The field of international relations has expanded its traditional focus on the behavior of nation-states in response to various developments in the international arena, including the phenomenon of globalization, the emergence of transnational activist networks, the proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the penetration of global decision-making processes by these NGOs. This paper contributes to this body of literature by focusing on the most developed form of transnational activism, transnational social movements. I use a mixed-method research design to analyze how transnational social movements gain and exert power in world politics. The project combines a large-N analysis of how transnational social movement organizations influence world politics with an in-depth case study of the global movement against sweatshops. In particular, I use the case study analysis to trace the process by which the anti-sweatshop movement overcame challenges of organizing transnationally and gained political influence in world politics. I argue that as transnational movements manage internal differences and maintain solidarity across time and space they are able to effectively pressure their targets into changing their practices.

Fernando Tormos is a PhD candidate at Purdue University with a specialization in social movements and the politics of social groups. Specifically, his research is interested in how transnational social movements overcome internal divisions and gain political influence over global decision-making processes. His work focuses on labor, environmental, human rights, and student movements. Tormos is also part of a research team affiliated with Purdue’s Center for Research on Diversity and Inclusion that investigates the challenges and consequences of building solidarity across social group differences.

Faculty Host: Bryce Reeder (reeder3@purdue.edu; 765-494-2951)