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Dissertation Title
Civil Society on the Line: Examining the Relationship between Media and Activist Groups along the Arizona/Sonora Border

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Abstract
The U.S. government began militarizing its southern border in 1994 to prevent unauthorized persons from crossing into the country. In the thirteen years that followed, more than 4500 individuals perished trying to cross into the United States. Neither militarization nor migrant deaths have discouraged unauthorized entry across the southern U.S. border; roughly 1500 unauthorized migrants are apprehended each day in the Tucson Sector alone. Numerous civil society organizations, formed to protest what they see as broken immigration policy, have mobilized along the border and actively responded in ways that have challenged the government's management of this federal issue. Media coverage of their efforts has placed immigration at the center of national debate.

This dissertation focuses on media's relationship with three of the most prominent civil society groups active along the U.S./Mexico border: Humane Borders, Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, and No More Deaths. These groups have each gained national media attention for the often controversial approaches they have chosen to address what they view as a crisis along the border. As the result of widespread coverage of their on-the-ground efforts, each has also had an influence on the general public's understanding of current immigration policy and the need for reform.

This qualitative study examines the delicate relationship between members of a passionate citizenry, the messages they promote, and the media through which those messages are conveyed. It is an attempt to highlight the success of concerned group of citizens in utilizing media to shape the national public’s attitudes and actions toward unauthorized migrants. Participant observation, survey and interview work, and content analysis were employed as a means of analyzing media consumption habits of the volunteers, studying the ideologies and actions of the organizations, and measuring the effect that mediated publicity of their efforts has had on the wider immigration debate.