



## Article

# Transnational Advocacy Networks of Migrants and Asylum Seekers' Human Rights: The San Diego—Tijuana Border in the Trump Era

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**Abstract:** How do advocacy organizations from the San Diego—Tijuana area contest and resist Trump's immigration policies? What resources and tactics do they use to externalize their demands at the local and international levels? Based on semi-structured interviews with eight advocacy organizations—with a local, binational, and international presence—that have mobilized to externalize their demands on different local and international arenas, this research aims to answer these questions by applying the transnational advocacy networks literature to the mentioned case study. Our main findings show that transnational relations between advocacy organizations represent a counterbalance to Trump's immigration policies. Some organizations have adapted to react to a set of new policies implemented by the administration, and, at the same time, they have diffused information, values, and ideas as part of their resistance tactics. Through transnational advocacy networks, local organizations have accomplished international relevance, turning into key players of advocacy in the region. These networks demonstrate that, despite Trump's restricting immigration policies, transnational channels between these actors remain open for collective action.

**Keywords:** transnational advocacy networks; undocumented migrant; asylum seekers; human rights; United States; Mexico

## 1. Introduction

With the rise of Donald Trump's administration, considerable changes in policies and immigration enforcement practices have been implemented in the U.S.—Mexico border and in the interior of the United States, that have conveyed in a rise on human rights concerns and violations for those undocumented people in the United States, and those who seek international protection from the U.S. government. Even though the current administration immigration policies are far from new, grassroots and transnational resistance have had to adapt to an array of new policies by developing new contention strategies and advocating for the human rights of undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers. It is in this context, and when local authorities cannot guarantee the respect of people's human rights in different human mobility contexts, that the international arena represents an opportunity to wield pressure and pursue significant progress on their demands (Reinsberg and West 2017).

Likewise, since the 1990s, immigration enforcement and deterrence strategies have increased the risks of crossing undocumented into the United States (Cornelius 2005). In this sense, the military force's involvement in law enforcement has also raised concerns for human rights and the accountability of immigration agents (Dunn 2001). Although for some authors, it does not represent a systematic violation

of human rights (Meneses 2003), some cases that have developed in the last years have evidenced human rights abuses for migrants and the international conventions in which the United States is a signatory. These violations are a consequence of border enforcement practices, which comprise a diverse set of practices based on prevention through deterrence to discourage and prevent the arrival of migrants and refugees in their territory, or that manifest as barriers to access the asylum system (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Tan 2017).

On the other side, the Mexican state has also contributed to the detriment of human mobility in the territory and its northern border. Thus, Mexican civil society's actions and responses are not entirely based on the strengthening of Trump's immigration policies; instead, they respond to the necessity of collaboration to mitigate the adverse conditions of the Mexican migration policies. Precisely, Mexico has also implemented an immigration enforcement regime that perceives immigrants as a threat to its "national security," where border enforcement has been privileged over individual rights and liberties. Moreover, the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* (National Institute of Migration), incorporated into the National System of Security since 2005, began in 2007 to align and comply with U.S. immigration demands. This is embodied with the signature of a regional security pact known as the Merida Initiative (Villafuerte and Garcia 2018), that continues to operate and that associates migration within the national security questions, at the same tier as terrorism and organized crime.

The progressive criminalization of irregular migration in Mexico was accompanied by a crescent tension between migrants rights organizations and the Mexican State, up to a point wherein January 2020, the National Institute of Migration communicated that they were unlimitedly suspending the access of civil society organizations to detention centers (contrary to the Mexican Migration Law) with the aim of not hindering the operation of the facilities (Perez 2020). This measure, considered a symbolic lack of will of the Mexican government to protect the rights of migrants, amid local and international protests, was soon overturned on the following days (Tourliere 2020).

Moreover, the criminalization discourse towards migrants and refugees has been present in Donald Trump's administration since the very first days. Trump's immigration policy changes arose from his campaign rhetoric that criminalized immigrants and refugees, portraying them as threats to the United States' national security (Heyer 2018). His campaign promises began to catalyze on the first days of his presidency with the issue of some executive orders that instructed the construction of a wall on the US-Mexico border, settled a selective travel ban, expanded the removal process, and called for the hiring of more immigration agents (Heyer 2018). The securitization of migration has led to stricter immigration policies, making people take more dangerous routes along borders (Blus 2013). As mentioned before, migration and border enforcement are not new. Nonetheless, the Trump administration has hardened detention processes, removals, and deterrence strategies (FitzGerald et al. 2019).

As Basok (2009) argues, it is relevant to analyze how local actors frame, translate, and negotiate counter-hegemonic human rights that liberal nation-states find difficult to accept. Following this idea, Trump's policies that have impacted on the San Diego and Tijuana border can be classified into three new practices in the region. First, the adoption of "Operation Streamline" in San Diego—after 13 years of local resistance—that prosecutes unauthorized migrants (ACLU n.d.c); the issue of the "Zero Tolerance Policy" that sought to criminalize further immigrants that entered the country irregularly; and the adoption of the "Migrant Protection Protocols" that returned asylum seekers to Mexico while waiting for their immigration court hearing. In May 2018, the Department of Justice began to implement the "Zero Tolerance Policy" that established that any person that tried to cross irregularly into the United States, independently if they are asylum seekers or family units, they would be processed without exception (Kandel 2019). According to Human Rights Watch (2018), since the implementation of this policy, judiciary actions for detained individuals rose in about 134%. One of the most evident consequences of this policy was the family separation case along the US-Mexico border. Non-official figures estimate that around 3000 children were separated from their parents because they could not be held in criminal custody (Pierce et al. 2018). The zero-tolerance policy aimed to dissuade family

units' arrival, which comprised more than one-third of apprehended people in the first months of the fiscal year 2018 (Pierce et al. 2018).

In November 2018, the Migrant Protection Protocols were initiated in California and soon implemented in the ports of entry of the southern border (Pierce 2019; Solis 2019). According to the official records, this program establishes that any person that seeks to enter into the United States—irregularly, apprehended at the border, or without proper documentation—can be returned to Mexico awaiting their immigration case (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2019). This program was negotiated along with the Mexican government and, as reported by Human Rights Watch, by early June 2019 more than 15,000 people were returned to Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana, and Mexicali, more than 40,000 by September 2019 (Human Rights Watch 2019), and more than 57,000 by February 2020, only in the San Diego—Tijuana border (Rivlin-Nadler 2020).

In February 2019, Donald Trump declared a national emergency on the southern border because the southern border situation represented a security and humanitarian crisis that threatened U.S. national security (White House 2019). Furthermore, the official discourse framed as if asylum seekers have taken advantage of legal voids in U.S. Immigration Laws, which calls for the arrival of thousands of asylum seekers with false asylum statements (Galli 2018). Under the current administration, asylum seekers have been exposed to stricter qualification processes, as it is the case of credible fear interviews, putting in risk the non-refoulment principle (Pierce 2019). One of the first actions that his administration undertook was the limitation of cases of private crimes, such as domestic and gang violence, that comprise a big part of persecutions and arrivals into the country (Pierce et al. 2018). Additionally, the current administration announced in August 2019 the plans to terminate the Flores Agreement of 1997, impeding to put into custody minors. As stated by the President, this agreement was an incentive to cross without documents and one of the leading causes that caused the arrival of families in the southern border (Department of Homeland Security 2019). This change in the management of minors in the United States has changed radically from the last administration, which sought to implement less severe policies (Galli 2018).

As a result, local and transnational activists have signaled the evident human rights abuses linked directly to these new policies. Indeed, stricter immigration policies have caused deaths and have been a concern of local and international organizations. Only in the fiscal year 2018, the United States Border Patrol registered 283 along the border, ascribed to climate conditions, and the use of excessive force (USBP 2018). This situation has raised concerns about human rights and human security of migrants. The human rights situation on the border attracted the attention of the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) by conducting a visit to the United States southern border in San Diego and Laredo in 2019. After the visit to the border and detention centers, and holding meetings with local advocates from San Diego and Tijuana, the main findings were based on barriers to the exercise of the right of legal assistance, failure on deaths accountability, and access to international protection for asylees. Moreover, they reported on the conditions of detention, particularly unjust detentions, access to medical care, and lack of access to legal counsel.

While much of the transnational advocacy network literature has focused on what Basok (2009) calls as hegemonic rights—that are congruent with liberal values of equality and freedom—this article aims to identify the political strategies that transnational advocacy networks have used to respond to the Trump administration, their strengths and limitations on their transnational collaboration. By interviewing eight different non-profit organizations in San Diego and Tijuana, and applying the results to the transnational advocacy literature, some of the key findings illustrate the transnational mobilization for migrants' human rights in San Diego and Tijuana in the age of Trump.

In particular, it examines the forms of collaboration that local and international organizations have made, the different political strategies to advocate for the human rights of migrants and refugees, and presents an evaluation of the strategies of the work the networks have done. This research is particularly relevant because it aims to offset a void in the study of transnational advocacy networks where, according to the literature review, there is no actual research of how advocacy networks have

collaborated in the border region during Trump's presidency.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, it contributes to recent empirical knowledge by basing the main findings on first-hand information that was obtained by interviewing different actors that are part of these networks.

The interviews conducted aimed to get to know the advocacy work they have been doing historically, but specifically during the early years of Trump's presidency and how they advocate and cooperate transnationally. The following article is divided into four sections. First, we describe the methodological approach of our study, then we clarify theoretical concepts of transnational advocacy networks and transnational contentious politics, focusing on the resistance and mobilization tactics, as well as the level of influence. Third, we present the empirical research results on transnational advocacy networks and migrants' human rights in San Diego and Tijuana, concentrating on activism in the age of Trump immigration policies. Lastly, we highlight the main findings of the research and establish future directions for research. This article seeks to contribute to the existent scholarship of advocacy of migrants' human rights by examining the strategies to persuade, advocate, and change state practices that lead to human rights violations.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Notably, due to the absence of previous works on this topic on the border, the transnational space of San Diego and Tijuana was chosen because it corresponds to the largest transnational metropolitan area in the U.S.—Mexico border and constitutes, as well, one of the busiest ports of entry in the world. Additionally, Tijuana represents one of the cities with the greatest interculturality, tradition, and history as a city of transit in the long-mile border towards the United States, while San Diego has implemented policies and practices that identify the city as a "Sanctuary City."<sup>2</sup>

This research, which describes and explores the transnational network collaboration, was carried by applying a mixed qualitative method. First, we implemented documental research to identify the considerations, problems, and challenges of transnational advocacy. We resourced secondary literature, such as reports published by international and local organizations, intergovernmental organizations, and first-hand information obtained from civil society actors in San Diego and Tijuana.

Then, during 2019 we requested an interview with 15 local, binational, and international organizations that work in the border region. Some interviews did not occur because the organizations referred that they were understaffed and overloaded with cases, and others did not reply. Ultimately, we applied semi-structured interviews to eight strategic actors and members of these transnational advocacy networks of migrants and refugee rights organizations. Two interviews were done in person, and the rest of them through conference calls. All of the informants gave their written consent to answer the questions. The interviews took between 45 and 60 min and were completed in a secure and relaxed environment, allowing them to make complementary questions and clarify answers. During this process, we inquired on how the organizations work and advocate, their degree of collaboration, the advocacy tactics they allude to (such as information diffusion, naming, and shaming, among others), and the collective actions they have made.

The representatives of the organizations interviewed represent our unit of analysis. The selection criteria were based on their migrant's rights advocacy character-based in San Diego or Tijuana, without its headquarters necessarily being there. In the end, they represent a pool of religious and secular organizations in the region, as well as local and international organizations as shown in Table 1.

<sup>1</sup> Based on our literature review, only a thesis has been published in 2019. See [Salazar \(2019\)](#). Transnational Immigrant Activism. México and the United States (Thesis of Degree). Faculty of Occidental College, Los Angeles.

<sup>2</sup> Although there is not a legal definition of this term, a Sanctuary city is identified as one that limits or prohibits cooperation of local law enforcement authorities with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

**Table 1.** Organizations interviewed.

| Location  | Organizations                                 | Creation Date | Area of Geographic Influence | ¿Transnational Cooperation?             |
|-----------|---|---------------|------------------------------|---|
| SD        | American Friends Service Committee *          | 1917          | International                | Yes                                     |
| SD        | American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)         | 1920          | National                     | Eventual                                |
| SD        | Border Angels                                 | 1986          | Binational                   | Yes                                     |
| SD        | San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium (SDIRC) | 2007          | Local                        | Yes, informally                         |
| SD        | San Diego Rapid Response Network (SDRRN)      | 2017          | Local                        | Yes (some organizations of the network) |
| SD and TJ | Espacio Migrante                              | 2012          | Binational                   | Yes                                     |
| TJ        | Casa del Migrante *                           | 1987          | Local                        | Yes                                     |
| TJ        | Alma Migrante                                 | 2017          | Local                        | Yes                                     |

(\*: Religious organizations). Source: Authors' elaboration. SD, San Diego; TJ, Tijuana.

The information thus collected is reliable and according to the theoretical framework of transnational advocacy networks. The authors carried out a qualitative cross-sectional study, which included an analysis strategy based on validation techniques to obtain reliable findings supported by a multi-layered approach based on informants' textual citations and providing details of the conditions and context. The association between the interview data, secondary sources, and the analysis made by the authors strengthen the accuracy of the results presented.

### 3. Transnational Advocacy Networks and Transnational Contentious Politics: Theoretical Framework

Transnational advocacy networks are commonly identified within the transnational social movement literature. A transnational advocacy network includes “those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services” (Keck and Sikkink 1998). These networks serve as structures (Hafner-Burton et al. 2008) and actors (Keck and Sikkink 1998) that work domestically and transnationally that intend to influence discourse, procedures, policies, and behavior that, by drawing upon a variety of resources, aim to produce a change in State practices (Keck and Sikkink 1998). In other words, transnational networks seek to change interests, identities, and structures of power and meaning (Khagram et al. 2002). Activists in the network are settled in a specific national context, but they are also engaged in contentious activities that involve transnational contacts and issues to set up their demands at different levels (Tarrow 2005). Therefore, they are important on the national, regional, and transnational levels (Keck and Sikkink 2002).

A variety of attributes and components constitute the central core of the network concept. The first is the centrality of values and ideas that the members of the network share. These networks are composed of different actors or organizational forms: nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), informal associations and coalitions, international nongovernmental organizations, local social movements, and, in some cases, intergovernmental organizations. Advocacy networks try to insert themselves in international processes to influence policy outcomes by framing issues to target audiences and actors comprehensively. In this context, domestic and international NGOs play an essential role in initiating actions and pressuring more powerful actors to advance on specific policies by introducing new ideas, providing information, and lobbying for policy changes (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

Second, the emergence of these actors is related to the conditions of the local structures. For instance, if channels of communication between local groups and the government are blocked or do not respond to activists' demands, they might appeal to the transnational arena. Also, if the network or activists within believe that networking will expand their campaigns, they will seek for transnational contacts. Lastly, if international conferences or spaces create arenas for forming and



strengthening networks, advocacy networks will take advantage of those spaces (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Drawing on transnational contentious politics literature, diffusion and internalization are other processes that allow the protests' transnational activity. Protest domestications refer to the integration of a conflict that originated outside the local context or politics, and activists adopt that from a different country. Given the closeness in the San Diego and Tijuana border, no conflict has remained entirely local and, therefore, transnational relations have existed for many years. This movement on different local and transnational contexts is identified by Tarrow and McAdam (2004) as a scale shift. This last refers to the intensification of the protest in which the demands of the activists migrate from the local to the national or the transnational level, allowing different actors to hold transnational contacts on a domestic issue.

Another attribute characteristic to the networks is the political strategies employed to establish their demands. The overall repertoire of action includes creating new ideas, norms, and discourses into policy debates, and norm implementation by monitoring and documenting information. Therefore, information is at the core of the partnerships of these actors. This cooperation is not only limited to information, but also limited by resources, services, and personnel. Regarding the political strategies and tactics, the activists within the network might appeal in their efforts of persuasion; Keck and Sikkink (1998) identify such into information politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics. In this sense, information politics refers to the ability to generate useful information and share it, where it will create more impact.

Transnational advocacy networks provide novel information from non-traditional sources, usually providing not only facts but also testimony. Also, networks investigate problems, use that information to frame issues, and alert the press and policymakers to attempt to produce change. In the transnational protest, information politics and monitoring are a tool to externalize the demands made by activists. To accomplish this, they must have external allies who have the power to diffuse information about the abuses (Tarrow 2005). Generally, the information presented by these actors refers to principled shared values or ideas. The importance and power of information made possible the appearance of several non-governmental organizations that collect information (Tallberg et al. 2015), and other authors place information politics at the core of the different resistance strategies by establishing that information is required at the framing process, agenda-setting, investigation, monitoring, and persuasion (Pruce and Cosima 2016).

Leverage politics depend on the pressure over more powerful actors to bring policy change and influence state practices directly. To attain this, they need to identify material or moral leverage in the development of their campaigns. While material leverage is usually linked with money or goods, networks focus on moral leverage. This involves what some academics call as the "mobilization of shame" where the actions of target actors are on the light of international scrutiny (Keck and Sikkink 1998). "Naming and shaming" strategies involve exposing state actions on the international level or publicly to mobilize local and international support and, hence, alter or change state behavior. Due to the lack of monetary or material power, moral influence is best excreted by these actors. Generally, in this strategy, activists publicly expose the violations to which states have adopted and legal compromises (Friman 2015). Although this strategy might not change state behavior itself, it could be the first step to more effective international efforts. This strategy depends on information politics concerning human rights violations and norm monitoring conducted by other organizations (Franklin 2015).

Accountability politics entails that one actor has the right to make other actors comply with a set of normative standards, judge if they have succeeded in complimenting their responsibilities, and impose sanctions if considered that they have failed to accomplish their responsibilities (Grant and Keohane 2005). In this strategy, activists refer international compromises to which a government has engaged to comply—such as human rights or democracy—and use these standards to expose the disparity between discourse and practice (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Accountability politics aims to expose and sanction abuses that are considered contrary to norms and standards. To the execution of

this, it is necessary for the existence of institutions that provide information to hold accountable one State or actor (Grant and Keohane 2005). All of these strategies and tactics are potentially important due to the absence of military or economic power of these actors, contrary to States and corporations and their authority and ability to forge interests and public opinion (Florini and Simmons 2000).

Other resources that advocates might utilize are framing ideas and presenting them to mobilize attention, turning them into frames that define themes and strategies of action. Additionally, public protests, educational campaigns, and media relations are part of the contention strategies so that they may diffuse their message.

Keck and Sikkink (1998) propose different categories of network influence to assess the levels of influence. These include issue creation and agenda-setting, the influence of official discourse, influence on national and international institutions and procedures, influence on policy change in target actors, and impact on state behavior. In this context, networks influence discursive positions when they persuade states and international organizations to support international declarations or change domestic policy practices (Keck and Sikkink 2002). Fox (2002) argues that binational coalitions and networks have achieved more influence over official discourse than on official practices of the target actors. These stages of impact, Keck and Sikkink argue, make governments more vulnerable to the claims they frame in their demands.

The effectiveness of transnational mobilization depends on the existence of certain conditions. Burgerman (1998) argues that there needs to be international norms relevant to the issue activists are mobilizing. Domestic groups that hold relations with transnational activists are also required, since the existence of sustained communication between different networks and organizations in each country makes more feasible the diffusion of values, strategies, and objectives (Smith and Bandy 2005). Moreover, transnational networks are effective when there are a relatively significant number and size of the organizations that have sustained exchanges of contacts and information (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

Furthermore, transnational contentious politics are as sporadic, collective interaction among makers of claims, and their objectives (Tarrow 2013). The organization of these types of contention is possible through transnational advocacy networks, transnational coalitions, and transnational social movements. Transnational advocacy networks depict the most informal collaboration between non-state actors, where sustained coordination between its members is not present (Smith and Bandy 2005). The source of the protests can be either transnational or domestic, that allows that advocates can migrate on the international and local level by using their resources and opportunities to leverage over other actors. To be considered transnational, Tarrow (2001) states that an entity must have political or social bases outside the target State or actor. As stated in the literature on transnational advocacy networks, the openness of international institutions allowed the proliferation of transnational processes in which non-governmental organizations, networks, and coalitions participate (Sikkink 2004). Scale shift is the contention process in which a domestic issue migrates from the domestic arena to the transnational space. In the transnational contention process, this concept demands attention since activists have to face obstacles related to the gaps and costs of mobilization, in comparison to domestic contention (Tarrow and McAdam 2004).

The transnational processes and mechanisms presented before manifested the diversity of actors that interact outside and inside, combining domestic and transnational activism over an issue (Tarrow 2005). Overall, transnational contentious politics calls for activists to group resources, take advantage of the opportunities, and frame their approach to allow actors to identify and cooperate towards a common target (Tarrow 2001).

#### 4. Transnational Advocacy Networks in the San Diego and Tijuana Border

Over the last years, binational civil society in the region has mobilized around diverse issues, such as the adoption of the North American Free Trade Agreement, environmental concerns, economic integration, and migration (Fox 2002). The Immigrant Rights Movement in the United States emerged as a mechanism to compensate for the different policies and practices against immigrants (Salazar 2019).

This movement has its origins since the application of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986 that, besides giving a regular status to millions of immigrants, also aimed to deter irregular immigration by criminalizing undocumented worker's hiring.

For the past 30 years, at the local level, San Diego and Tijuana have developed a base of grassroots organizations that formed as a counterstrategy of immigration policies that impact on the border to document and report human rights abuses from immigration agencies—such as Border Patrol and ICE—and the overall immigration system (Huspek et al. 1998; Moreno and Niño 2013).

Until the second half of the 1990s, local organizations in San Diego and Tijuana began to hold relations with the instauration of Operation Gatekeeper in 1994 to advocate for immigrant rights (Moreno and Niño 2013). During the first years of the instrumentalization of immigration and border enforcement, with the implementation of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IRIIRA) in 1996, removals became consolidated, and motives behind the removals expanded. This last turned the border between San Diego and Tijuana to become one of the main ports of repatriations into Mexico, as well as the most concurred port of entry into the United States. Since the very start of migration enforcement programs, advocacy and humanitarian organizations have developed a core role in assisting, defending, supporting, and advocating for migrants in transit, settlement, and return (Moreno and Niño 2013).

For the last 10 years, the work and activism of these organizations have adapted to the changing dynamics of migratory flows. At first, migration was mainly from Mexican males that aimed to work in the United States—say, economic migration. However, in the last five years, migration into the United States has been mainly forced displacements from Central America, including non-accompanied children, family units, and women. Apprehensions at the border evidenced these trends in 2019; only in the San Diego Border Patrol Sector, there was a 341% increase in family units apprehensions that aimed to seek asylum in the United States (U.S. Customs and Border Protection 2019).

In the last two years, transnational networks have called for the respect of migrants' human rights in the San Diego and Tijuana border, adjusting their demands to new policies in the region the Trump administration has brought. As stated by Salazar (2019), "today, the Immigrant Rights Movement is largely made up of key players that range from small community groups to national service organizations and include legal and organizing groups, churches and faith-based organizations, small service organizations, state, and city advocacy organizations, as well as trade unions and labor federations." Therefore, the three main activities of their activism were service-provisions, social organizing, and advocacy.

The diversification of the migratory flows, alongside the strengthening of the political and immigration policies, bolstered the transnational collaboration between different non-governmental organizations. For instance, Asylum Access, based in California, opened a post in Mexico in July 2015 in the southern and northern border of Mexico (Asylum Access n.d.). The Tijuana office opened in 2019, located inside *Casa del Migrante Tijuana*, is the only of their posts based on the northern border in Mexico. Their installment in the oldest shelter in the northern border of Mexico demonstrates the efforts of combining methodologies and purposes between new and previous organizations in the region. It is in this context that the complexity and diversity of the NGOs—traditionally focused on service and humanitarian assistance, such as the "*Casas del Migrante*" (refuges for all population in-migration context)—adapted and acquired new tools as a response to immigration restrictions and intended to collaborate with their pairs and provide legal counsel to people that need it.

#### 4.1. Advocacy and Humanitarian Organizations in the Political and Geographic Context

Traditionally, the San Diego and Tijuana border has been one of the main ports of entry in which immigration deterrence programs were implemented, with Operation Gatekeeper of 1994 and the construction of the border wall (Cornelius 2005). Human rights in the 60-mile border have been one of the most significant concerns of different immigrant rights and humanitarian organizations, since this region, although mainly urbanized, has zones that are potentially dangerous for migrants due to



the meteorological and geographical landscapes in the zone (Nuñez-Nieto and Garcia 2007). In the last years, undocumented immigration to the United States has diminished as a result of the border enforcement practices. On the contrary, the refugee arrivals have increased—mainly family units and non-accompanied children—from the Northern Triangle of Central America, Haiti, and some extra-continental asylum seekers from the African continent. These new trends illustrate the general pattern and changes that U.S. immigration has had. Traditionally, Tijuana has been a receiver and transit municipality of migrants that seek to cross into the United States, of repatriated people, and, in the last months, for those who wait for their immigration courts (Moreno and Niño 2013).

The geospatial context's relevance lies in the "Sanctuary City" condition of San Diego, and Tijuana as a strategic border city that has been an entry point for the last 30 years (Moreno and Niño 2013). Although federal immigration policy became stricter after the terrorist attacks of 2001, at the local level, some counties have sought to protect to migrants even they are denied at the federal level (Wells 2004). California is distinguished by its "Sanctuary city" policy adopted in 2017, limiting communication and cooperation between local and federal law enforcement agencies regarding the immigration status of a person. As it came to be until 2018, it had to confront with Trump's executive order that punished sanctuary cities (Villazor and Gulasekaram 2019).

The region's dynamism has permitted the extension of transnational relations between local civil society from both countries (Fox 2002). For the past two years, local non-governmental organizations in San Diego and Tijuana have resisted Trump's immigration policies through different political tools. They advocate for the rights of migrants and refugees and aim for accountability for human rights violations from immigration officers, as well as more humane immigration policy and the acceptance of human rights of migrants without regard to their immigration status. The advocacy and humanitarian organizations have been long present in the region and have been the most vocal on migrants' rights on the border. In the United States, most organizations focus on litigation, advocacy on behalf of migrants at the local, state, and federal levels, and on grassroots organizing. These organizations include the American Civil Liberties Union and the American Friends Service Committee. At the local level, organizations include Espacio Migrante, San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium, Border Angels, and the San Diego Rapid Response Network. In Tijuana, organizations focus on service provision for returned migrants and migrants in transit to the United States. Most of these humanitarian organizations come from a religious background or faith values. More recently, an advocacy organization, Tijuana-based Alma Migrante, dedicated to strengthening access to justice was born in the border and been focusing on litigation against xenophobia, discrimination, and non-accompanied minors at the border.

With the current administration, local and international non-governmental organizations have been vocal about Donald Trump's immigration policies and its link to human rights in detention processes, asylum-seekers, immigrants' rights, and activists' criminalization. Several legal paths have taken place regarding deaths and killings on the border. These cases, however, have not turned favorable and have raised concerns about accountability for human rights violations from immigration agents and the overall commitment, from the U.S. government, for the human rights of migrants.

Members within the network specialize in different advocacy activities to produce a change in policies and practices. For instance, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a nonprofit organization that, since 2014, has developed the U.S.—Mexico Border Program to ensure human rights and self-determination of migrants and border communities (AFSC n.d.). The San Diego office works on creating an understanding of migration experiences and bolster cooperation between immigrant communities and allies through the development of local migrant leadership, the documentation of human rights abuses, and advocacy with local authorities, legislative, and executive branches of the government. The American Civil Liberties Union of San Diego and Imperial Counties is a national organization aiming to expand and enforce the liberties and civil rights of the people. Due to its closeness to the border, it has a strong migration focus aiming to make human rights and liberties established in the U.S. Constitution available to all people, independent from their immigration

status, through litigation cases locally and nationally ([ACLU n.d.a](#)). The San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium is a coalition of community, religious, labor, and legal organizations that support a comprehensive migration reform and intents, through their advocacy work, to stop and report practices and policies that violate the human and civil rights and of migrants ([SDIRC n.d.](#)). San Diego Rapid Response Network is a coalition of local organizations founded in 2017 with the objective of binding efforts between different organizations to provide assistance and orientation to migrants and their families that are settled temporarily in San Diego. It also serves as a communicator about immigration raids, arrests, inspection checkpoints, and complaints about harassment from immigration officers in the San Diego and surrounding counties ([SDRNN n.d.](#)).

In Tijuana, Casa del Migrante Tijuana is a nongovernmental organization from a religious congregation, founded in 1987 that provides humanitarian assistance to returned and transit migrants, and refugees. While its primary focus is to provide assistance and shelter, it delivers legal counseling for administrative immigration processes ([Tijuana 2019](#)). Alma Migrante is a nonprofit organization based in Tijuana that focuses on the defense of the right to justice to people in different human mobility contexts in the northern border of Mexico, through workshops for advocates in the region ([Migrante 2019a](#)). Some binational organizations have emerged in the region that, similar to other local organizations, focus their work in Tijuana in providing shelter and in San Diego, advocating for the rights of migrants. Espacio Migrante is a binational non-profit organization that focuses on supporting returned migrants and refugees in Tijuana and advocates for them in San Diego. Established in 2012 as a response to the arrival of migrant flows from Haiti in Tijuana, in the last two years, they have responded to the arrival of migrants from Central America ([Migrante 2019b](#)). Lastly, Border Angels is a binational non-profit organization that advocates for human rights, humane immigration reform, and social justice. It provides legal counseling and humanitarian assistance in the desert in San Diego, and Tijuana offers shelter for transit migrants and returnees ([Angels 2019](#)).

Even though most organizations have been present since before the current administration came to power, they have had to adapt to new policies and draw on new strategies to respond to the changing political landscape that impacts on the region. In the last two years, local and international nongovernmental organizations, intergovernmental organizations, and binational organizations have resisted Trump's immigration policies through different strategies, tactics, and networks. As the collected information, the advocacy work has been mostly reactive to the ongoing policy and program changes the current administration has placed. The main strategies on the region have revolved around information sharing, training, and advocating for emerging refugee and immigration issues that have appeared with the new administration.

#### 4.2. Organization, Demands and Transnational Mobilization

Trump's immigration policies have had different responses from local governments and civil society. The adoption of local practices, in the form of sanctuary cities, represents a manner of these differentiated responses. San Diego has implemented some "compensatory" politics that come in the form of a sanctuary city,<sup>3</sup> which has led in manifestations of support towards the immigrant community ([Wells 2004](#)) as well as a major presence of ICE in the county ([Pierce 2019](#); [Galli 2018](#)).

Due to this complexity of the political scenery in which networks must interact, opportunities for mobilization are defined in two levels. On one hand, there is a need to externalize and cooperate with their counterparts in San Diego and Tijuana due to the spillover effect of the immigration policies. This is that policies that develop on one side of the border will impact the other side of the border, thus, making transnational cooperation increase. On the other hand, some advocacy work has remained in the domestic arena because local structures have responded better than national structures, allowing more leverage and influence through the existing opportunities and resources

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<sup>3</sup> Even if there is not yet an official declaration of the city as a "Sanctuary City" ([Libby 2017](#)).

locally. This scenario highlights the complexity and ability of transnational networks to interact in different local, national, and transnational levels ([Della Porta and Tarrow 2005](#)). Advocacy networks expanded their work in the region due to a system of diffusion of ideas, practices, and frameworks of meaning regarding the human rights of migrants and the configuration of advocacy and humanitarian organizations ([Moreno and Niño 2013](#)). Hence, it allowed the establishment of a common agenda, sharing of strategies, and objectives of action ([Smith and Bandy 2005](#)).

As mentioned before, transnational contentious politics can be present in different ways: advocacy networks, coalitions, and movements. However, in San Diego and Tijuana, the transnational protest has been made for the most part through informal advocacy networks. Border networks have developed relations based on information exchange—mostly from Tijuana to San Diego—and training for the advocacy work, mainly from San Diego to Tijuana. The manifest of the transnational feature of the migrants' rights movement has been the emergence of binational organizations seeking document and influence migration policy on both sides of the border. This is the case of Espacio Migrante, a binational organization that provides humanitarian assistance in Tijuana while, at the same time, has an advocacy team in San Diego. By being part of the San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium (SDIRC), they can advocate both in the United States and Mexico over the current immigration policies on both sides of the border. Also, the San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium holds sporadic meetings with the Coalición Pro Defensa del Migrante in Tijuana to provide information about what organizations in Tijuana have been documenting. Both coalitions have been jointly vocal about Trump's policies, mainly the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) through online statements, exposing the condemnation of this policy since it constitutes a violation of the right to seek asylum.

The absence of opportunities for leverage at the federal level has led local organizations to depend on local relations to create and expand protections ([ACLU 2019](#)). This can be understood as closed structures, making transnational protest available and a valuable tool to externalize their demands. However, transnational mobilization depends on the issue in which the networks advocate. This argument is best highlighted by the San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium, stating that, if it refers to a local issue, they will not collaborate with another coalition unless they want to publicly expose on the problem ([SDIRC 2019](#)). The closeness to the border asks for a binational and transnational collaboration since policies impact both cities on the border. An example that best illustrates this case is the creation of the San Diego Rapid Response Network. According to their representative, at first glance, they thought the network established to respond to internal immigration enforcement. However, because of the proximity to the border, they came to realize that they would be affected by any issues happening on the border.

Transnational advocacy networks are characterized by the use of a similar discourse and the use of strategic information to produce change. Regarding the use of a common discourse, the organizations interviewed highlighted the existence of more severe immigration policies with the current administration, especially regarding asylum-seekers' rights. Although there exists a consensus that migration policies and treatment of migrants are not a recent practice to the region, they have signaled the lack of political will and a severe context for migrants and asylum seekers ([ACLU 2019](#)). Through information politics, activists have shown the humanitarian situation and human rights violations of asylum seekers on the border. In this context, they have appealed to international treaties, such as the Refugee Convention, to frame their claims as non-compliance to international compromises the U.S. has agreed to. In the advocacy literature, this process called naming and shaming has been a common political tool inside the advocate's agenda. Binational networks have also facilitated the obtention of testimony from asylum seekers on the Tijuana border. The main coalition of migrant's rights in San Diego, the SDIRC, is connected sporadically to Coalición Pro Defensa in Tijuana to obtain information regarding migrants and asylum seekers in Tijuana. This information is then outsourced to other allies to convey their demands on different political spaces.

Although cooperation between members of the network is not as dense and sustained as in a social movement, the representatives of the organizations interviewed signaled the existence of open

channels of communication with their counterparts in Tijuana to obtain information on what they see locally, at the shelters, and on the Mexican side of the border (SDIRC 2019). Advocates in the region widely recognize the power of information. For example, Espacio Migrante stated that they expect, through the documentation work in the southern border of the U.S., to produce change on policies from the following administrations. Additionally, the SDIRC representative affirmed that:

“We don’t have a formal working partnership with them [Coalición pro defensa], it’s more a lot like we keep a line of communication open [ . . . ] So for example, when we had issues and that we have met with them to get an understanding on what they are seeing on that side of the border, and information about the people and the ports of entry, so we met with them in person, usually its more in communication by the phone or email” (SDIRC 2019).

Simultaneously, stricter migration policies have bolstered transnational collaboration between these networks and actors over new issues. The American Civil Liberties Union began giving background information on the Operation Streamline policy to a local migrant shelter in Tijuana to help Mexican activists understand the new policy’s implications. This transnational space has been useful allowing ACLU to interview transit migrants as an effort to find human rights violation patterns from deportations as part of the Operation Streamline in San Diego. Although local organizations in Tijuana cannot advocate for the human rights of migrants in the United States, it is through networks that information diffusion and transnational spaces that human rights documentation happens. Advocacy networks have also provided training on U.S. immigration policy, documentation process, and international refugee regimes. As stated in the transnational advocacy networks literature, another part of the transnational cooperation relies on the exchange of services and training between members of the network. When the Migrant Protection Protocols began, local shelters in Tijuana received training from organizations in San Diego in issues such as a change in U.S. federal policies, the asylum process, and the overall legal processes in the United States (Tijuana 2019). Furthermore, some documentation workshops have also been implemented in Tijuana to share practices and advises on the documentation of human rights violations cases to refer to organizations and San Diego. For example, the American Civil Liberties Union has provided training to Alma Migrante regarding litigation of cases that involve human rights abuses. At the same time, Alma Migrante provides workshops to local organizations in Tijuana in issues of access to justice to local human rights defenders. This transnational cooperation has permitted the professionalization of organizations in Tijuana since most of them are related to humanitarian assistance. This provides an example of how collaboration between transnational networks has benefited from resources that different actors have to produce change. For instance:

“Hicimos un taller de documentación para las organizaciones, porque a veces nos refieren casos, pero con información incompleta o que no es relevante. Un cuestionario para que fuera fácil obtener la información necesaria para cuando nosotros refiramos casos a otras organizaciones. Pero eso no fue derivado de ningún proyecto especial, entonces no hemos podido darle el seguimiento adecuado”<sup>4</sup> (ACLU 2019).

On a broader scale, networks in San Diego and Tijuana have related to intergovernmental organizations and international non-governmental organizations, such as the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights and Amnesty International, to provide information about human rights violations as a consequence of stricter immigration policies. This partnership is based mostly on information-sharing about the local and national immigration context, as well as case-sharing that have documented at the local offices. Furthermore, one of the main ways in which the protest has become transnational is through the participation of transnational intergovernmental spaces,

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<sup>4</sup> We did a workshop on documenting violations for organizations in Tijuana, cause sometimes they refer us cases with incomplete or non-relevant information. We did a questionnaire so it was easy to obtain information that we can share with other organizations. But this was not embedded in any special project, so we have not been able to have follow-up meetings. [Translation].

such as the hearings of the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights during their visit to San Diego in 2019. During this audience, advocates from San Diego and Tijuana discussed the Migrant Protection Protocols and the non-compliance of international compromises, such as the Refugee Law. The Commission concluded that some of the current programs in the border negatively impacted on the right to seek asylum in the United States (IACHR 2019).

Moreover, the involvement of intergovernmental organizations, such as the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), has allowed the transnational shift on the advocate's demands in Tijuana. The issue of asylum seekers on the border has raised concern and interest among international non-governmental organizations that have reported migrants' situation at the ports of entry to advocate and expose human rights abuses. Some international actors that are involved with members inside the network are outsiders of the region. The involvement of the UNHCR in Tijuana is relevant in terms of cooperation and strengthening of capacities for organizations in Mexico. Furthermore, the UNHCR has supervised the international regime concerning refugees on the border by monitoring norms and complementing international human rights obligations at the local level (UNHCR 2019). This exemplifies the involvement of a multiplicity of actors within the network and the scale shift of the protest that involves local, binational, and transnational actors.

Inside the United States, local opportunities have made available the development of networks and the existence of channels to extend demands towards human and civil rights violations, through the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties of the Department of Homeland Security. As some organizations have highlighted, cases submitted through this process are hardly solved, and responsible officers are rarely held accountable (AFSC 2019). As Hendrix and Wong (2013) state, the network's advocacy work does not automatically lead to sensibility to international scrutiny or accountability. This demands a scale shift on the protests on different levels to mobilize a consensus regarding human rights violations. In this process, the level of influence that the networks might have depends on the local structures and opportunities. With the current administration, the advocacy work some organizations have done has had more impact at the local and state level than federally, because of the amount of power Trump's administration has (SDIRC 2019).

Domestic activism has focused mainly on relations with local and state representatives, congress members, and public servers. As an example:

"Ahorita ya están entrando nuevas leyes, donde las organizaciones pueden pedir que se realicen cambios como en algunas leyes del gobierno, pero es algo bastante nuevo. Es algo en lo que vamos a empezar a trabajar, pero ahorita en lo que nos hemos enfocado mas es en involucrar a la comunidad para lograr más fuerza al momento en que haya estas situaciones donde requieran más de nuestro activismo político y que podamos tener a la población y a la ciudadanía consciente de las situaciones y exigiendo que exista este trato humanitario"<sup>5</sup> (Angels 2019).

The action does not limit the local and federal levels since some organizations have chapters around the country and even on the transnational arena. This is also facilitated by the binational condition of their representatives that allows for binational advocacy. This example provides an examination of how activists interact on different levels—local and transnational—taking advantage of their resources that, to accomplish their objectives, they have reached to diverse strategies and tactics to frame their demands, expanding relations locally and transnationally to evidence the situation on the San Diego—Tijuana border.

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<sup>5</sup> Now they are applying new rules in which organizations can advocate for the change of certain governmental policies, but it's quite new. It is something we will start to work on but now, we are focusing on community involvement to enhance capacities in a moment where these situations present and requires our political activism. Then, we can have the population and citizens aware of these situations and they can demand for a humane treatment [Translation].



### 4.3. Transnational Mobilization Results

Each of the different mobilization strategies has accomplished a positive impact on domestic responses and policies. Even though measuring influence and success of advocacy networks might seem subjective—due to the prevalence and re-enforcement of immigration policies—based on [Keck and Sikkink \(1998\)](#) influence levels, binational civil society has had more impact on the local discursive level and practices, than on the overall policies at the federal level. While some issues have remained locally, the overall immigration debate has re-emerged nationally. This last is considered as agenda-setting in which, through the monitoring and documentation of the human rights situation, new issues besides DACA and undocumented migrants inside the United States emerged not only in the country but also in the international arena. As ACLU highlights, the current administration policies allowed to set an agenda about family separations, Border Patrol accountability, detention deaths, and immigration agency budget on most international non-governmental organizations and regional intergovernmental organizations.

As [Kocher \(2017\)](#) posits, the creation of a Rapid Response Network has developed as a response to the increase of immigration enforcement in different cities throughout the country. In San Diego, the San Diego Rapid Response Network (SDRRN) first convened in 2017 as a direct response to Trump's administration and the uncertain future political landscape. Even though Rapid Response is a local network, it holds transnational partnerships with local shelters in Tijuana through the American Civil Liberties Union to share information for migrants that are in the process of relocation in the United States. Moreover, new local and national organizations and outside organizations have established links with other non-profits in San Diego and Tijuana to access local information and testimonies from organizations in the region. Intergovernmental organizations, such as the UNHCR have joined the network, working together with NGOs in Tijuana to bolster organizational capacities and monitor refugee access to international protection.

The San Diego Rapid Response Network implemented an immigrant emergency hotline, especially directed at those facing unlawful detention or expedited removal:

"In San Diego, we have five non-profit organizations that do legal services and they are all raising funding for the California department of social services so we collaborated with all those non-profits and they all have like monthly meetings where they have a collaboration ( . . . ) People in the community can call and report immigration activity so again that would be ICE knocking on somebody's door trying to make an arrest ( . . . ) So the hotline is 100% volunteer-run and it's just people getting calls and if would be somebody calling and saying Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is conducting activity at a location at the moment, then we can send our what we call our responders or others are called legal observers that can go out to the location and they are filming the activity that it is happening and if it affects immigration and if it is immigration that know how to document it and the purpose of that is to be able to use that documentation as evidence for that person's case or also be able to share that with other organization that does advocacy" ([SDRRN 2019](#)).

The impact has been more profound at the local level as a means of expanding protections toward undocumented immigrants in San Diego. Members of the network advocated at the state level to adopt the SB 54 law, known as the Sanctuary City Law. This law prohibits cooperation between local law enforcement agencies with federal agents. For example, the San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium was one of the local coalitions that advocated for the adoption of the policy back in 2017.

Nowadays, local organizations have been monitoring local law enforcement offices to comply with the bill. Meanwhile, with the arrival of the first "Migrant Caravan" in 2018 at the Tijuana border, the National Guard's presence on the border raised concerns on human rights and potential abuses. It was through the documentation done by the American Friends Service Committee on the use of chemical agents against migrants, and through the local opportunities, that the National Guard from California withdrew from the border. In the report, they addressed the raising concerns on the use of excessive force on migrants and asylum access restrictions made by CBP in the area.

Through testimony obtained by the existing contacts in Tijuana, they completed the initial report on U.S. CBP use of chemical agents on migrants at the US-Mexico border. All of these represent a change in state procedures, characterized by the extension of protection and a reduction in border militarization. In addition, with the issue of the Zero Tolerance policy, through documentation and information sharing, the networks made possible institutional changes regarding family separations. The American Civil Liberties Union of San Diego and Imperial counties first documented and monitored these cases on the San Diego-Tijuana border and then, the national office sued at a federal court Trump's administration. Through this advocacy work, later in 2019, a District Court Judge issued an injunction for the family reunification (ACLU n.d.b).

"I think one of the things that we haven't really seen before is that just the policy of like MPP is something new that we didn't see before and then like the separation of families and the intolerance that is something that is something new" (SDIRC 2019).

In regard to accountability politics, the network's demands have focused on the abuses of immigration agencies and asylum-seekers. Organizations have exposed abuses from Border Patrol and Customs and Border Protection through documentation and testimony of the victims, for instance, the American Friends Service Committee contains an area that documents cases of human rights abuses and publicizes it to have more accountability, generate interest on bigger organizations, and have more diffusion on public opinion (AFSC 2019). One example of the documentation work was the report published by this organization on the use of chemical agents against migrants in 2018. With the cooperation of local shelters in Tijuana to provide testimony from the migrants, they took advantage of the existing resources and networks to provide evidence of the lack of accountability and human rights violations on the border. Also, at the count of documentation and reports, organizations have resorted to the naming and shaming strategies, by exposing how border enforcement and immigration policy are against international human rights standards and lack of State accountability. At the same time, one of the effects has been greater accountability of the authorities as a response of abuses and violations committed by immigration agencies, as reported by the ACLU's informer.

The visit of the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights provided spaces for the advocates to externalize their concerns by providing information and testimony to more powerful actors and aim to produce leverage to the current administration. During the hearings, the main topics of concern to the IACHR and the organizations were the Migrant Protection Protocols and access to the asylum system. The ability that these networks have, through transnational political spaces and opportunities, allows them to externalize their demands and exert leverage. As Franklin (2015) states, this action could mark a path towards other international strategies to produce policy change.

As part of the limitations of the network's advocacy work, we highlight three aspects. First, the current conditions of the humanitarian crisis on the border have surpassed the organizational capacities of local organizations, mostly in Tijuana, that has left then on an assistant position given the absence of responses from the Mexican state:

"Estamos batallando un poco con todos estos cambios que están sucediendo porque todo el tiempo es algo diferente, hay información nueva y también vemos que la respuesta de las autoridades mexicanas es bastante parcial, o sea no hay una postura realmente fuerte, al final se están aceptando muchas de las decisiones en Estados Unidos, pero no se están tomando las responsabilidades. Entonces eso a nosotros como organización como albergue nos mete en unas dinámicas bastante pesadas"<sup>6</sup> (Migrante 2019b).

Second, the lack of political will from the federal administration regarding asylum policies and humanitarian concerns on the border has made that certain policies continue to be implemented

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<sup>6</sup> We are having trouble with all these changes that are happening because it is always different, there is new information and we also see that the response of the Mexican authorities is really unbiased say, there is no clear position, at the end they are accepting a lot of the U.S. demands and decisions, but they are not taking the responsibility. Then, as an organization and as a shelter, it puts us in really difficult circumstances [Translation].

regardless of the advocacy work different networks, coalitions, and movements have made. Third, the proper characterization of a network—informal relations with low links of connections—limits the network the sustained action that could hold more leverage over more powerful actors. The informality of the networks is also considered as a limitation since transnational cooperation is sustained sporadically and not continuously, hence turning in low-density cooperation. As Fox (2002) signals, binational networks are more effective in discursive positions than on a change of state practices. At first glance, it would seem that transnational relations between civil society from San Diego and Tijuana do not exist. However, the evidence collected from the interviews suggests that transnational advocacy is done by local organizations on both sides of the border. Due to the informal transnational collaboration, some issues remained only on the domestic agenda. Taking into consideration the transnational contentious literature, a denser network with more periodic transnational relations can change the scope of the level of influence of the protests. The ability of the networks to interact on the local and transnational levels allowed to demonstrate the practices of human rights violations on the border, conducting to modify certain state practices with the help of the courts, to externalize their demands transnationally, and to strengthen their binational collaboration through documentation and cooperation. It through the diverse set of practices that, even in the absence of monetary power, they produced changes in practices and policies aiming to improve the human rights conditions of undocumented migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

## 5. Final Remarks

In this article, we presented the resistance tactics and strategies advocacy networks from San Diego and Tijuana have employed to produce a change in federal and local immigration practices that impact the border and aiming to provide evidence on the impact of their transnational mobilization.

Migration policies that have hardened border security have encouraged transnational relations between non-governmental organizations in San Diego and Tijuana. Opposition on both sides of the border to human rights violations towards migrants has been a condition of socialization between groups that were not connected before. This has led to the establishment of new contacts that recognize and identify with each other.

Likely, these transnational advocacy networks constitute a counterbalance to Donald Trump's callous immigration policies. Networks have seized qualitative changes in their existing forms of organization that were only focused on service provision, and that now have politically revendedicated the rights of those targeted by Trump's administration. Transnational advocacy networks *are more than just their organization's individual activities*. In fact, they engender a more profound impact: more mutual recognition; they make evident the immigration debate, place mediatic pressure, and produce changes in some aspects of the politics. Also, they diffuse with greater scope new information, ideas, and value since, as part of their resistance tactics, they have exchanged information, provided training about national policy, advocated for the termination of certain programs, and monitored international norm compliance.

The reactive actions toward repressive immigration policies have allowed the constitution of transnational social capital in the region thus, building a more effective resistance movement. This social capital has also favored the use of new resistance tactics, not resourced on before, one of the reasons being that some of these actors have not a great reach outside collective action (for instance, it is not the same that an advocacy campaign has the same outcome coming from a 30-year old organization, such as Casa del Migrante, than a simultaneous campaign made by various local and international actors on both sides of the border). Besides this, the social capital is not equally distributed and, thus, groups with greater reach must assume a leadership role to have more impact on their actions. It is up to them to enrich and continue mobilizing these networks.

The information has been a core tool in the advocacy of the networks by exposing the consequences of border enforcement on migrants' human rights and potential human rights abuses. The externalization of information towards outside coalitions and organizations has allowed the change

in certain state practices, especially accountability politics over human rights violations made by U.S. immigration officers. The information and documentation that the networks have done for the past two years are employed in different transnational political spaces to expose which international norms the current administration failed to comply with. By doing this, they provide reliable information “from below.” On the other hand, local organizations in San Diego have also provided training in Tijuana to strengthen the advocacy capacities of the activists

Activists have framed their demands mainly in terms of the human rights lens. Also, they have taken advantage of the local opportunities and policies to frame their demands at the local and transnational levels. In the local arena, they have taken advantage of local relations that have formed since years before, as well as the existent political spaces to be able to influence not only locally, but also transnationally. This has been possible through the mobilization of information, lobbying, and educational campaigns. At the transnational level, they have externalized their demands in different spaces and have exposed the human rights situation of migrants and asylum seekers through international human rights and refugee law.

Federal immigration policies that impact both sides of the border have bolstered transnational cooperation by making use of information politics and monitoring. As part of their results, they have brought new issues into the agenda about human rights and migrants in the U.S.-Mexico border, permitting international actors involvement in the region. At the local level, the existence of compensation policies allows for a deeper influence on practices. On the contrary, at the federal level, their efforts are limited due to the lack of political will to their demands. Through the tactics and strategies aforementioned, they have exposed the absence of accountability and the failure to comply with international standards. Although there are several limitations on the transnational mobilization, due to the characteristic that defines these networks, local opportunities and structures have permitted a more significant level of influence on the agenda-setting process and certain state practices.

The advocacy tactics and strategies described above illustrate the local and federal opportunities to produce change are organized and how through diverse practices, they resist the current immigration policies context. It is interesting to highlight how, through transnational activism, some local actors have acquired international relevance, even becoming key actors. The ability of their simultaneous double action, the local and the international, demonstrates the transnational character of their actions, even though they might not be necessarily aware of their dual approach. Though border enforcement has set in for migrants and refugees, it might seem that these borders are not as thick for non-governmental organizations.

Undoubtedly, transnational collaboration undertook as a contestation to border enforcement and securitization enhanced the quantity of collective action, alliances, and communication. However, there are still some flaws and limitations that have some explanations: first, the diversity of the organizations can lead to the existence of different agendas and divergences on the appropriate ways of action, or even competition between these actors; then, the precarity of the migration contexts drives to sudden policy changes that not all of the organizations can, or know, how to react. In some cases, there is a need for constant training in the advocates, since some show resistance to change in the way they have worked in the last years: each on their territory and their side of the border. Finally, because of their recent establishment, they still have a long way to consolidate and institutionalize over a common base. In this sense, they still depend on interpersonal relations between activists from different organizations. Future research could focus on recent accomplishments of advocacy networks in the region, such as the continuum of the Migrant Protection Protocols, legal representation on asylum hearings in courts, and the return of asylum seekers as a part of the “third-safe country” strategies.

During Donald Trump’s administration, the systematic violation of international law has permitted the progressive improvement of local and transnational networks in defense of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. Even though the work made through networks is relatively new, the sum of the years of the individual experience of these organizations and activists is creating impact, not only at

the personal level of migrants but also on the public opinion by influencing a change of paradigm of immigration in the U.S.—Mexico border.

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