of labor relations, it is a matter of allowing for the legal representation of a workforce by a labor union and, perhaps, the institutionalization

[7] I am not arguing that traditional labor strategies resoundingly failed in all sectors. Strategies for organizing public sector workers, construction workers, and what remained of traditional manufacturing did not experience the same degree of crisis.

[8] Haines (1984, 32) also refers to a negative radical flank effect that exists when moderates are hurt by a backlash created by the actions of radical groups.

of collective bargaining that may last decades. Thus, allowing unionization by one group of workers to avoid unionization by another has profound and long-term consequences on the employer.

Most Central American employers will oppose unionization by any organization—leftist or conservative—in order to avoid pressure to increase wages or other interferences in their ability to manage a factory as they choose. But, if the choice is between a left-oriented union that appears more likely to disrupt production through strikes and to make strong demands for higher wages and benefits, and a moderate union that is less confrontational and demanding, then employers will opt for the latter. Thus, the greater the threat faced by a manager of left-oriented unionization, the more likely the manager will welcome a collaborative relationship with moderate unions.

Hypotheses

The analysis above suggests the following expectations: (1) for left-oriented unions, strategic responses to the internationalization of the apparel industry are likely to include transnational alliances that pressure multinational corporations. This effect will be stronger in countries with less accessible political institutions. (2) For conservative labor unions, strategic responses to the globalization will tend toward plant-level pacts with employers facilitated by a radical flank mechanism. This effect with be stronger where the threat of left unionization is stronger.

Research Design

Operationalization

Economic Sector: I have chosen to study the global apparel industry or, more specifically, manufacturing export parks known as export processing zones (EPZs), because they offer a paradigmatic case of economic globalization. EPZs are defined by the International Labor Organization as ''industrial zones with special incentives set up to attract foreign investors, in which imported materials undergo some degree of processing before being (re-) exported'' (ILO 2002, 1). That is, by definition, EPZs involve the segmentation and international dispersion of production and distribution. Prior to the mid-1960s, there were only two EPZs in developing countries. By 2002, there were 3,000 of these industrial parks employing 37 million workers (ILO 2002, 1). While in some countries, EPZ production includes consumer electronics, and footwear as well as apparel, in Central America EPZ production is mostly in the apparel sector. On the one hand, EPZs offer needed employment, particularly to the young, female segment of the work force (Moran 2002). Yet, on the other hand, labor relations issues such as low wages, forced overtime, gender-based discrimination, and violations of freedom of association are common (ILO 2002). This has presented a challenge to conservative and to left-oriented labor unions whose mission is to organize workers and defend their interests.

Domestic Political Access: To study the effect of domestic political access on labor strategies, I chose a paired comparison of two developing countries that have important differences in their labor relations regimes, but in many other ways are similar. El Salvador and Honduras faced the legacy of Iberian colonization, export-oriented agriculture, import substitution, and, recently, a dramatic shift to export-oriented manufacturing through EPZs. Yet, as noted earlier in the article, there are important historical structural differences between the two countries that resulted in differences in labor's access to the state.

Historically, the Salvadoran state has been more labor-repressive than the Honduran state. El Salvador's 12-year civil war that left over 5,000 labor activists dead instilled a legacy of fear in many workers. Moreover, in Honduras the labor laws that regulate union formation and collective bargaining are more favorable to labor than in El Salvador. Honduras also had 105 state labor inspectors enforcing labor laws in the 1990s compared with 40 in El Salvador.[9] And Honduras, unlike El Salvador, also had ratified international conventions on the right to organize and bargain collectively. Political access via tripartite negotiations (state, employer, and labor) and other forms of consultation are more developed in Honduras.

Another important indicator of state access is the presence of a labor-based political party in power (Murillo 2001). Neither Honduras nor El Salvador had a labor-based party in power during the period under study. However, it is worth noting that an extremely conservative political party—the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA)—has ruled El Salvador since 1989, contributing to the adverse conditions facing labor in that country.[10] For all these reasons, I classify El Salvador as a state with less favorable political access relative to Honduras. (See Table A1 in the Appendix for a chart comparing labor's ''political access'' in El Salvador and Honduras.)

Labor Ideologies: I group labor unions into two categories, left-oriented and conservative. In each country-case, I chose the most representative left-oriented and conservative unions.[11] In El Salvador, this includes unions in the left-oriented labor center, CSTS, and the conservative labor centers, CNTS and FENASTRAS. In Honduras, this includes unions in the left-oriented labor center, CUTH, and the more conservative labor center, CGT.

This approach offers an important corrective to a selection bias problem present in the literature on labor activism in the global economy. Much of this literature focuses on a limited number of case studies with a preference for left-oriented unions (Anner 2000; Armbruster-Sandoval 2003; Frundt 1998). This approach may be adequate for probing deterministic claims on this subset of unions, but it is not appropriate for testing a probabilistic argument of union actions by all labor union organizations. Thus, the addition of conservative union strategies makes a crucial contribution to the literature. Only by studying the full ideological range of union organizations can we appreciate the myriad of responses pursued by labor unionists and the role that ideology might have in influencing those responses.[12]

Labor Actions: Another common limitation of the literature on labor organizing in EPZs is a tendency to focus on cases of labor transnationalism. However, studying labor responses to globalization by examining this sub-set of cases involves drawing on the dependent variable (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). To avoid this pitfall, it is necessary to study the full range of labor attempts to form unions in EPZs. In this study, I examine all unionization attempts in El

[9] Figures correspond to the 1990s and early 2000s. The two countries had, at the turn of the century, roughly the same population size of 6.2 million people.

[10] It is also worth noting that since the 1994 election, the FMLN political party has been the second most important party in the country. This is similar to the two-party system in Honduras. Yet, the political spectrum is much broader in the case of El Salvador. ARENA is somewhat further to the right than the conservative National Party in Honduras, while the FMLN is much further to the left than the Liberal Party of Honduras. However, power remains very concentrated in the Salvadoran executive branch, so the FMLN's ability to adequately address labor rights abuses in the apparel export sector has been limited.

[11] The history of these organizations and explanation of my categorization are provided earlier in the article.

[12] A common problem in studying conservative unionists in Latin America is that they are often distrustful of outsiders and thus harder to research. A careful cultivation of relationships over a period of many years allowed me to collect data on both left-oriented and conservative unions.

Salvador and Honduras between 1990 and 2003 (59 cases). I break down strategies used by activists to form labor unions in apparel export plants into several specific actions: (1) transnational activism, (2) strikes, (3) non-governmental organization (NGO) alliances, and (4) the targeting of state institutions. Data were gathered through structured interviews during three research trips to the region between 2001 and 2003.

Statistical Model

I argue that left and conservative union membership growth is the result of differing organizing logics. While left union formation is a function of the interaction between access to the domestic political arena and transnational activism, conservative union formation is the result of the threat created by successful left union formation. In this section, I test my arguments using pooled time-series regression analysis. My dependent variable is the number of union members per year per plant in the apparel export sector of the two countries. Since there are no government or international sources of union formation in Salvadoran and Honduran EPZs, I gathered these data through extensive interviews in the region. Time-series data from 1990 through 2003 were collected by country and grouped according to the ideological orientation of unions.

My first independent variable is access to state institutions. ''Political access'' is an indicator variable measured by comparing my two country cases. Given the more favorable political access in Honduras relative to El Salvador explained above, political access in El Salvador is coded as ''0'' and in Honduras it is coded as ''1.''[13]

My second independent variable is transnational activism. I measure two tactics to capture this strategy. The first tactic is media campaigns. To measure this tactic I document coverage of anti-sweatshop activism in major English language newspapers. Lexis-Nexis was used to establish the yearly number of articles with reference to ''sweatshops'' and ''protests.'' This ''media coverage'' measure picks up the shaming mechanism and protest actions used by the movement to leverage brand-name apparel companies into ensuring respect of labor rights in their sub-contractors.

The second tactic I document is support from foreign labor unions and NGOs to labor activists in Salvadoran and Honduran EPZ sector. An indicator variable was used for the period in which these groups were most active in Central America (''0'' for non-active periods and ''1'' for active periods). For example, the National Labor Committee (a labor-oriented NGO based in New York City) began its first campaigns to support union organizing in the region in 1994. Soon afterwards, the U.S. textile workers' union UNITE began providing funding to organizing efforts in Central America. It also stationed a full-time American union organizer in the region. By 2002, external support for cross-border campaigns came to an almost complete halt. UNITE elected a new president who decided that the union needed to focus less on supporting campaigns in Central America and more on building union strength in non-tradable sectors in the United States, such as apparel retail and distribution centers (Anner and Evans 2004). At the same time, as jobs increasingly flowed to China, groups like the National Labor Committee shifted much of their focus to Asia. For these reasons, I coded ''external support'' as ''1'' from 1994 through 2001. Otherwise it was coded as ''0.''

[13] As noted earlier, the Appendix provides a chart comparing labor's domestic political access in the two countries and thus details how I arrived at this coding.

These two tactics—media campaigns and external support for organizing—are designed by activists to work synergistically and thus cannot be understood in isolation from each other. For these reason, I combine my measures of these two tactics into one indicator variable of transnational activism.

For conservative unions that shunned transnational activism, I would not expect my media campaign/external support variable to have a direct effect on their ability to organize unions. Rather, I am anticipating a radical flank mechanism through which the threat created by successful left union organizing provides an opportunity for conservative unionization. To test this dynamic, left union membership for the prior year is used to predict conservative unionization in the current year since it is assumed it will take some time for employers and conservative unionists to register the growth of left unionization and to develop a means to act on it.[14]

I also control for plant ownership. Asian investors (most notably from South Korea and Taiwan) represent from one third to one half of all investment in the apparel export sector in Central America. Other common investors include Americans and Central Americans. Some research suggests that—drawing on a labor repressive model of development—Asian investors would be more fiercely anti-union than other investors (Deyo 1989). Strong managerial anti-unionism could either results in a lower rate of unionization or it could foment nationalistic sentiments that facilitate unionization (Bergquist 1986). Thus, the impact of plant-ownership is theoretically indeterminate. I explore the impact of plant-ownership by coding non-Asian owned plants as ''0'' and Asian-owned plants at ''1.''

For control variables, I used the most common economic factors considered to have a strong effect on unionization. A low unemployment rate implies a tighter job market and thus greater strength for labor; employers are less likely to fire workers in order to avoid unionization because it would be hard to replace them (Katz and Kochan 1992). This suggests that the unemployment rate will be negatively correlated with unionization. Similarly, periods of strong economic (GDP) growth is considered positive for labor since during good economic periods employers are in a better position to provide wage increases and thus less inclined to resist unionization (Katz and Kochan 1992).[15] Thus, we should expect higher unionization in years with strong GDP growth. Time-series country-level data for unemployment and GDP growth in El Salvador and Honduras are taken from the World Development Indicators.

Descriptive Statistics

A graph of unionization according to union orientation (left/conservative) and transnational activism provides some indication of the two mechanisms. In the graph, we can see that left unionization appears to increase in correlation with the increase in transnational activism. It is only after the growth of left unions that the conservative unions appear able to exploit the radical flank mechanism and grow. When transnational activism begins to decline in 2001, right unions continue to grow. Yet, as transnational activism declines further, it hurts left unions and they decline. This then appears to remove their threat to employers and the corresponding employers' desire to allow unionization by conservative unions. As a result, conservative union membership drops considerably. (See Figure 1.)

[14] It is most likely that the lag time is shorter than a year, perhaps even three to four months. But I was only able to gather annual unionization data so I had to rely on a 1-year lag.

[15] Of course, growth may not always translate into higher unionization rate as some workers might trade higher wages for unionization (the author thanks an anonymous reviewer for this observation). The statistical analysis should allow me to test for either possibility.

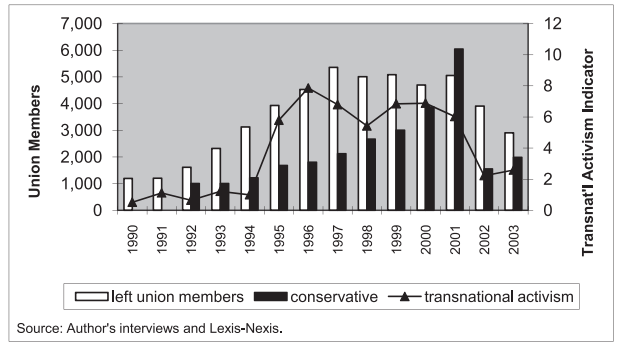

FIG. 1. Transnational Activism and Left and Conservative Union Membership

Pooled Time-Series Statistics

In the first regression model ''Total Unionization,'' I examine predictors of combined left and conservative union membership. What the results show is that political access is highly statistically significant and positively correlated with unionization. This suggests that in countries with more accessible political systems and better labor relations institutions, labor unionization is more likely. Transnational activism (media campaigns and external support) is also shown to have a positive and statistically significant impact on unionization. Economic variables (GDP growth and unemployment) and plant ownership are not statistically significant (see Table 1, *Total Unionization*).

In the second model, ''Left Unionization,'' the dependent variable is restricted to left union membership by plant per year. In this model, political access is highly statistically significant and positively correlated with left unionization. This suggests that for left unions in countries with relatively better access to the political system, labor unionization is more likely. Second, I find that transnational activism (international media campaigns and external support) is highly statistically significant and positively correlated with left unionization. This suggests, in accordance with my argument, in years in which there was more international support and media campaigns, unionization was more likely for left unions.

TABLE 1. Pooled Time-Series Regression Results Dependent Variable: Plant-level Union Membership, Apparel Export Industry, El Salvador and Honduras (1990–2003)

	Total Unionization	*Left Unionization*	*Conservative Unionization*
Variable	*Coefficient (s.e.)*	*Coefficient (s.e.)*	*Coefficient (s.e.)*
Domestic political access	1.411*** (.334)	1.143*** (.340)	.126 (.995)
Transnational activism	149*** (.032)	.122*** (.033)	.031 (.097)
Left Union Members (1-yr. lag)			.448** (.183)
GDP growth rate	035 (.047)	.066 (.048)	−.038 (.099)
Unemployment rate	−.045 (.086)	−.134 (.089)	.099 (.175)
Plant ownership	145 (.154)	−.337** (.157)	1.132*** (.327)
Constant	.777 (2.206)	.433 (.717)	−1.332 (1.503)
F-Statistic	19.480***	20.224***	6.616***
No. of observations	637	415	221
Adjusted-R^2	.127	.188	.132

*Statistically significant at the .10 level; ** at the .05 level; *** at the .01 level.

In this model, neither the unemployment rate nor the GDP growth rate is statistically significant, indicating the limited value of these economic variables in predicting successful left unionization. However, plant ownership is statistically significant and negatively correlated with unionization. This suggests that non-Asian owned factories are more likely to be unionized by left-oriented unions (see Table 1, ''Left Unionization'').

In the third model ''Conservative Unionization,'' I examine the potential predictors of conservative unionization. In this model, the 1-year lag of left unionization is highly statistically significant and positively correlated with conservative union membership growth. That is, it appears that a good predictor of union success by conservative unions is the level of unionization in the previous year by left unions. This provides some evidence from my argument that conservative unionization is achieved via a radical flank mechanism.[16]

While political access is positively correlated with conservative unionization, it is not statistically significant. This was not anticipated since I would assume favorable political access would support unionization regardless of union orientation. However, since political access is such a strong predictor of left unionization, and left unionization is a predictor of conservative unionization, we can deduce that political access has an indirect effect on conservative unionization.

Transnational activism was not statistically significant, suggesting that conservative unions did not rely *directly* on transnational activism to form unions.[17] Also, the economic variables were not statistically significant. However, the plant-ownership variable was highly statistically significant and positively correlated with union membership growth. Thus, unlike left unions that grew in non-Asian owned plants, conservative unions were more likely to grow in Asian-owned plants. This suggests that Asian investors are more likely to turn to conservative unionization to block unionization by left-oriented unions (see Table 1, ''Conservative Unionization'').

Structured Interviews

The regression analysis allowed me to test for a correlation between transnational activism and left-union membership, and between left-union membership and conservative union membership (a radical flank effect). Both correlations are statistically significant. To probe my research question deeper, I conducted interviews with labor organizers in El Salvador and Honduras over the course of three research trips between 2001 and 2003. In these structured interviews, I asked labor organizers which labor actions they used in each of the 59 campaigns to form labor unions from 1990 to 2003.[18]

These structured interviews allowed me not only to test more directly the use of transnational activism, but they also allowed me to examine other domestic strategies not examined in the regression analysis. For example, the historic inclination to pursue protest suggests that left-oriented labor unions will be more likely to form alliances with local activist NGOs and to strike. At the same time, the conservative unions' historic reliance on the state suggests that they would be more inclined to shun protest.

[16] Of course, other mechanisms could be at work here, including conservative union success in the prior year. This is why I do not consider this statistical analysis as the only test of my arguments. Structured and in-depth interviews later in this article will shed more light on my arguments.

[17] The result was indirect in that transnational activism helped left unions grow, and their growth created a threat to employers that allowed conservative unions to subsequently grow.

[18] My original goal was to survey labor activists. However, Central American labor activists were not accustomed to the survey instrument, and some had only limited literacy skills. As a result, I decided to use my five-page survey as a format for structured interviews. I tracked down and interviewed every major labor organizer except one in the two countries. The one activist who refused to be interviewed—Juan Jose Huezo of FENASTRAS—was under investigation at the time on corruption charges and refused to talk to all media and researchers.

Union Orientation	Political Access/Labor Relations Regime: Highly Unfavorable (El Salvador)	Political Access/Labor Relations Regime: Moderately Unfavorable (Honduras)
Left	71% (10 out of 14 cases)	44% (11 out of 25 cases)
Conservative	20% (1 out of 5 cases)	7% (1 out of 15 cases)

FIG. 2. Percent of Campaigns to Form Unions that used Transnational Alliances ($n = 59$) (1990–2003)
Source: Author's structured interviews with 25 labor organizers in El Salvador and Honduras, 2001-2003.

Combining these two independent variables in one model, my results show that 71 percent of the campaigns pursued by left-oriented labor unions in El Salvador used transnationalism via alliances with foreign activists, indicating that transnational activism is most common among left-oriented organizations in countries where domestic political access was highly curtailed. In sharp contrast, only 7 percent of the campaigns pursued by conservative labor unions in Honduras employed transnationalism, indicating that transnational activism is least common among conservative unions facing less adverse political institutions. In mixed cases (highly unfavorable regime with conservative unions and moderately unfavorable regime with left-oriented unions) the incidence of transnational activism falls between the two extremes (see Figure 2).

Lumping left-oriented and conservative Salvadoran unionists together and comparing their actions to all Honduran unionists, my results indicate that in El Salvador (where workers face a strongly union-repressive state) unionists turned to transnational alliances in 58 percent of the cases whereas in Honduras (with a relatively less union-repressive state) unionists turned to transnational alliances in 30 percent of the cases.[19] What these findings suggest is that domestic political access did influence the frequency of transnational labor activism. That is, when Salvadoran workers wanted to form a labor union, more often than not they found that domestic labor laws and the formal political process were largely ineffective. Rather, by allying with labor activists in other countries, they were able to raise awareness about their concerns, and put pressure on the state and employers from the outside.

When lumping left-oriented Salvadoran and Honduran unionists together and comparing them to conservative Salvadoran and Honduran unionists, I found that in 54 percent of the campaigns pursued by left-oriented unionists, activists resorted to transnational alliances, whereas in only 10 percent of the campaigns pursued by conservative unionists did activists resort to international cross-border collaboration. Thus, the proclivity to pursue transnational alliances also appears to be strongly influenced by labor union ideology, as anticipated (see Table 2).

The next union response I examine is strike activity. Here, left-oriented unionists are anticipated to strike with greater frequency given their proclivity toward class confrontation over class collaboration. What the structured interview results indicate is that strikes were very common among left-oriented unions in Honduras (88 percent), but much less common among left-oriented unions in El Salvador (14 percent). My interviews suggest that this is because unions in less

[19] I record transnational alliance formation based on a response to a direct question: Unionists were asked if they formed alliances with foreign activists to help form a union.

TABLE 2. Structured Interview Results: Labor Actions Used to Form Unions in Apparel Export Plants (1990–2003)

Labor Actions Used to Form Unions in Apparel Export Plants (1990–2003)				
	All Unions, El Salvador		*All Unions, Honduras*	
Transnational Activism	58% (11 out of 19 cases)		30% (12 out of 40 cases)	
	All Left Unions		*All Conservative Unions*	
Transnational Activism	54% (21 out of 39 cases)		10% (2 out of 20 cases)	
	Unions in El Salvador		*Unions in Honduras*	
	Left	*Conservative*	*Left*	*Conservative*
Total number of cases	*14 (100%)*	*5 (100%)*	*25 (100%)*	*15 (100%)*
Strikes (%)	14	20	88	13
Work-stoppages or slow-downs (%)	43	0	68	47
Alliances with local NGOs (%)	86	20	36	13
Pressure on state institutions (%)	86	100	88	87

Source. Author's structured interviews with union activists examining 59 cases of union formation.

favorable political contexts are less likely to strike for fear of state repression or dismissal and blacklisting by employers. However, left-oriented unions in El Salvador did say they were more likely to use work slows-downs—a confrontational tactic, but one that is less risky for the activists than a strike (see Table 2).

Next, I asked unionists whether they formed alliances with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as women's groups, human rights organizations, and faith-based institutions. Their responses indicated that left-oriented unionists, reflecting their belief in social alliances with like-minded progressive groups, were far more likely to work with domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the process of union formation than conservative labor unions. In particular, unions where there were extremely adverse state structures were more likely to turn to alliances with NGOs than in cases where state structures were only moderately unfavorable. This is a reflection of the difficulty of a ''going it alone'' strategy in countries with highly adverse state structures (see Table 2)[20]

Finally, I asked unionists to what extent their responses involve targeting state institutions. Here all unions, regardless of ideology and political access, indicated a high frequency of state-oriented actions. This is a reflection of the strong role that the state continues to play in union recognition in Central America. It is almost impossible to form a union without pressuring state institutions to one degree or another because the state is the authority that grants or denies union recognition. Simply presenting the legal documentation is not enough. Unionists must lobby, use the local media and, at times, protest outside the Ministry of Labor in order to gain union recognition (see Table 2).

Process Tracing

The structured interview results above illustrate the variations in labor actions in the apparel export industry according to differences in political access and labor ideologies. Yet, they do not provide a complete picture of how unionists

[20] The relationship between left unions and local NGOs was not without conflict. In particular, at times tensions developed between male-dominated union movements and women's groups interested in organizing the predominately female workforce in EPZs.

employed different organizing mechanisms to form trade unions in this sector, nor much less do they examine the mechanisms linking these strategies. To fill this gap, I employ process tracing. As noted by Alexander George and Timothy McKeown, process tracing ''is intended to investigate and explain the decision process by which various initial conditions are translated into outcomes'' (George and McKeown 1985, 35). Process tracing allows researchers to get beyond correlations to see how events fit together and to examine the decision-making process.

I spent the summers of 2001, 2002, and 2003 conducting field research in El Salvador and Honduras. During this time, I met with union leaders, visited factories, reviewed union archives, studied newspaper reports, and conducted lengthy, in-depth interviews with union leaders, and with some government officials and employers. With the union leaders, I was particularly interested in tracing the process by which they shifted strategies. How, when, and why did union leaders realize they needed to change strategies, and why did they choose one strategy over another? Their accounts provide important insights into the mechanisms behind the two logics of union formation.

Left Unions in El Salvador: As shown above, transnational activism was a very common strategy for left-oriented unionists in El Salvador. How did they arrive at this strategy? My field research indicates that transnationalism was neither an immediate nor an automatic response by left unionists. Rather, in the early 1990s left-oriented unionists continued to rely on their traditional strategy of strikes and base-level mobilization to organize workers in the export apparel industry.

The results were less than impressive. In the early to mid-1990s, in the process of organizing 300 workers, 5,044 were fired (Arévalo and Arriola 1996). It was through these dramatic and repeated failures that unionists realized the old strategies were not working. That is, it was only by analyzing repeated iterations of old strategies in new global production structures did they come to realize they needed to change strategies. But what strategy would work? Historically, the left in El Salvador had a strong distrust of state institutions. During the war, many unionists were imprisoned, exiled, or assassinated. The Peace Accords of 1992 were too recent to allow for a dramatic shift in attitudes. Moreover, the government did not change hands during this period. The conservative ARENA party still held power. As a result, the idea of turning to the state for support in unionizing apparel export workers did not appear to these unionists to be an option.

Rather, the left-oriented unionists turned to a source of support that they had used during the war: international solidarity groups. These groups had helped them pressure to win the release of arrested union activists, helped them protest the government in international human rights forums when a unionist was killed, and organized international speaking tours of unionists to explain the challenges facing unions in El Salvador at the time. It seemed natural that these international solidarity activists could help them in this new context. It was a trusted relationship that had been tried and proven over the years. Salvadoran unionists also turned to foreign labor unions with whom they were institutionally associated through an affiliation in the same international labor union organization.

The next challenge was to determine how to use these old alliances in the new context. The goal was no longer to protest an assassination of a union activist, but rather to organize an apparel export plant. The U.S. activists were able to play a particularly strategic role since most apparel MNCs with production in Central America had U.S.-based headquarters that could be targeted. What the U.S. activists also realized was that their chances of successfully shaming a corporation

were much better when they could frame the issue in terms of basic human rights such as physical abuse of workers, use of under-aged women workers, obligatory pregnancy testing, and wages that failed to provide for basic needs.

By the mid- and late-1990s, the new transnational strategy provided its first results: unions were successfully formed at the Mandarin and Do All plants. In the early 2000s, another union was formed at the Tainan plant. One left-oriented Salvadoran labor activist explained to me that organizing a union ''is achieved by integrating national and international pressure. We have to know what brands are being produced in the factories. There has to be NGO and union pressure.''[21] The interview reflects an awareness of international opportunities and a very strong belief that success can only be achieved by international pressure with base-level activism and social alliances. The left-oriented unions did not abandon their historic reliance on membership mobilization. But rather, they combined this with international pressure and NGO alliances in the form of transnational activism. (See Appendix, Table A2, for a summary of all case studies.)

Conservative Unions in El Salvador: Conservative labor unions also came to realize that their traditional strategies for organizing workers in apparel export plants were not working. Indeed, it took them much longer to realize they needed to change strategies and to determine what a new strategy would look like. In 1995, while the left union strategy of organizing using transnational activism resulted in the formation of four unions with 730 members, the conservative unions had only two unions with 125 members. Yet, the success by the left unions created a panic in the business community and government circles. Employers referred to the interference of foreign activists in domestic affairs, and the government threatened to deny visas to foreigners known to have supported left unionization in the apparel sector.

At this time, the conservative labor unions saw an opportunity. They could gain the favor of employers by offering ''labor peace'' in exchange for union recognition and financial support. For example, to form a union at the Amitex factory, one conservative labor organization signed an agreement with management in which it promised that there would be no labor unrest (strikes, slow-downs, etc). In return, management agreed to make a deduction from all of the workers' paychecks in payment of ''union dues.''[22] In other cases, this labor organization requested union recognition and lump-sum monthly payments from the company in exchange for preventing left-oriented unions from unionizing the work force. In the case of the Gabo factory, the group received USD 6,857.04 per year from the owner.[23]

Other factory owners made similar pacts. One employer told me: ''If I can avoid labor conflicts by making monthly payments, of course I will do it.''[24] This statement reflects assumptions on the part of the factory owner of two types of unions: one that causes conflicts (e.g., the left-oriented unionists) and one that accepts money in exchange for labor peace (e.g., the conservative unionists). It also provides explicit evidence of a radical flank mechanism. The owner accepted the conservative union not because he liked unions, but because the conservative union was the least bad option. It is the viable threat presented by left unionism that made success by conservative unionism possible. And it was only after the success of the left unions that the conservative unions could use

[21] Author's interview, San Salvador, July 14, 2001.

[22] Legally, only workers who are union members pay dues. Moreover, the factory agreed to make the deduction before the union chapter was legally established. ''Convenio Entre La Empresa Industria Amitex, S.A. de C.V. and FENASTRAS,'' October 11, 1994.

[23] *Primera Plana,* ''Más Controversias en torna a Juan J. Huezo,'' March 24, 1994, p. 4.

[24] Author's interview, San Salvador. March 1996.

the threat of left unionization to grow in members. By 2001, conservative unions reported over 2,690 members in the sector, including unions at the Yesan and Gabo factories.

Left Unions in Honduras: In Honduras, while political access and labor relations practices are more favorable to labor relative to those in El Salvador, industrial restructuring in the apparel sector still necessitated a re-thinking of strategies. By 1994, left-oriented unionists had only managed to form three unions in EPZs. Only after experimenting successfully with transnational activism did these unionists alter their strategic approach. By the late 1990s, two left-oriented Honduran labor activists, Ayax Irías and Héctor Hernández, reflected: ''The nature of the [apparel export] sector suggests the need to establish a *non-traditional* model of unionism'' (Irías Coello and Hernández Fuentes 1999, 17–18; emphasis mine). They conclude: ''National and international solidarity is an indispensable response to the transnational globalization of capital'' (Irías Coello and Hernández Fuentes 1999, 27). These statements illustrate how the changing structure of production necessitated a shift in strategies and that left-oriented unionists came to believe that national strategies must be complemented with transnational activism.

Left-oriented unions began finding ways to use transnational activist campaigns more strategically. They also developed alliances with a local women's group and a legal rights group. While the unions focused on organizing, the NGOs provided training and legal assistance to workers. As in El Salvador, left-oriented unions worked with U.S. unions and NGOs to put pressure on apparel corporations. For example, in the case of the Kimi factory, the U.S. NGO, USLEAP—in coordination with U.S. and international unions—put pressure on Gap and J.C. Penney to ensure union formation. In the case of Sale City, the National Labor Committee worked with the left-labor confederation, CUTH, to pressure J.C. Penney into accepting a union.

Yet, the relationship between the foreign activists and the Honduran unionists was not as crucial as in El Salvador and for periods of time the Hondurans preferred to pursue their campaigns without foreign support. They were able to do this because they had greater domestic political access than unionists in El Salvador. Not only was the threshold for union formation and bargaining lower (as mentioned above), but the left-oriented unionists developed contacts in the Ministry of Labor (sympathetic insiders) that helped them when attempting to form unions. This was the case of the Warners factory where left-oriented activists formed a union without transnational pressure.

Their capacity to combine base-level mobilization, local political access, and some international pressure helped them to grow from four unions with 1,200 members in 1991, to 11 unions with 5,058 members in 2001. Overall, transnational activism was used to a lesser degree than in El Salvador. In 16 cases out of 20 successful attempts to form unions in the Honduran EPZ sector, left-oriented unionists said that local organizing, militant strike activity, and local political pressure were the most important factors for success. Transnational activism provided some needed additional pressure on the employers.

Conservative Unions in Honduras: A different model of organizing was used by the CGT, the more conservative labor center in Honduras. Like conservative unions in El Salvador, the CGT did not use international unions or NGO alliances to achieve success. Its discourse and actions reflected its collaborative orientation. A leader of this labor center elaborated on the CGT's strategy by noting to me: ''We have to solve our problems here, without foreign intervention. We don't use denouncements in the U.S. We are against NGOs getting involved in labor

issues. This is the responsibility of [national] labor unions.''[25] What this suggests is both the CGT's nationalist orientation and its inclination to distrust foreign activists.

But what strategies was this union able to use? Like conservative unions in El Salvador, the CGT benefited from employers' concern that left-oriented unions would organize unions in their factories. These conservative unionists perceived this preference on the part of the employers as an opportunity which they could exploit. One CGT organizer in the apparel sector explained to me the union's strategy in these terms:

> What we do is form the unions without going on strike or causing other types of problems. Then we go in and explain to management that we are a different type of union [from the radical unions], that we are not going to cause disruptions, and that we want to find a way to live together as workers, union and company.[26]

This quote reflects a deliberate use of the radical flank mechanism on the part of this union. It is the threat created by the success of the left-oriented unions that allows this activist to present the union as a moderate alternative to the left-oriented unions, an alternative that will not disrupt production. The employers responded positively to the overture and the radical flank mechanism produced results for the conservative unions. For example, when left-oriented unionists began organizing a union in the Hu-Ywa factory in Puerto Cortés in 1995, the employers worked to block the union and replace it with a conservative union. A similar situation took place in 1994 when the left-oriented unions attempted to form a union in Certified Apparel Services of Honduras.

As in El Salvador, the sequencing of unionization is revealing. While no conservative unions existed in the apparel export sector prior to 1992, left-oriented unions were slowly growing in strength. In the mid-1990s, left-oriented unions added transnational activism to their mobilization strategy and began to grow, by the late 1990s they became a threat to employers. It was at this time that the conservative unions could exploit the radical-flank mechanism. By 2001, without using any transnational activism to pressure brand-name corporations, but rather by relying on the threat of left unionization, they had organized 6,040 members compared with the 5,058 members organized by left-oriented unionists.

Where this organization differed from some of conservative unions in El Salvador is that it did not resort to blatant forms of corruption. Indeed, on a very limited budget, it formed a large number of factory-level unions by combining radical flank pressure with the traditional hard work of organizing. The base-level organizers also appeared more open to the occasional use of international alliances than the leaders in their parent organization, the CGT. Indeed, subsequent interviews in the late 2000s revealed that, as the threat of left unionization declined, these conservative unionists pursued a few international campaigns, most notably by focusing on factories that produced American university-licensed apparel.

Conclusions

In internationalized industries like apparel, globalization and state transformation have rendered labor's old union strategies less effective. Domestic strategies of base-level mobilization (for left unions) and state support (for conservative

[25] Author's interview with Luis Ramírez, coordinator of the CGT for San Pedro Sula. San Pedro Sula, Honduras, June 25, 2001.

[26] Author's interview, San Pedro Sula, Honduras, August 1, 2003.

unions) were no longer viable in this highly mobile export industry. What my research has found is that two new union strategies emerged that operated under distinct but inter-connected mechanisms. For left-oriented labor unions, the response to the new challenges entailed combining base-level mobilization with transnational activist pressure on multinational apparel corporations. Conservative unions formed their unions by presenting themselves to employers as a moderate alternative to the left via a radical flank mechanism.

These findings challenge economistic and social movement approaches to the study of labor activism. While both approaches provide part of an explanation for when and how workers form unions, they do not cover the full range of strategies and mechanisms of union formation. Most notably, they do not explain why unionists in the same country and in the same industry opt for very different responses to economic internationalization. I have argued that while economic and state transformation shift the range of strategic options open to labor, they do not limit labor to one best option. Labor has a new range of strategic choices. Ideological orientation and historical experiences help determine whether labor will opt for transnational activism or plant-level cross-class collaboration.

This article also makes a methodological contribution. Much of the research on labor activism in the global apparel industry has focused on left-oriented unions that have successfully used transnational activism to form unions. But to examine the probability of transnational activism, such a methodology errs by drawing on the dependent variable. This article avoids this pitfall by expanding on the range of cases to examine all attempts to form labor unions by both left-oriented and conservative unions. Statistical analysis, structured interviews, and process tracing were used to gain greater insights on the different mechanisms of union formation in apparel export plants. Combined, they provide strong evidence for transnational and radical flank mechanisms.

Labor responses to economic and political transformations remain dynamic processes. By the mid-2000s, with the entry of China into the WTO and the liberalization of trade in the apparel sector, competitive pressures escalated in Latin America and some countries saw a drop in apparel export employment. As a result, union organizing became more tenuous. Yet, labor unionists continue to experiment with new strategies. What the findings presented here suggest is that those new strategies will continue to shift in reflection not only of changing economic structures, but also in accordance with shifts in political opportunities and how labor unionists come to perceive those shifts based on their historical experiences and ideational influences.

Appendix

Table A1. El Salvador and Honduras: Comparison of Political Access and Labor Relations Regimes (1990–2003)

Measures of Political Access & Labor Relations Regimes	*El Salvador*	*Honduras*
Strength and effectiveness of tripartite (state, employer, labor) consultation mechanisms	Weak	Moderate
Number of ''peak'' labor organizations	9	3
Government ratification of ILO Conventions 87 & 98/right to organize & bargain (pre-2003)	no	yes
Labor Party in Power	No	No

TABLE A1. (Continued)

Measures of Political Access & Labor Relations Regimes	*El Salvador*	*Honduras*
Legal requirement of workers needed to form a union	35	30
Legal requirement of union status to obligate employers to bargain collectively	51% of workers in an enterprise must be union members	No union membership requirement
Law allows for competing unions in one work place	Yes	No
Number of labor courts	9	11
Number of state labor inspectors (pre-2003)	40	105
Ministry of Labor budget as a percentage of total central government expenditures	0.23%	0.89%
Gov't expenditure on social spending as a share of total gov't expenditures (1990s)	27.00%	34.30%
Summary classification of union ''political access''	Highly unfavorable	Moderately unfavorable

Sources. Author's interviews and review of countries' labor legislation. Data for unionization is based on Ministries of Labor statistical yearbooks. Data on social security expenditure is based on IMF sources.

TABLE A2. Summary of Case Studies

Domestic Political Access	Union Ideology	Local Labor Center	Targetted Local Company	Alliance with Int'l NGOs? (Which?)	Alliance with Int'l Unions? (Which?)	Pact with Employers	Pressure on MNC? (Which?)
Highly unfavorable (El Salvador)	Left-oriented	CSTS	Mandarin	Yes (NLC)	Limited (UNITE)	No	Yes (Gap)
		CSTS	Do All	Yes (NLC)	Limited (AFL-CIO; UNITE)	No	Yes (Liz Claiborne)
		CSTS	Tainan	Yes (USLEAP)	Yes (AFL-CIO; ITGLWF)	No	Yes (Gap and Target)
	Conservative	CNTS/STIASSYC	Yesan	No	No	No	No
		FENASTRAS	Gabo	No	No	Yes	No
		FENASTRAS	Amitex	No	No	Yes	No
Moderately unfavorable (Honduras)	Left-oriented	CUTH	Warners	No	No	No	No
		CUTH	Sale City	Yes (NLC)	No	No	Yes (J.C. Penney)
		SITRAKIMIH	Kimi	Yes (USLEAP)	Yes (UNITE-ITGLWF)	No	Yes (Gap & J.C. Penney)
	Conservative	CGT	Winners	No	Limited (WCL)	No	No
		CGT	Hu-Ywa	No	No	Yes	No
		CGT	Certified Apparel	No	No	Yes	No

Source. Author's interviews.

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