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## Scaling Up? TRANSNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISING IN GLOBALISED PRODUCTION

Special Issue Guest Editors:  Karin Fischer,
Signe Moe,
Cornelia Staritz

## Contents

Marissa Brookes
**The Transnational Labor Alliances Database Project: Methods, Problems, and Progress**

Abstract *Transnational labour alliance (TLA) campaigns have been the subject of sustained scholarly inquiry for more than two decades. Nevertheless, little is known about the overall characteristics of TLA campaigns in general, in part because the full population of cases remains unknown. This article begins to fill this lacuna by introducing the Transnational Labor Alliances Database Project, an archive of primary and secondary documents and researcher-assembled case summaries created by the author over six years, with the help of over 100 undergraduate research assistants. This article explains the methodology of the project as well as several important limitations of the database in its current state. Additionally, this article provides a theoretical overview of key themes relevant to the analysis of TLAs and an empirical overview of broad trends in TLA campaigns. It makes a first step towards developing a typology of TLAs and argues that TLAs vary across at least five key dimensions: (1) who the main actors are; (2) what workers want; (3) where the campaign occurs; (4) why the TLA forms in the first place; and (5) how tactics are deployed.*

Keywords *activism, database, labour, transnational, unions*

### 1. Introduction

In the late 2000s I set out to research what was then a fairly niche topic: transnational labour alliance (TLA) campaigns, meaning active collaborations among workers from two or more countries in efforts to improve working conditions and labour rights by changing the behav-

iour of a transnational corporation (TNC) or other employer. Thanks to a handful of excellent case studies scattered across the fields of geography, sociology, and industrial relations, I knew of a few TLAs. Yet beyond this small sample of examples, I knew next to nothing about the total number of TLAs in existence, the countries or regions most originated from, or the main strategies, issues, and goals characterising their campaigns. As it turned out, no one else knew either. Unlike well-worn social science subjects such as democratisation or interstate conflict, the topic of TLAs lacked a large-N dataset or other comprehensive collection of cases. The full population of TLA campaigns is in fact unknown, despite thousands of interviews, on-site observations, document analyses, and case studies conducted on the subject by scholars across several disciplines from the 2010s onward. Hence, full descriptive inference has been inhibited, as has the sort of research that could lead to more generalisable claims about cause and effect.

Nevertheless, one must start somewhere. Thus, undeterred by these limitations, I proceeded in a piecemeal fashion to collect as much information as I could on TLAs via news archives, union websites, and academic articles. I made phone calls. I met activists. I boarded planes to speak with union officials in Australia, the UK, and the US and corresponded with activists from Cambodia, Germany, the Netherlands, and elsewhere. Nearly every interview revealed another TLA previously unknown to me: tense standoffs, aborted alliances, unpublicised failures, and quiet wins, mentioned offhand through casual anecdotes over hot tea or a cold beer. I jotted down notes, then later attempted to collect as much information as I could on each new case I came across. By the time I began my first tenure-track job at UC Riverside in 2013, I had shoved scores of news clippings, flyers, pamphlets, printouts, and other hard copy documents into an over-stuffed filing cabinet in a somewhat absurd attempt to construct a physical database of every TLA campaign ever known.

For the sake of efficiency, the environment, and my sanity, I decided to go digital. Thus, in 2015 I launched the Transnational Labor Alliances Database Project (TLA Project). The purpose of this project is to construct a database documenting the basic facts of all known TLA campaigns, including both success and failure cases, occurring since the end of the Cold War. Currently, the database contains 1) chronologically ordered primary

and secondary sources with relevant information on each campaign and 2) brief overviews summarising each case's basic facts, including a detailed timeline of key events. At the time of this writing, 69 out of 155 cases in the database have final timelines, according to the criteria for 'finished', explained below.[1]

This database is the first of its kind. To my knowledge there is no centralised listing of TLA campaigns, let alone a comprehensive database conducive to the systematic identification of patterns in labour transnationalism. My intention is for this database to serve not only academic researchers, but also union officials, labour activists, and others in the labour movement, by facilitating the identification of TLA campaigns suitable for systematic comparison using qualitative methods of causal analysis (e.g., Mills' methods, typological theory, set theoretic analysis, and most-likely, least-likely, deviant, and outlier case studies), as well as potential quantitative analyses if variables are eventually coded into a quantitative dataset.

This article begins by contextualising the TLA Project within New Global Labour Studies (NGLS) and some broader theoretical debates in the social sciences. In the next two sections, I explain the methodology of the project as well as several important methodological limitations of the database in its current state. The section after that provides an empirical overview of broad trends in TLA campaigns based on findings from the database to date. Finally, this article concludes with a commentary on the knowns and unknowns of TLA campaigns with an aim toward developing a typology of TLAs and informing directions for future research.

## 2. TLA data in context

TLA campaigns have been the subject of sustained scholarly inquiry for more than two decades (Sarkar/Kuruvilla 2020; Thomas 2019; Brookes 2019; Zajak et al. 2018; Evans 2014, 2010; McCallum 2013; Kay 2011; Anner 2011; Fairbrother et al. 2011; Croucher/Cotton 2009; Bronfenbrenner 2007; Herod 2003; Harrod/O'Brien 2002; Mazur 2000; Johns 1998). Through careful research, scholars of labour transnationalism have shed light on the dynamics of TLAs and their interactions with employers. Moreover, while

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older analyses of labour transnationalism tended to centre on primarily descriptive, single case studies of success stories, in recent years more research has analysed unsuccessful campaigns and made use of comparative case studies, answering the call for more middle-range theories in the study of TLAs (Brookes/McCallum 2017). Indeed, we have learned quite a lot in the nearly quarter of a century since the launch of the New Labour Internationalism and the subsequent so-called NGLS.[2]

Nevertheless, there remain serious barriers to systematic research on TLA campaigns. Although scholars across the social sciences have analysed various forms of labour mobilisation to gain insight into enduring questions about the future of economic inequality, state-sponsored social protections, supply chain politics, and corporate social responsibility, the contribution of TLA campaigns in particular to these major issues remains mostly unknown, as productive dialogue between NGLS scholars and more mainstream social scientists has not always been forthcoming. While the latter sometimes neglect to treat labour as an actor with agency, the former too often eschew direct engagement with mainstream academic debates in favour of more narrow analyses. Data limitations are part of the problem: It is difficult to draw connections between TLA campaigns and big-picture questions in political science, sociology, and economics without enough data to conduct rigorous case studies and develop middle-range theories (Brookes/McCallum 2017: 210). The TLA Project can help to address this challenge.

There are several ways in which a large-N qualitative database of TLA campaigns can connect labour scholarship with current debates in the social sciences. For instance, scholars continue to ask whether states (national governments) are capable of countering the "race to the bottom" in labour rights due to international capital mobility (Ye 2020; Rodrik 2012; Silver 2003; Lindblom 1982). For some, the erosion of welfare states in the global North and the disappearance or nonexistence of social protections in the global South are clear signs of states' complicity in the treatment of workers as mere commodities. Yet, some TLA campaigns have successfully persuaded states to enhance worker protections. For instance, the Campaign Against Precarious employment, a TLA supporting public sector workers in Turkey in the 2010s, concluded with a government decree effectively ending the outsourcing of central and local government workers

(Acevedo/Ibrahim/Morillo 2019). More systematic case studies of similar TLA campaigns could help uncover the conditions under which states become more willing to act in labour's favour.

Another pressing question concerns private governance, meaning regulation without formal government intervention (Amengual/Kuruvilla 2020; Vogel 2010). Is private governance a viable means of securing labour rights for employees of TNCs? When do corporations respond to the regulatory efforts of non-state actors? These questions are important, because the NGLS developed "largely in parallel with what is by now a mature body of literature in comparative and international political economy on corporate strategy and institutional change," which "overlook[s] labour as a causal factor in the construction of a political-economic landscape" (Brookes/McCallum 2017: 211). Again, the TLA Project can help. Its data includes numerous campaigns that have changed the behaviour of transnational employers without any state intervention, offering evidence that private governance is at least possible. For example, a TLA campaign centred on Nestlé helped 53 workers in Indonesia win their jobs back and sign a collective bargaining agreement in 2011 (Kim/Lee/Ourkhan 2016), and in 2015 a TLA helped workers unionise every Coca-Cola bottling plant in Guatemala (Aguilar/Chao/Lee/Perez-Lar 2016). A large-N analysis of cases that fall into this category would enhance our knowledge of the conditions conducive to corporate regulation by non-state actors, while comparative case studies could reveal the mechanisms through which such private governance actually occurs.

Data from the TLA Project can also connect NGLS scholars with sociologists, economists, and geographers debating the (dis)advantages of analysing work and employment through a global value chain (GVC) or a global production network (GPN) framework (Coe/Yeung 2019; Selwyn/Musiolek/Ijarja 2020; Barrientos 2014; Gereffi 2014; Bair 2005). Specifically, the systematic analysis of TLA strategies can benefit from GVC and GPN theories of TNCs as both structures and actors. On the one hand, GVC theories' emphasis on corporate structures helps explain why some supply chain arrangements are more vulnerable than others to globally coordinated industrial action. On the other hand, GPN theories' emphasis on TNCs as actors can help us understand how both TNCs and TLAs make strategic use of the overlapping and sometimes contradictory web of

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national and subnational laws and regulations in which supply chains are embedded. Such analyses, in turn, can further debates over how well GVC *vs.* GPN theories help us understand power relationships among actors across supply chains.

Among the most contentious subjects of scholarly debate is the resilience of neoliberal globalisation, especially in the context of growing populism, increasing economic nationalism, the rise of China, environmental crises, and supply chain challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 global pandemic (Schulze-Cleven/Vachon 2021). What is the future of globalisation? What would be the impact on labour if globalisation were to slow down or reverse in the coming years? More systematic analyses of labour campaigns using TLA Project data can speak to all of these issues. For instance, since globalisation's future will depend in part on the public's acceptance or rejection of free trade and the free flow of finance, it can be informative to analyse TLAs' strategic use of free trade agreements to protect rather than restrict labour rights (Scherrer 2020; Raess/Dür/Sari 2018; Kay 2011). Case studies of TLAs during the COVID-19 pandemic can likewise shed light on the future of globalisation by revealing the connection between a public health crisis and transnational activists' demands for better health and safety provisions along GVCs/GPNs (van Barneveld 2020; Stevano/Ali/Jamieson 2020; McNamara/Newman 2020).

In sum, data from the TLA Project make middle-range theorising possible. While NGLS scholars and those in the mainstream social sciences have made great progress in analysing their respective areas of expertise, more and better data on TLA campaigns create the potential for both sets of scholars to engage in a more productive dialogue with each other.


## 3. Methods of data collection

As noted above, the purpose of the Transnational Labor Alliances Database Project is to construct a database documenting the basic facts of transnational labour campaigns occurring since the late 1990s. TLA campaigns are defined as active collaborations among trade unions or other organised groups of workers from two or more countries, which attempt to address labour rights or employment relations issues with a TNC or other

employer. Active collaboration refers to deliberate, conscious planning on the part of the two (or more) workers' groups who formed the alliance. The TLA Project is housed in Google Drive and backed up weekly offline on a solid state drive.

Based on my physical collection outlined in the introduction, I began in 2015 by organising a small number of case files in a Google Drive folder according to the name of the main employer involved (with a few exceptions) and uploading relevant documents with information on each campaign. I then recruited and trained undergraduate students at the University of California, Riverside, to work as research assistants (RAs) collecting and uploading secondary sources for each case in the database. At the time of this writing, there are 24 undergraduate RAs working under my supervision on the TLA Project, either for course credit, for pay, or on a volunteer basis. Since the TLA Project's inception, I have trained over 150 undergraduates in methods of data collection and organisation. Each RA spends anywhere from 10 weeks to three years working on data collection for between three to six hours per week. Each RA is tasked with two main objectives: to build an archive of all publicly available sources with information on a given case, and assemble that case-specific information into a detailed timeline of events.

The process involves four steps. First, the RA collects all sources with relevant information on that campaign using Nexis Uni, Google, Google Scholar, Way Back Machine (archive.org), YouTube, social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, and the websites of unions, corporations, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Trade Union Advisory Committee, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the European Industrial Relations Observatory, and other relevant organisations. The RA then uploads these sources as pdfs, sound files (mp3s), videos (mp4s), or photos in the Google Drive, naming each file with a code for the year, month, and day of publication. Second, the RA uses these sources and a template I created to construct a comprehensive timeline recounting each campaign's basic facts and key events. The timeline template includes entries for information on the employer involved, the unions or other workers' organisations involved, any coalitional supporters beyond the labour movement, the main issues or dispute, the outcome, and important dates and events, summarised in chronolog-

ical order. All event entries include citations to sources contained in the TLA Project case file in the Google Drive.

Third, I have a second RA construct a separate timeline (without seeing the first one), using the same sources. Fourth, in order to check for inter-coder reliability, I examine both timelines for gaps, ambiguities, or inconsistencies and note any needs for additional research (e.g., information to be gathered in interviews) before merging them into a final timeline.[3] At that point, we consider the case 'finished.' In other words, to be considered finished, a case folder must have two completed timelines plus one merged 'final' timeline, with our full understanding that relying on publicly available secondary sources does not actually render a case file complete in the sense of having obtained full knowledge of all events of the campaign. Rather, 'finished' case files are meant to serve as skeletons of case studies that can be utilised in future research that will necessarily involve supplementing our data with primary sources, including interviews with the key actors involved in each campaign.

Indeed, interviews and additional fieldwork in general are not only vital in order to fill gaps in our completed timelines, but also to expand the number of different perspectives represented in the data. Moreover, interviews have been crucial for learning about failed campaigns, which are rarely publicised. Since one goal is for this database to be as comprehensive as possible, I frequently add new cases to the Google Drive. To discover additional campaigns, I continue to use a variety of print and internet sources, including searches on websites of the nine Global Union Federations (GUFs), which collectively represent over 207 million workers in 163 countries and territories (AFL-CIO 2021) and have been instrumental in coordinating TLA campaigns.

Also, in February and March 2016, I conducted a round of semi-structured interviews in Geneva, Switzerland with officials and staff at the ILO, three GUFs (IUF, BWI, and IndustriALL),[4] the Swiss union UNIA, and a former trade union leader from Ethiopia. The interviews served two purposes: Firstly, I was able to learn additional information about several transnational labour campaigns in the database, (especially IKEA, Nestle, NXP, Sheraton, and Unilever) that helped explain, clarify, and add to the data we obtained from publicly available sources.[5] Secondly, I obtained advice and feedback on the database project itself from knowledgeable offi-

cials and staff, who offered a wide range of perspectives on the value of the database and the procedures I am using to collect and code the relevant data.[6] Additionally, while in Geneva, I gave a formal presentation on this database project to two dozen staff from the Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) and the Multinational Enterprises and Enterprise Engagement Unit (MULTI) sections of the ILO. The project was well-received by these groups, which offered valuable feedback, insights, and advice.

## 4. Database struggles: five major methodological problems

Perhaps the most obvious flaw in the TLA Database Project is our nearly exclusive reliance on publicly available information.[7] Granted, one goal of the project is simply to serve as an archive, collecting in one convenient location all publicly available documents, images, and videos pertaining to each case. Nonetheless, the 'finished' timelines are necessarily incomplete, as information available to the public likely obscures some of the less palatable aspects of labour-employer negotiations. Several interview subjects have revealed to me that a lot of 'real' campaign activity occurs behind closed doors in private negotiations between union leaders and the owners and managers of the companies in question. While this is not surprising, it does highlight one methodological limitation in our data collection process and underscores the necessity of conducting additional interviews with employers, managers, union officials, workers, and other campaign participants who participated in or have close knowledge of the transnational campaigns we are documenting in order to gain well-rounded accounts of each campaign.

A second, related flaw in the database is an underrepresentation of unsuccessful TLA campaigns. Unions tend not to publicise their own failures. Hence, it is highly probable that success stories are overrepresented in the publicly available data on which the project is based. Moreover, campaigns that are documented on organisations' websites and on social media often cease to be updated if they take a turn for the worse or reach a stage of stalemate, at which point information slows to a trickle. In extreme cases, evidence of a campaign can disappear from the internet altogether, particularly if it failed and its participants were drawn into

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lawsuits requiring campaign materials to be taken down. Our use of Way Back Machine and Google cached pages helps remedy this issue to some extent. Still, it is ultimately up to the researcher to surmise that a campaign has failed based on context clues.

Compounding the selection bias problem is the fact that failure cases are fairly difficult to code in the first place, since even the actors who were actually involved in these campaigns disagree among themselves on what success even means. Existing scholarly work on TLA campaigns has defined an unsuccessful campaign as one that does not improve the material well-being or strategic capacity of any of the workers involved, or one that does so but at the price of some heavier material or strategic loss (Brookes 2019). Nevertheless, the best one can do when it comes to coding a case is to take into account all available viewpoints, weighing each view as fully and objectively as possible. Once again, in-depth interviews with a variety of campaign participants can go a long way toward improving the external validity of the data.

A third major flaw in the TLA database is our overwhelming reliance on English-language sources. This bias is due to the principal investigator of the TLA Project being a native English speaker based in the US. The RAs come from a variety of backgrounds but are all fluent in English and trained to carry out the data collection in English. Consequently, TLA campaigns that involve few or no English speaking individuals or organisations are far less likely to be represented in the data. We are increasingly collecting non-English-language sources that contain information on many of these campaigns by using different countries' Google search pages and news sites. Many of the RAs are fluent in Spanish, which helps increase the diversity of cases documented. Still, translations of sources are necessarily restricted to the language skills of the present research team. Only a truly global collaboration of researchers would be able to resolve our unintentional exclusion of campaigns that have no documentation in English and, consequently, are not known to us at this time.

Fourth, our database struggles to stay up to date. Despite hours of dedicated data collection nearly every week of the year, we are unable to stay abreast of new developments in all of the ongoing campaigns. Moreover, sometimes previously 'closed' cases with final timelines reopen, as new activities unfold in what were assumed to be concluded campaigns.

Such 'moving targets' make it challenging to keep our information up to date. The TLA project is already a labour-intensive process. The process is time-consuming because it requires one to first gather all of the basic facts of each campaign using a breadth of online sources. The large volume of data produced for each case then has to be sorted, read, and processed into a summary sheet and timeline. While my team of undergraduate RAs has been invaluable for the project, there is also a relatively high turnover among the RAs, as students graduate or leave the project to focus on coursework and careers. A more permanent research team, or perhaps the inclusion of RAs from many different countries, could help keep the TLA Project accurate and timely.

A fifth major flaw in the TLA database is due to disagreement among researchers and campaign participants themselves over what exactly constitutes a TLA and what exactly constitutes a campaign. Hence, despite staying true to the working definition of a TLA campaign as provided above, researchers must recognise that the cases included in the project contain some heterogeneity. There are different types of transnational campaigns represented in the database, including strictly bilateral labour alliances, multilateral alliances, and campaigns predominantly led and coordinated by a Global Union. While all campaigns entail some level of active transnational solidarity among unions or other organised groups of workers, not all of them focus on issues spanning several countries. Many have a more narrow focus on a single country or even just one workplace. And although there are some instances of cross-national collaboration involving only national (or subnational) unions or workers cooperating directly with other national (or subnational) unions or workers, the majority of TLAs in our database involve the direct participation of one or more international organisations, especially the Global Unions (most prominently, BWI, IndustriALL, ITF, IUF, and UNI), as well as one or more non-labour supporters, such as nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), human rights advocates, or consumer groups.

Goals vary as well. Some simply strive to reinstate a group of fired workers or gain union recognition from an employer. Yet others aim for longer-term objectives, such as a obtaining a floor wage for an entire industry. Some campaigns are clearly reactive, meaning workers and unions responded to some change in behaviour or expectations from

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the employer in question, while others are clearly proactive, meaning that labour initiated engagement with the employer in launching the campaign.

The danger of conceptual stretching is to treat oranges as apples and draw flawed conclusions based on a misunderstanding of the basic units of analysis. "Conceptualisation cannot remain an open question. Until scholars can better categorise different instances of labour transnationalism, neither small-N comparative case studies nor large-N statistical analyses can be carried out effectively", since having clear categories "not only makes comparison possible but also alerts researchers to the relevant larger literature that might already offer some answers to the questions NGLS scholars have asked" (Brookes/McCallum 2017: 212). Hence, going forward it will be important to pay attention to distinctions such as those noted above. Below, I attempt to undertake a more systematic categorisation of TLA types in order to more precisely delineate these differences and any important analytical implications that these differences indicate. I also report some other findings from the TLA Project in general.

## 5. Progress nonetheless: some initial findings

As noted above, the TLA Project currently contains 155 campaign folders. Each folder contains anywhere from one to over 100 sources in the form of PDFs, JPGs, MP3s, and MP4s with information relevant to that particular campaign. Of the 155 folders, 69 (nearly 44.5%) contain 'final' timelines, 17 (nearly 11%) have two completed timelines that have yet to be merged into a final timeline, and 29 (just over 18%) have one completed timeline. The oldest TLA campaign documented in this database began in 1990 (Ravenswood Aluminum Corporation), unless one counts the International Transport Federation's Flags of Convenience (FOC) campaign as beginning in 1948, when the ITF officially brought the issue to broader public attention, although the majority of FOC campaign activities documented in the TLA Project took place in the 2000s and 2010s (Shafer/Hotrum/Farison 2019). The newest TLA campaign to be documented (on an ongoing basis) in the database is the Make Amazon Pay Campaign, with updates as recent as November 2021.

TLA campaigns have originated from every continent except Antarctica.[8] Common countries of origin for workplace disputes that eventually evolve into full transnational labour campaigns are Australia, Canada, Colombia, Germany, Honduras, India, Indonesia, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Sweden, the Netherlands, Turkey, the UK, and the US. While a fair share of authoritarian countries are represented in the data, the majority of TLA campaigns documented originate or otherwise play out predominantly in democratic countries. This is likely at least partially due to the fact that many of the Global Unions and other international organisations choose to operate only in democracies, given limited resources and the obvious constraints created by countries that repress freedom of association, assembly, and expression.

The home country of the employers targeted in TLA campaigns also varies widely, but more often than not involves a TNC or an employer that is otherwise intimately linked to a larger global production network. While TNCs headquartered in the US and the European Union are frequent targets of TLA campaigns, it appears that TLAs are increasingly targeting companies based in countries of the global South. Recent examples include campaigns aimed at Turkish Airlines, the Guyana Sugar Company, Robertson Winery in South Africa, Hotel Tharabar Gate in Myanmar, Jasic Technology Company in China, Philippine seafood giant Citra Mina, and Indonesian restaurant chain PT Champ Resto.

A vast range of industries are also represented in the data. Appearing frequently in the case files are workplaces centred on food and beverage production, food service, hotels, manufacturing (especially automobiles, garment, and electronics), retail (including clothing and supermarkets), shipping and logistics, and transportation services. Earlier campaigns from the 1990s through the mid-2000s appear to focus more on workers involved in the manufacturing and delivery of goods, whereas newer campaigns from the late 2000s through the present decade encompass more service sector workers. That said, since the COVID-19 pandemic displaced an enormous number of service sector workers in lodging, travel, tourism, and food service, it remains to be seen whether or not TLAs will continue to trend toward targeting service industry employers in the near future.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the TLAs documented utilise diverse tactics in their campaigns. Actions include, but are not limited to: appealing to

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government authorities, boycotts, click-and-send website forms, court cases, email blitzes, go-slows, ILO complaints, invoking the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, letter writing, marches, 'naming and shaming' on social media, petitions, private negotiations between Global Unions and corporate leaders, protests, rallies, research reports, shareholder votes, sit-ins, strikes, and walk-outs. Many TLAs include groups of loosely affiliated workers not organised into any union or other formal organisation, such as the 2011 TLA focused on seasonal agricultural workers migrating from Mexico to Canada (Carrera/Aguirre Avila 2021), although no TLAs consisted exclusively of such groups. While most TLAs involved one or more Global Unions to some extent, others, such as the 2012-13 Adidas TLA involving workers in Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, and Nicaragua (Acevedo/Bolanos 2020), did not.

Different Global Unions appear to prefer different types of involvement in TLA campaigns and emphasise different types of goals. For instance, the data suggest some disagreement among the Global Unions about the desirability of Global Framework Agreements (GFAs) as the end result of a transnational campaign as opposed to a means to an end or even a useless distraction. There also appears to be a difference between Global Unions that take on issues brought to them by unions or workers from countries in which a dispute is already unfolding and those that prefer to take it upon themselves to identify areas that could potentially benefit from a TLA campaign. Another interesting divide among the Global Unions is the extent to which they have attempted to include workers from China in TLA campaigns. For instance, the ITF and UNI, and to a lesser extent IndustriALL, have made efforts to engage the state-controlled All China Federation of Trade Unions directly; the other Global Unions have not (Brookes 2021).

Another finding is that TLAs also commonly attract supporters from beyond the labour movement, although some campaigns remain entirely in the realm of labour relations. For instance, the TLA fighting wage theft and poor working conditions at grocery store chain El Super gained support from nonprofit and grassroots organisations such as Strategic Action for a Just Economy and Ollin Cali Maquila Network and Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (Border Committee of Women Workers) (Gonzalez 2016), whereas the main participants in the transnational campaign focused on paper products corporation Kimberly-Clark were unions from Colombia

and the US (Torres/Kahlon/Farison 2018). When non-labour stakeholders do become involved, they tend to be either local community, legal assistance, or religious organisations or international consumer, environmental, human rights, or shareholder groups. Such coalitional support ranges from relatively hands-off help in the form of advice or financial resources to more hands-on activities such as union activist training, direct participation in rallies and protests, or orchestrating an international boycott of goods or services.

Moreover, whereas unions were the dominant actors in earlier TLAs, more recent TLAs include a broader spectrum of actors, including casual employees on short-term contracts, workers in the informal economy, and international migrants. For example, a TLA campaign focused on British multinational retailer Marks and Spencer won permanent contracts for thousands of UK migrant agency workers in 2008 (Patel/Tarango/Lee 2016). TLAs also fought for migrants' working and living conditions at US tobacco company Reynolds in 2007, against the blacklisting of Mexican migrant activists in Canada in 2011, and for migrant cruise ship workers' visa and reentry rights in New Zealand in 2021. Migrants have also become more active campaign participants. For instance, migrant workers joined unions from Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Thailand in a campaign protesting factory closures by international underwear manufacturer Triumph in 2009, and Polish and Lithuanian migrants played a key part in a campaign focused on Norwegian salmon and trout exporter Norse Production in 2012.

## 5.1 Toward a typology of TLAs?

All of the findings noted above are helpful for constructing a typology of TLA campaigns. Granted, because only 69 of the TLA Project's 155 cases have been coded as of this writing, a realistic attempt to group cases at this stage should strive less for a clear typology and more for a loose categorisation to be refined through further analysis. Crucially, TLAs appear to vary on at least five key dimensions: (1) *who* the main actors are, (2) *what* workers want, (3) *where* the campaign occurs, (4) *why* the TLA forms in the first place, and (5) *how* tactics are deployed. First, we can divide TLAs based on who comprises the alliance (e.g., two unions, multiple unions, Global Union and its allies, or two or more groups of nonunion-

ised workers) and who they target (e.g., TNCs, local employers, or states). Second, we can differentiate TLAs seeking short-term gains (e.g., higher wages, paid leave, retirement benefits) from those with longer-term goals (e.g., sustainable collective bargaining rights, unionisation, a GFA). Third, TLAs either focus on one workplace or encompass multiple workplaces. Fourth, TLA campaigns are either proactive or reactive. Fifth, TLA strategies may fall into the general categories of structural power, institutional power, and coalitional power, which refer respectively to workers' strategies to physically disrupt the production or delivery of goods and services; invoke the authority of national or international laws, rules, and regulations; and mobilise supporters beyond the labour movement (Brookes 2019).

Understandably, dividing TLAs along five dimensions can seem simultaneously overwhelming and inadequate. Even a simplified model that assigns five possible categories to the first dimension, two each for the next three dimensions, and three categories for the fifth dimension yields a typological space containing 72 cells and, therefore, 72 possible TLA 'types'. I predict, however, that the empirical distribution of cases would not be even across cells. Some cells would stay empty, while others would be highly populated, as cases cluster along certain dimensions. For example, TLAs with more long-term goals will likely also be proactive, span multiple workplaces, and involve Global Unions. Clearly, work on this front remains to be done. Completing the task of typologising TLAs will be crucial for moving forward with comparative analysis, large-N or otherwise.


### 6. Conclusion

The TLA Project exists not only to bridge the gap between the NGLS and the mainstream social science literature; it also exists to shed light on real-world concerns by tracking trends in transnationalism throughout major shifts in the geopolitical, technological, cultural, and macroeconomic landscape over time. TLAs are not separate from the national and global crises unfolding in the 2020s. Labour affects and is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, environmental degradation and climate change,

economic inequality, the global decline in freedom of association and expression, the continued undervaluation of care work, and calls for racial justice, including the Movement for Black Lives (Schulze-Cleven/Vachon 2021). TLAs help define what it means to exercise power vis-à-vis powerful TNCs and states. They may yet prove to be an enduring feature of the global economy for decades to come.

Clearly, this overview has barely scratched the surface of the TLA Project's enormous potential. While the database itself will be valuable for both researchers and practitioners, the process of completing this project will also continue to generate findings along the way that will be of interest to a broad audience. These findings include an emerging picture of the geography of TLA campaigns, a typology of TLAs, varying forms of material and strategic gains won in TLA campaigns, strategies of coordination unions have used to cooperate across national borders, and patterns of strategic interaction among workers and employers on the international scale.

In sum, the topic of labour transnationalism is timely and important, as the future of secure, stable, gainful employment has come to depend not only on local dynamics and national politics but also increasingly on the interests and actions of corporations and other non-state actors. With this new database, we can begin to understand more thoroughly not only when and how TLAs succeed and fail, but also topics such as when and how the gains from successful TLA campaigns become institutionalised over time, what role national governments play in either enhancing or limiting forms of private governance, and how employers evolve over time in their strategic responses to transnational campaigns, among many other salient topics.

1   See Appendix for a full list of finished TLA campaign files. To request access to view the TLA Database, please email: mbrookes@ucr.edu
2   Examples of recent NGLS scholarship include Webster and O'Brien (2020), Sarkar and Kuruvilla (2020), Frangi and Zhang (2021) and Lohmeyer and Schüßler (2018).
3   Encouragingly, the first and second timelines only occasionally diverge so much as to require the creation of a third timeline.
4   A fourth Global Union, UNI, declined my request for interviews but remains open to the possibility of allowing me to speak with their staff if I provide letters of reference from unions and labour-friendly academic researchers.

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5    These interviews were conducted with full approval from UCR's Institutional Review Board (IRB).
6    For instance, some interviewees told me that employers' perspectives need to be more fully represented in the database. Other interviewees expressed the opposite concern, that the database should be more focused on workers and unions and primarily serve their needs.
7    With the exception of a few cases in which primary source data was included in the timelines because I obtained explicit permission by interviewees who signed disclosure forms approved by the IRB.
8    That said, even Antarctica is touched by TLA concerns. The TLA Project archive contains an ITF *Seafarers' Bulletin* briefly referencing "the exploitation of crews working on illegal fishing vessels from regions as diverse as South-East Asia, the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and even Antarctica" (ITF 2011).

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## Appendix

Below is a list of the 69 TLA campaigns fully documented in the database:

1. Accor
2. Adidas Panarub
3. Adidas PT Kizone
4. Agility Logistics
5. Amazon 2013-15
6. Blue Diamond
7. BMW
8. Bridgestone-Firestone
9. Brylane/PPR
10. Campaign Against Precarious Employment (Turkey)
11. Carrefour (Colombia)
12. Charleston 5
13. Citra Mina
14. Coca-Cola (Guatemala)
15. Crown Holdings / Carnival
16. Dannon / Danone
17. DESA

18. DHL
19. DNO
20. El Super
21. First Group
22. Flags of Convenience
23. Fonterra
24. Fruit of the Loom
25. H&M (2003-04)
26. IKEA
27. Imerys
28. Inditex (Turkey)
29. JBS (US)
30. Kik
31. Kimberly Clark
32. Lidl
33. Liverpool
34. Marks & Spencer
35. Mercedes / Daimler
36. Mondelez / Kraft (Egypt & Tunisia)
37. Mouse and the Elephant Campaign
38. Nestle
39. Nissan
40. Novamed
41. NXP (Philippines)
42. Pick 'N Pay
43. PKC Group
44. Ports of Convenience
45. Quebecor
46. Raffles
47. Ravenswood Aluminum
48. Rio Tinto (2000)
49. Rio Tinto (2012+)
50. Russell Athletics
51. Samsung
52. Securitas

53. Shame on Sheraton
54. Shangri-La
55. Sheraton (Maldives & Ethiopia)
56. Sheraton (Fiji)
57. Shoprite
58. T-Mobile
59. Tetley/Tata
60. Triumph
61. Turkish Airlines
62. Unilever (India – Mumbai)
63. Unilever (Netherlands)
64. Unilever (Pakistan – Casual-T)
65. Unilever (Pakistan – Rahim Yar Khan)
66. Unilever (United Kingdom)
67. UPS (Turkey)
68. Volkswagen
69. World Cup / Olympic Games (Brazil)

Abstract *Kampagnen transnationaler Allianzen von Arbeiter\*innen (Transnational Labour Alliances, TLAs) werden seit mehr als zwei Jahrzehnten intensiv beforscht. Dennoch ist über die allgemeinen Merkmale dieser Kampagnen wenig bekannt, was zum Teil daran liegt, dass die Gesamtheit der Fälle nicht erfasst wird. Dieser Leerstelle soll mit dem hier vorgestellten Transnational Labour Alliances Database Project entgegengewirkt werden. Bei dem Projekt handelt es sich um ein Archiv von Primär- und Sekundärquellen sowie um forschungsbasierte Fallbeschreibungen, die von der Autorin über sechs Jahre hinweg mit Hilfe von über 100 studentischen Forschungsassistent\*innen gesammelt wurden. Der Artikel erläutert die Methodik des Projekts sowie die Schwachstellen, die die Datenbank aktuell aufweist. Darüber hinaus gibt der Beitrag einen theoriegeleiteten Überblick über die Themen, die für die Analyse der TLAs besonders relevant erscheinen, und einen empirischen Überblick*

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*über allgemeine Trends bei den Kampagnen. Damit wird ein erster Schritt in Richtung einer Typologie der TLAs unternommen. Der Artikel argumentiert, dass sich TLAs hinsichtlich mindestens fünf zentraler Aspekte unterscheiden: (1) wer die Hauptakteure sind, (2) was die Arbeiter\*innen wollen, (3) wo eine Kampagne stattfindet, (4) warum die TLA überhaupt entsteht und (5) welche Taktiken angewandt werden.*

Marissa Brookes
Political Science, University of California, Riverside
mbrookes@ucr.edu