

Organizing Together: Benefits and Drawbacks of Community-Labor Coalitions for Community Organizations

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ABSTRACT Community-labor coalitions unite grassroots community organizations and hierarchical labor unions with the promise of increasing the effectiveness of each. Little is known, however, about whether and how community organizations benefit from such partnerships. We analyze survey data from the National Study of Community Organizing Organizations and field data from community-labor coalitions in Chicago to identify benefits and drawbacks for community organizations collaborating with unions. We find that community organizations that have unions as members generate more media attention, possess a broader tactical repertoire, and are more likely to mount state-level advocacy campaigns. Those benefits, however, come at the expense of grassroots mobilizing and result in less neighborhood-level organizing, fewer volunteers, and smaller turnouts at protest actions, all of which are vital to community organizing. Understanding these benefits and drawbacks can help advocates adjust strategy, tactics, and goals to ensure the long-term viability of community-labor coalitions.

INTRODUCTION

Coalitions of community organizations and labor unions play important political roles in many US cities and states (Milkman and Ott 2014; Reich, Jacobs, and Dietz 2014; Luce 2015).¹ In the past decade, community-labor coalitions have won notable policy victories, such as a \$15 minimum wage

1. Throughout this article, we use the term “community organizations” as shorthand for grassroots community organizations engaged in community organizing.

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in California, Illinois, and Massachusetts, paid sick days legislation in New Jersey, and a state law mandating predictable work schedules in New York (Doussard and Lesniewski 2017). These victories confound commonly held views about the improbability of activists winning state employment policy reforms (Doussard and Lesniewski 2017). More surprising than these unexpected outcomes, however, is the existence of the community-labor coalitions that underlie them. In addition to negotiating the substantial problem of unions' past discrimination against communities of color (Jayaraman and Ness 2005; Milkman 2006; Tait 2016), community-labor coalitions face challenges in uniting grassroots community organizations engaged primarily in basic outreach and leadership training with unions focused on public policy and political bargaining (Tattersall 2013; Lesniewski and Doussard 2017). Despite these apparently conflicting priorities, research indicates that some community-labor coalitions have forged successful partnerships (Milkman 2006; Cordero-Guzmán, Izvănariu, and Narro 2013; Tattersall 2013). These accounts, however, typically focus on unions and the benefits they accrue from the partnerships (Clawson 2003; Milkman 2006; Sonn and Luce 2008; Ikeler 2014). What community organizations gain from collaborating with unions, and what they trade away, remains underexamined in substantial part because both the quantitative and qualitative information needed to assess those relationships are in short supply.

The limited prior research suggests that collaborating with unions can provide community organizations with additional resources and extend their pathways to influence (DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge 2009). Due to their size and resources, unions are able to fund the development of certain organizational expertise and services for community organizations participating in labor campaigns. For example, unions have invested in social media production and training programs and frequently make their researchers available to community partners (Nissen 2004). Having access to these resources would likely help community organizations increase their strategic capacity and develop more effective campaigns (Milkman, Bloom, and Narro 2010; Cordero-Guzmán et al. 2013). In addition, unions in the United States have a federated structure, with local organizational chapters connected at state and national levels. This arrangement provides a means for community organizations partnering with unions to expand their organizing scope and reach elected officials beyond their local areas of operation.

Examinations of the degree to which community-labor coalitions benefit community organizations, however, must also consider the persistent trade-offs associated with limited organizational resources. For example, contemporary community-labor efforts require organizations to apportion their efforts among local campaigns, typically focused at the neighborhood or city level, and campaigns targeted at higher levels of government (Milkman and Ott 2014). State-level activism requires political skills that differ from those used in local campaigns and expenditure of resources that would otherwise be used to support local organizing and advocacy (Dousard and Gamal 2016). The need to obtain and allocate skills and resources specifically for higher-level political advocacy suggests that participating in such campaigns comes at the expense of the bread-and-butter local organizing activities of developing leaders, mobilizing citizens, and building local-level campaigns.

To identify benefits and drawbacks to community organizations collaborating with unions, we analyze data from the National Study of Community Organizing Organizations (NSCOO). This unique data source provides detailed information on the members, resources, and activities of a set of organizations that comprise institutions such as local religious congregations, nonprofit organizations, schools, unions, and other civic associations. Our quantitative analysis indicates that community organizing organizations with unions as members have greater strategic capacity and a broader organizing scope but less mobilizing capacity than those without union members. To better understand how these relationships function and how they affect community organizations at the level of practice, we analyze data from 142 interviews with community organizers, union leaders, policy makers, elected officials, and low-wage workers in Chicago, as well as data from participant observation with members of Chicago's community-labor coalition. Together, these approaches constitute a mixed-methods explanatory research design, in which the qualitative data explain and add context and nuance to the quantitative findings (Creswell and Creswell 2017).

The qualitative data show that collaborating with unions changes not only community organizations' immediate capacities and skills but also their long-term thinking about political and organizing strategy. Among the cases we analyze, unions help community organizations generate more media attention and broaden their tactical repertoires. In addition, the many points of contact that community organizers, rank-and-file members,

and organizational directors have with unions lead these community organizations to undertake campaigns that use resources and influence at the level of cities and states. Finally, the field data show that these benefits to working with unions are accompanied by the cost of increasing demands on community organizations' time, staff, and fiscal resources. Our informants are well aware of these demands. Accordingly, they are experimenting with techniques for balancing the demands of political organizing campaigns with the basic organizational work of developing and mobilizing members.

SHARED PROBLEMS, POOLED RESOURCES: WHY UNIONS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS WORK TOGETHER

Unions and community organizations serve similar populations, and both confront systemic problems of low wages, insecure work, and power arrangements that disadvantage poor, marginal, and working-class communities (Jayaraman and Ness 2005; DeFilippis et al. 2009; Wood and Fulton 2015; Yukich, Fulton, and Wood 2019). Despite these similarities, in the mid- and late twentieth century, the two types of organizations worked in parallel rather than in concert. The terms of the 1935 Wagner Act, which granted unions new political and legal legitimacy, pushed union practice toward state- and national-level political bargaining—often at the expense of local grassroots organizing that built and sustained labor organizations prior to the New Deal (Montgomery 1989). Following the Wagner Act, unions developed effective mechanisms for organizing their members to mobilize for state and national political change, while at the same time, the number of members joining and participating in community organizations diminished (Cornwell and Harrison 2004). Although community organizations continued to operate within the same industrial areas and working-class enclaves as unions, they targeted sources of power closer to citizens and their lived experience (e.g., city governments, landlords, corporations, and sometimes unions themselves) rather than state and national elected officials (Warren 2001). As a result, unions and community organizations developed distinct cultures and approaches to organizing (Fulton and Wood 2012). In addition to prioritizing union-recognition elections that result in new dues-paying members, unions focus more on public policy campaigns, whereas community organizations focus more on geographically immediate problems that directly affect the lives of their rank-and-file members (Braunstein, Fulton, and Wood 2014).

Both types of organizations invested time and energy in developing citizens (or workers) into leaders. Unions, however, developed and protected organizational chains of command in which higher-ranking members and professionals near the top of the organizational hierarchy frequently overruled the decisions of rank-and-file members (Nicholls 2003; Tattersall 2013). Critics of unions' rigid, top-down structure note that disempowering members weakens rank-and-file enthusiasm for organizing and policy campaigns and that leaders often cause dissent by cutting deals that override members' decisions (Fine 2005; Holgate 2015; Lesniewski and Dousard 2017). Unions' rigid hierarchies persist, however, in substantial part because they facilitate access to elected officials (Kerrissey and Schofer 2018). Although national-level union leaders and the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) often advocate for positions that large portions of their membership oppose, unions' ability to speak with a single voice, and at scale, increases their effectiveness in state- and national-level political bargaining (Silverstein 2008; Doussard 2013; Terhune 2014).

Unions' top-down structure contrasts with community organizations' looser hierarchies, which facilitate the development of activist leaders and small-unit democracy (Tattersall 2013; Fulton, Oyakawa, and Wood 2019). In contrast to unions, community organizations rarely organize within workplaces. When they draw on a subset or class of workers as a constituency (e.g., low-wage workers, day laborers), they typically organize along other lines of identity, such as neighborhood, religious denomination, or ethnic identification (Fulton 2017; Markofski, Fulton, and Wood 2019). In addition, engaging the lived experience of these communities generally identifies organizing issues centered around housing, health care, public spending, and other issues less likely to be confronted directly through workplace-based organizing. Community organizations also excel at local-level mobilization, an area in which unions have historically performed poorly (Holgate 2015; Fulton and Wood 2018).

The promise of community-labor coalitions lies not in eliminating these differences but rather using each approach to organizing to complement the other. Whereas unions benefit from increased community support for their causes, partnering with unions can provide community organizations with access to skilled professionals, such as lawyers and public relations specialists, as well as greater financial resources. Perhaps more importantly, unions' power in multiple political arenas can enhance the

bargaining ability of community organizations that have limited political connections. In principle, community organizations can use union resources to increase their strategic capacity and broaden their organizing scope. These anticipated gains may come, however, at the cost of local-level organizing and mobilization, as organizational resources are redirected toward the higher-level issue advocacy and resource-intensive campaigns that organized labor favors.

Despite the challenges involved in uniting these different types of organizations, participation in community-labor coalitions continues to grow (Clawson 2003; Jayaraman and Ness 2005; Milkman et al. 2010; Milkman and Ott 2014; Fine 2015). In the midst of deindustrialization, community development funding cuts, and mounting poverty, both institutions have had distinctive motivation to collaborate and pool resources (Reynolds 2004). Changes to the political, economic, and social context in which these institutions are embedded have made the prospect of combining the efforts of community organizations and labor unions not only appealing to both entities but also necessary from a strategic standpoint (Jayaraman and Ness 2005; Doussard 2016). More recently, falling levels of union density, the proliferation of states' so-called right-to-work laws, and the recent Supreme Court *Janus* decision limit unions' ability to fund themselves and add urgency to campaigns to recognize new unionized workplaces and increase the total number of dues-paying union members (Peck 2016).²

In response to these challenges, scholars have published numerous manifestos proposing to update organizing and political advocacy by focusing on problems of low-wage work, prioritizing the previously downplayed issue of race, and building multiorganizational networks that cross territorial and social boundaries (Anner 1996; Sen 2003; Sites, Chaskin, and Parks 2007; Bobo, Kendall, and Max 2010). Community-labor coalitions devote their limited resources to pursuing these same goals. In the 1990s, AFL-CIO unions began to institutionalize efforts to partner with community organizations by founding more than 500 local central labor councils—elected boards of local union members charged with reaching out to local community organizations, coordinating policy campaigns, and building union support for community organizing initiatives (Ness and Eimer 2001). Sharing resources and participating in the same campaigns helped participants in

2. *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Council 31*, No. 16-1466, 585 U.S. ____ (2018).

community-labor coalitions learn about one another's organizational cultures, develop routines for working together, and build interpersonal relationships vital to capable organizing (Milkman 2006; Doussard 2016).

Unions had straightforward reasons for partnering with community organizations. By the 1990s, union leaders viewed their diminished membership and waning political influence as a crisis. The unionized share of the workforce had peaked in the late 1950s and dwindled ever since. At the same time, increasing employer militancy and the growth of service industries characterized by large numbers of small workplaces prohibited the effective recruitment of new union members (Doussard 2013). In the limited cases in which unions mounted campaigns to form bargaining units in service-sector industries, they faced pervasive mistrust from workers of color whose families had suffered discrimination from historically white and racist union locals in the construction trades (Jayaraman and Ness 2005). Building coalitions with community organizations increased unions' likelihood of winning support in the communities of color that comprise a large share of the growing low-wage workforce. No less important, the popular legitimacy of community organizations also helped mobilize citizens to support union organizing campaigns, the legislative reforms they proposed, and the political candidates representing them (Sonn and Luce 2008). The Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign, in which community organizations allied to low-wage janitors mobilized their members on behalf of the union-recognition campaign, exemplifies the potential of community organizations to add legitimacy and citizen mobilization to union-led campaigns (Milkman 2006). The partnership between community organizations and unions advanced rapidly in the late 1990s, when both supported living-wage campaigns designed to raise wages for low-income service workers of color (Luce 2004).

The appeal of collaboration for community organizations came from the recognition that unions' resources and political relationships provide an effective means of promoting legislation to address the systematic problems of disinvestment, job loss, and working poverty facing low-income communities and people of color (Ness and Eimer 2001; Milkman 2006). However, these collaborations developed during a period in which community organizations' embrace of service delivery and neighborhood development work was already diverting time and financial resources away from grassroots organizing activities (Stoecker 1997; Fulton 2016). The prospect of partnering with unions forced community organizations to weigh the

potential trade-off between higher-level political advocacy and local-level grassroots organizing (Lesniewski and Doussard 2017). If higher-level political advocacy diminishes local-level organizing and leadership development, then partnering with unions may weaken the organizing activities on which community organizations depend.

THE CHALLENGE OF COLLABORATION

Community-labor coalitions played central roles in winning city- and state-level minimum wages, earned sick time legislation, and other proworker employment legislation enacted in the 2010s. Research on these campaigns has helped scholars address long-standing questions of whether and how unions and community organizations can work together and whether those coalitions can be successful in achieving their stated goals (Milkman 2006; Milkman et al. 2010; Milkman and Ott 2014; Doussard and Gamal 2016; Doussard and Lesniewski 2017). This body of research describes in detail what unions gain from collaborating with community organizations, but it leaves underexamined whether and how community organizations benefit from such collaborations. When union officials themselves reflect on their collaborations with community organizations, they note that unions' promises to support intensive community organizing are rarely kept (Lesniewski and Doussard 2017; Rosenblum 2017). One likely explanation for this outcome is that union-led policy organizing campaigns consume time and resources so intensively that coalitions are unable to shift their attention to community organizing activities.

During the same period that unions founded local central labor councils and began seeking partnerships with community-based organizations, they also began to initiate policy-advocacy campaigns to supplement their union-recognition and contract campaigns. Milkman (2006) contrasts this "air game" approach with the conventional "ground game" of grassroots organizing. By pairing unions' resources and community organizations' mobilizing power, this approach achieved legislative victories that brought about wage and job-quality improvements that the collective bargaining process had failed to obtain, particularly in service-sector industries. Examples of such victories include passing wage-theft, living-wage, and minimum wage laws in dozens of cities and states (Doussard and Gamal 2016; Doussard and Lesniewski 2017). The prototypical campaign in this model allies unions' financial and strategic resources and political reach with community

organizations' political legitimacy and skill in mobilizing individual citizens (Fulton 2019). Community-labor coalitions continue to use these combined resources to pressure employers not to interfere in union campaigns and to persuade politicians at multiple political levels to enact legislation favorable to workers (Milkman et al. 2010).

The best known of these efforts, the LA Justice for Janitors campaign in the late 1990s, drew on the pooled resources of unions and community organizations to overcome a series of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, including workers' undocumented status, employer intransigence, and the need to sustain the campaign for several years (Waldinger et al. 1996; Milkman 2006). The LA Justice for Janitors campaign and others like it advanced collaborative organizing tactics and strategies that the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and its community organization allies quickly adopted elsewhere. The Justice for Janitors model itself spread with mixed success to a number of cities in the 2000s (Milkman 2011). Increasingly, labor campaigns combined union resources and political connections with community organizations' broad base of members to move advocacy to the state level. From 2004 to 2012, US states passed several dozen bills addressing wage theft—the deliberate under- or nonpayment of promised pay rates—in service-sector workplaces (Doussard and Gamal 2016). State-level advocacy also began to support minimum wage increases (Sonn and Luce 2008) and dedicated legislative responses to law-breaking industries, such as the establishment of a garment industry task force in California (Archer et al. 2010) and a legally binding Greengrocer Code of Conduct in New York (Ness 2010). State-level campaigns grew still more prominent during the national Fight for \$15 fast-food minimum wage campaigns, in which allied community organizations in dozens of cities used their connections and membership to pressure employers and city councilmembers to raise wages; these efforts often received financial support from unions. Some of the successful city-level campaigns, most notably those in California, Illinois, and New York, led to similarly successful state-wide minimum wage campaigns.³

3. As Republican-controlled state legislatures began to oppose organized labor more forcefully in the 2010s, however, most community-labor coalitions redirected their efforts to city legislatures, where they have helped pass dozens of laws addressing wage theft, the minimum wage, earned sick time, fair scheduling, and other employment matters (see Doussard and Lesniewski 2017).

Despite these achievements, the community-labor coalitions' air game approach drew criticism. Some analysts warned that big, expensive campaigns of the type first modeled in LA would lead to the neglect of the local grassroots organizing on which those campaigns drew (Nissen 2004; Savage 2006; Aguiar and Ryan 2009; Markowitz 2015). The final bargain the SEIU made with janitors' employers also raised questions, with critics noting the large distance between the small pay raise workers actually won and the animating goal of stable, living-wage employment. However, each of these critiques focuses on the benefits unions reaped from the coalition, leaving open the question of what community organizations gain and lose from collaborating with unions.

Research on community-labor coalitions points to several possible gains and losses for community organizations, with the gains coming predominantly from an increased strategic capacity and a broadened organizing scope (Doussard and Gamal 2016). First, unions use their size and resources to fund specialized, in-house services that smaller, less well-resourced community organizations can rarely fund for themselves (Milkman 2006). Contemporary unions, and especially those engaged in organizing, have staff members dedicated to social media training and development, lobbying and political representation, corporate and campaign research, and policy development (Fowler and Hagar 2013). Second, unions devote resources at every level of their federated structure (local, state, and national) to cultivating political relationships, a commitment that should be expected to both expand political influence for their community partners and help those partners work at higher political scales (DeFilippis et al. 2009).

The disadvantages community organizations may accrue from working with unions typically relate to the organizations' grassroots mobilizing efforts. First, unions' focus on state- and national-level campaigns requires substantial resources and a more sophisticated skill set. Such campaigns require travel to often-distant capitals and professionalized communication skills that differ from those activists use with city councils and mayors (Doussard and Lesniewski 2017). In addition to consuming resources and requiring specialized skills, policy advocacy at the state and national levels entails multiple logistical challenges, as organizers must find the means to allow members to travel to and from legislative hearings that politicians often reschedule or cancel (Doussard and Lesniewski 2017). Second, union-directed policy campaigns often have periods of intense, round-the-clock organizing and advocacy, which can monopolize organizational resources

that community organizations need for other work. For example, preparation for the first Fight for \$15 strikes in Chicago featured Thursday night meetings that frequently ran past midnight; consecutive all-night planning sessions prior to the strikes; dozens of radio, television, and print interviews in the days following the strikes; and follow-up testimony and lobbying at Chicago City Hall and the state capitol in Springfield.⁴ Many accounts of community-labor organizing campaigns note diminished levels of activity and participation by community organizations over the course of such intensive campaigns (Ness 2010; Doussard 2013; Broxmeyer and Michaels 2014).

These dynamics of community-labor coalitions suggest a mix of benefits and drawbacks for participating community organizations. Accounting for the gains and losses for community organizations is an important step in evaluating these partnerships as they become more common and can provide vital insight for adjusting strategy, tactics, and goals to ensure the long-term viability of these coalitions. Although our inquiry focuses on community organizations collaborating with unions, the findings speak to broader, long-standing concerns about how organizers can balance the ground game of grassroots organizing with the air game of policy advocacy. Overall, we expect that community organizations that collaborate with unions will exhibit (1) greater strategic capacity, (2) a broader organizing scope, and (3) less mobilizing capacity.

DATA AND METHOD

QUANTITATIVE DATA AND MODEL

To identify benefits and drawbacks to community organizations partnering with unions, we analyze data from the NSCOO (Fulton, Wood, and Interfaith Funders 2011). The organizations in this study are located throughout the country and share a similar mission and structure. They operate as community-based organizations that organize local constituents to address the social, economic, and political issues affecting their communities (Osterman 2006). Similar to social movement organizations, these organizations mobilize constituents to address issues through the public exercise of political power (Morris 1984; Tarrow 1994). Similar to civic organizations, their most common forms of public engagement are collective civic actions (Sampson et al. 2005). Each

4. The first author participated in these activities.

organization comprises institutional members, which can include local religious congregations, nonprofit organizations, schools, unions, and other civic associations. Each organization has a board of directors consisting of representatives from these member institutions. The members of the board of directors function as the organization's core leadership team and meet together on a regular basis to lead the organization (Wood, Fulton, and Partridge 2012). These commonalities enable our analysis to hold the organizations' form relatively constant while allowing their size, member composition, activities, and organizational outputs to vary.

The NSCOO surveyed the entire field of these organizations by distributing a two-part survey to the director of each organization. Part one was an online survey that gathered extensive data on each organization's history, activities, and outputs. Part two consisted of customized spreadsheets that directors used to provide detailed demographic information about their institutional members, board members, and paid staff. This multilevel study achieved a response rate of 94 percent, gathering data on 178 of the 189 organizations in the country and demographic information on the 4,145 member institutions, 2,939 board members, and 506 paid organizers affiliated with these organizations (Fulton 2018).⁵

Although the NSCOO did not focus explicitly on community-labor coalitions, it collected data on the organizations' institutional members, which allows us to compare organizations that collaborated with unions to those that did not. When the directors provided information about their institutional members to the NSCOO, they were asked to indicate each institution's type. The analysis uses this information to construct the key independent variable: whether at least one of the organization's institutional members is a union. Twenty-three percent of the organizations have at least one union as an institutional member.

To assess the relationship between union membership and organizational effectiveness, this study analyzes multiple measures of organizational

5. The population included every institution-based community organizing organization in the United States with an office address, at least one paid employee, and institutional members. Institution-based organizing differs from other types of community organizing in that the organizations have institutional members rather than individual members. The population did not include organizations with only individual members. Based on these criteria, the study identified 189 active organizations by using databases from every national and regional community organizing network, databases from 14 foundations that fund community organizing, and archived IRS 990 forms.

output, specifically an organization's strategic capacity, organizing scope, and mobilizing capacity. The analysis uses three dependent variables for each of the measures.

Strategic Capacity

Strategies are the means by which an organization mobilizes resources to achieve its goals (Walker and McCarthy 2010). An organization's strategic capacity comprises the range of effective strategies it is likely to generate and utilize. When people develop strategies, they draw from their life experiences and professional training, which shape the way they frame issues, see political opportunities, and mobilize resources (Ganz 2000). Thus, when a community organization collaborates with a union, the organization is expected to incorporate strategies familiar to labor organizers and increase its effectiveness in implementing those strategies. To assess the relationship between union membership and an organization's strategic capacity, the analysis employs three variables: (1) uses strikes, boycotts, or sit-ins as organizing tactics; (2) uses Twitter at least once a week; and (3) number of references in newspaper articles.

Each variable was constructed using responses to one of the NSCOO survey items. Respondents were asked to indicate (from a list) which tactics their organization had used in the last 2 years to address issues. Strikes, boycotts, and sit-ins were among the tactics listed; "uses strikes, boycotts, or sit-ins as organizing tactics" was constructed from this item. Respondents were also asked to indicate how often their organization used specific services to mass communicate with constituents during the last 12 months. Twitter was one of the services listed, and frequency of use options ranged from never to daily (Fowler and Hagar 2013); "uses Twitter at least once a week" was constructed from this item. "Number of references in newspaper articles" was constructed using a survey item asking respondents to indicate how many "press hits" (by media type and geographic scope) their organization had received in the last 12 months. Newspapers were one of the media types, and the geographic scope options were local, regional, and national (Andrews and Caren 2010).

Organizing Scope

An organization's scope of organizing activity corresponds with the political level at which it seeks to engage in policy advocacy (Kleidman 2004; Wood 2007). In recent years, limited local resources and entrenched metropolitan

inequality highlighted the need for policy advocacy to occur at higher levels of government (Rusch 2012). However, compared with unions, many community organizations lack sufficient resources, skills, and networks to engage in higher-level political advocacy (Sager, Fulton, and Wood 2014). Thus, when a community organization collaborates with a union, it is expected that the organization will have a broader organizing scope and engage in policy advocacy at higher levels of government. To assess the relationship between union membership and an organization's organizing scope, the analysis uses three variables: (1) percentage of organizing activity occurring at the state level; (2) addressing at least one issue at the state level; and (3) number of state legislators with which the organization met.

"Percentage of organizing activity occurring at the state level" was constructed using responses to a survey item in which respondents were asked to provide the percentages of their organization's activity that focused on addressing issues at the neighborhood, city or county, state, multistate, national, and international levels (Wood 2007). "Addressing at least one issue at the state level" was constructed using responses to two survey items. Respondents were asked to indicate (from a list) which issues their organization had been actively addressing over the past 2 years. For each issue area selected, respondents were asked to indicate the level or levels at which their organization was addressing that issue; "state" was one of the options (Wood and Fulton 2015). "Number of state legislators with which the organization met" was constructed using responses to three survey items. Respondents were asked to indicate whether their organization had met with any political officials in the last 12 months. If respondents answered "Yes" to this question, they were asked to indicate (from a list) the positions of the political officials with which their organization had met in the last 12 months; "state legislator" was one of the positions listed. For each position selected, respondents were asked to indicate how many different people in that position their organization had met with in the last 12 months (Sager et al. 2014). Respondents were also asked to provide the full names of the political officials with which their organizations met.

Mobilizing Capacity

Grassroots organizations develop leaders and demonstrate power by mobilizing people from their surrounding communities, and an organization's mobilizing capacity corresponds with the number of volunteers it trains and constituents it assembles (Wood 2002). Because unions focus

on addressing issues at higher levels of government, and such activities compete for time with efforts to organize at the local level, it is expected that collaborating with a union will reduce a community organization's mobilizing capacity by taking time away from mobilizing activities (Rusch 2012; Young, Neumann, and Nyden 2018). To assess the relationship between union membership and an organization's mobilizing capacity, the analysis uses three variables: (1) percentage of organizing activity occurring at the neighborhood level; (2) number of volunteers; and (3) largest single turnout.

"Percentage of organizing activity occurring at the neighborhood level" was constructed using responses to a survey item in which respondents were asked to provide the percentages of their organization's activity that focused on addressing issues at the following levels: neighborhood, city or county, state, multistate, national, and international (Christens and Speer 2015). "Number of volunteers" was constructed using responses to a survey item in which respondents were asked to indicate the number of people who regularly attend planning meetings or work on their organization's projects (Orsi 2014). "Largest single turnout" was constructed using a survey item in which respondents were asked to provide the date and approximate attendance level of their organization's three most recent organization-wide events. The attendance number for the event with the largest turnout was used for this variable (Fulton 2019).

Controls

The analysis controls for the organization's annual revenue and age, the number of its paid staff and member institutions, the proportion of leadership team members who are white, and the estimated density of union membership in the organization's state based on data from the 2011 Current Population Survey (Hirsch, Macpherson, and Vroman 2001). Table 1 displays descriptive statistics for the variables used in the quantitative analysis.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The quantitative analysis conducts a series of linear, logistic, and Poisson regressions appropriate for the type of dependent variable under analysis. Table 2 displays the results of the nine multivariate regression models examining the relationships between the presence of a union in the organization

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Field of Institution-Based Community Organizing Organizations

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Strategic capacity:					
Uses strikes, boycotts, or sit-ins as organizing tactics	.10	.30	.00	1.00	171
Uses Twitter at least once a week	.10	.30	.00	1.00	173
Number of references in newspaper articles	9.84	12.73	.00	80.00	170
Organizing scope:					
Percentage of organizing activity occurring at the state level	15.88	16.05	.00	80.00	171
Addressing at least one issue at the state level	.83	.37	.00	1.00	173
Number of state legislators with which the organization met	7.14	12.19	.00	90.00	170
Mobilizing capacity:					
Percentage of organizing activity occurring at the neighborhood level	24.98	23.25	.00	95.00	171
Number of volunteers (× 100)	1.11	1.01	.03	6.00	171
Largest single turnout (× 100)	6.02	6.26	.00	40.00	169
Union involvement:					
At least one of the organization's institutional members is a union	.23	.42	.00	1.00	173
Characteristics of the organization and its context:					
Annual revenue (× \$100,000)	3.05	6.51	.11	75.00	173
Number of paid staff	3.53	3.26	1.00	25.00	173
Number of institutional members	23.75	14.10	4.00	82.00	173
Age of the organization	13.55	8.71	1.00	40.00	173
Proportion of leadership team members who are white	.48	.26	.00	1.00	167
Union membership density of the organization's state	12.78	5.83	2.90	24.10	173

Source.—2011 National Study of Community Organizing Organizations.

and its strategic capacity, organizing scope, and mobilizing capacity.⁶ Regarding an organization's strategic capacity, the analysis indicates that having at least one union as a member is positively associated with the number of union-style organizing tactics the organization uses, the frequency of its social media use, and the amount of media attention it receives. Having union members is associated with an organization being (1) 1.9 times more likely to use strikes, boycotts, or sit-ins; (2) 1.7 times more likely to use Twitter at least once a week; and (3) mentioned in 64 percent more local or regional newspaper articles. The analysis indicates similar positive relationships between having union members and the organization's organizing scope. Having at least one union member is associated with an organization (1) conducting nearly 3 times as much organizing activity at the state level as a percentage of its activity; (2) being 2.8 times more likely to

6. Because this study surveyed the entire population of institution-based community organizing organizations in the United States and received responses from 94 percent of the organizations, a finite population correction factor $\sqrt{(N-n)/(N-1)}$ is applied to each analysis (Cochran 1977). The finite population correction factor is based on the 163 organizations (out of 189) that provided data for all of the variables used in the analysis.

TABLE 2. Linear, Logistic, and Poisson Regressions Estimating the Relationship between Union Involvement and Organizational Outcomes

	Strategic Capacity				Organizing Scope			Mobilizing Capacity		
	Uses Strikes, Boycotts, or Sit-ins as Organizing Tactics ^b	Uses Twitter at Least Once a Week ^b	Number of References in Newspaper Articles ^c	Percentage of Organizing Activity Occurring at the State Level ^d	Addressing at Least One Issue at the State Level ^b	Number of State Legislators with Which the Organization Met ^c	Percentage of Organizing Activity Occurring at the Neighborhood Level ^d	Number of Volunteers ^c	Largest Single Turnout ^c	
At least one of the organization's institutional members is a union	1.861** (.374)	1.687** (.336)	1.637*** (.105)	2.756* (1.112)	2.802*** (.649)	1.569*** (.150)	-3.140* (1.379)	.664*** (.027)	.591*** (.030)	
Annual revenue ^a	.859 (.134)	1.679** (.278)	1.268*** (.056)	-.284 (.698)	.975 (.147)	1.476*** (.114)	2.715* (1.254)	1.124*** (.037)	1.081* (.042)	
Number of paid staff ^a	2.617*** (.419)	2.239*** (.525)	1.521*** (.068)	1.862* (.832)	1.376* (.206)	1.319* (.147)	-.088 (1.328)	1.040 (.036)	.950 (.042)	
Number of institutional members ^a	1.081 (.294)	.923 (.196)	1.194*** (.057)	1.076 (.910)	.736 (.138)	1.051 (.102)	-5.159*** (1.355)	1.735*** (.077)	2.210*** (.127)	

Age of the organization ^a	.994 (.132)	.858 (.101)	.958 (.033)	-.915 (.538)	1.672*** (.169)	.975 (.048)	3.721*** (.743)	1.270*** (.037)	1.113** (.039)
Proportion of leadership team members who are white	.286* (.139)	1.162 (.503)	1.028 (.107)	9.505*** (1.784)	1.051 (.320)	4.204*** (.717)	-20.159*** (2.183)	.897 (.061)	.753*** (.060)
Union membership density of the organization's state	1.128*** (.027)	1.002 (.012)	1.011* (.005)	.007 (.069)	1.144*** (.020)	.977*** (.007)	.147 (.108)	.977*** (.003)	.975*** (.004)
Number of organizations	166	167	165	166	167	165	166	165	163

Note.—Linearized standard errors reported in parentheses; constants are not displayed.

^a Logged values.

^b Odds ratios reported for the logistic regressions.

^c Incidence-rate ratios reported for the Poisson regressions.

^d Betas reported for the linear regression.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

address an issue at the state level; and (3) meeting with 57 percent more state legislators. On the other hand, the analysis indicates negative relationships between having at least one union member and an organization's mobilizing capacity. Having union members is associated with having (1) two-thirds less organizing activity occurring at the neighborhood level; (2) 34 percent fewer volunteers; and (3) 41 percent fewer people turning out to large-scale events. Overall, the analysis indicates that having at least one union member is positively associated with an organization's strategic capacity and organizing scope but negatively associated with its mobilizing capacity.

SECOND CITY STRIKES: THE BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS TO COLLABORATING WITH UNIONS IN CHICAGO

To better understand the benefits and drawbacks for community organizations that collaborate with unions, we analyze interview and participant-observation data collected by the first author over the course of four research projects and several policy campaigns undertaken between 2006 and 2019. These data principally consist of 142 interviews with community organization leaders and organizers (71), low-wage workers (29), union leaders and organizers (22), think tank professionals (15), and elected officials and policy makers (5). During that time, the first author provided research and advice for various worker-organizing campaigns and frequently participated in organizing meetings, strategy meetings, and public events ranging from legislative testimony to rallies. The interviews lasted from 15 minutes to 3 hours, with the questions focused on finely grained narratives of campaign events, strategies, and decisions. Interviews were partially transcribed and thematically coded after each round of fieldwork.

Across all periods of data collection, the method for selecting interview participants consisted principally of identifying community organizations, unions, workers, and policy writers engaged in the problems of low-wage fast-food, retail, and residential construction work, then conducting targeted interviews in which participants were asked how they identified and responded to workplace problems. The first project, which focused on low-wage worker organizing and a failed attempt to pass a living-wage law for large retailers, was coded primarily to detail workers' and organizers' strategies for winning improvements to wage and working conditions in low-wage workplaces. The second project focused on the Fight for \$15

movement and was coded primarily in terms of workers' motivations to strike and participate. The subsequent two studies, of low-wage worker organizing and efforts to integrate economic justice campaigns with housing, the environment, and other issues, were coded on measures of inter-organizational collaboration, campaign strategy, campaign tactics, and campaign motivations.

The different purposes, time frames, and interview strategies pursued over the course of these studies preclude systematic coding across all interviews for the analysis we present in the following sections. Instead, our analysis takes advantage of transcribed campaign narratives to add detail, explanation, and context to the findings from our quantitative model. In doing so, we employ a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design (Creswell and Creswell 2017), which uses the primary data to explain, contextualize, and add nuance to the quantitative findings. The qualitative results we present have been validated by thorough triangulation among the model findings, the interviews, and the first author's experience as a participant observer in many community-labor organizing campaigns. This analysis shows that a number of points of contact join community organizations and the unions with which they collaborate. These include trainings, policy campaigns, informal advising sessions, lobbying, and strikes. As a result, the influence of unions' organizing approaches on community organizations extends beyond the immediate transaction between the two parties. The field data show that exposure to unions' ideas, strategies, and tactics leads community organizations to understand their own work and goals differently.

STRATEGIC CAPACITY

Our quantitative model indicates that community organizations that collaborate with labor unions generate more media attention and possess a broader set of organizing tactics. Unions devoted many resources to building these capacities after the mid-2000s. For example, the SEIU's Fight for a Fair Economy strategy, undertaken in 2011 in response to both Wisconsin's antilabor Act 10 and the vigorous occupation of the state capitol in Madison by community and labor activists, devoted more than 1,500 organizers to door knocking and relationship building across 17 large cities (Smith 2011), provided financial assistance to partner organizations, devoted staff resources to training partner organizations in political campaigning,

and prioritized large-scale strikes and public demonstrations as longer-term goals (Rosenblum 2017). These efforts influenced the community organizations we studied in the qualitative analysis both through the direct mechanism of leaders receiving valuable training and through the indirect mechanism of exposing rank-and-file organizational members to new media tactics and the demonstration tactics of strikes, boycotts, and sit-ins.

Union efforts to help community organizations raise their profiles, using both news and social media, sprang from formal union policy during the study period. These efforts were aided by unions' prior decision to involve community organizations in policy campaigns at every level. The director of one community antipoverty advocacy organization explains how this long-term change in orientation led to more engagement with public policy: "Labor groups are doing more stuff that policy people used to do in a vacuum. The internal capacity development is important. Policy [advocacy] used to be done at a remove [from community organizations]. Now, pushing policy is integrated with mobilization."

Unions, she explained, provided a range of technical assistance to her organization and others in its network. Union attorneys consulted on drafting legislation; their staffers helped community organizations place editorials in the news media; and, in the early 2010s, at least, union staff members conducted training sessions and offered advice for organizations eager to use Facebook and Twitter.

The growing media capacity of Northside Power, a community organizing organization on Chicago's Northwest Side, shows the diverse benefits community organizations gain from unions' assistance. Northside Power collaborated with unions on many economic policy campaigns after 2005, when the organization's leaders determined that unions' public policy goals would benefit the organization's low-income membership. Beginning with the failed 2006 drive for a living-wage law covering big-box retailers, Northside Power organizers worked closely with union leaders to coordinate messages and events as well as meetings with elected officials. For example, Northside Power published reports that used original research from unions and union-supported research organizations with whom they collaborated. The organization has since conducted its own research on housing and education, published reports based on that research, and generated a number of stories in Chicago news media that publicize its research findings.

Unions also facilitate community organizations' use of social media by sharing their staff resources and organizational connections. The first

author observed this process many times while participating in and conducting research on the Fight for \$15 campaign in 2013. As the SEIU and community organizations planned the first wave of fast-food strikes, a handful of media professionals from the union's international offices set up shop in a cramped, low-rent office space on the city's Near South Side. Over the course of several days, fast-food workers, the union's own organizers, and organizers and members from allied community and neighborhood organizations cycled through the building. Working from laptops on wobbly card tables deep inside the building, they planned the campaign's social media, guided social media setup for fast-food workers and organizers (regardless of their organizational affiliation), and provided suggestions for possible messages and images. As the final days to the first planned strike ticked down, campaign organizers and the union's media consultants hovered in a corner of the office with cameras and lighting, urging workers who passed by to record video testimonials about their motivations for striking.

These practices directly transferred union expertise on media and social media to campaign participants. Our interviews with many of the nonunion organizations who participated in the campaign highlight two additional, indirect ways that participating in the Fight for \$15 campaign deepened their social media activities. First, the simple fact of exposure to the union's comparatively sophisticated social media and other media strategies spurred participating organizations to reexamine and bring up to date their own practices. Second, the striking workers themselves carried new ideas about social media to the community organizations in which they (or their friends or families) were members.

Community organizations that collaborated with unions during this period gained an appreciation for strikes, boycotts, and sit-ins through similar mechanisms. As a senior labor organizer involved in multiple campaigns explains, this outcome was the residue of design: "Part of Fight for \$15 was the decision to invest resources in protest, demonstration, [and] visibility. It was both part of the tactics for winning campaigns and part of the long-term strategy of the movement." This approach led directly to community organizations' members growing more involved with strikes and protests. For example, the lead organizer of City Alliance, a citywide direct action organization, explains that "the minimum wage filtered up into our other organizing. We couldn't help with [getting] a union, but we could help with making the minimum wage an issue that everyone needs to be thinking about. We made it so that in Illinois, one way or another,

a politician had to respond.” For City Alliance, protests around the minimum wage provided an important way to keep members engaged in activism day to day: The momentum of pursuing the next rally, the next office visit, and the next testimony made members eager to work for the organization.

Crucially, the public protests tied to the Fight for \$15 and related labor campaigns eventually took on a life of their own. The relationship is especially easy to observe in the case of community organizations’ involvement in the 2012 Chicago Teachers Union strike, which a South Side community organization director characterized memorably as “the culmination of a decade of work that had been happening at the community level.” (Several other organizers made similar comments.) According to interviews with senior organizers and union leaders, in the weeks before the strike, leadership, organizers, and rank-and-file members of many neighborhood and citywide community organizations ran a series of what they termed “strike schools,” in which Chicago Teachers Union staff and allies educated parents and community leaders about the union’s campaign and the Chicago Public Schools budget. A union official reports, however, that although the strike schools started as a deliberate tactic created by the Chicago Teachers Union, “they became their own thing: And then there’s all these solidarity events the community groups start doing, and they can connect the strike with whatever issues they care about. . . . It was sort of our idea, but it brings in all of these new organizations that have a stake.” Participating in the strike schools deepened community members’ engagement with protest and labor causes just as directly as did the media trainings provided by unions. Candace, the lead organizer from City Alliance, explains: “We organized solidarity strike schools, where we had parents and kids come to different churches, where we had community kids come, and we were really intentional about being pro-labor. I think we did six solidarity schools. . . . It was a shared conversation and a shared agenda-setting. There was shared visioning of what the schools should be and what the parents really wanted. And having that feedback acted upon was new, and parents liked that. The strike gave an opportunity for this new labor-community partnership to happen in a way that was in the self-interest of both parties.”

In these direct and indirect ways, community organizations that collaborate with unions develop greater capacity to win media attention and to use strikes and related tactics to advance their own goals. The next section

of our analysis details how unions' influence also changes the scope of application of those capacities.

ORGANIZING SCOPE

The goal of the AFL-CIO's establishment of local central labor councils in the late 1990s was to build support for municipal and regional policy campaigns (Ness 2010). The urbanized community-labor coalitions that undertook such campaigns gradually expanded their focus to state-level public policy campaigns, which bypassed the power of antireform urban political machines and focused advocacy on government entities that held power over a greater number of employment laws and a far larger number of workplaces (Doussard and Gamal 2016). In the 2010s, campaigns for municipal action on the minimum wage, wage theft, and earned sick time eventually transformed into statewide campaigns for the same: California, New York, Illinois, Washington, Oregon, Maryland and others passed statewide employment reforms as a result of urban community-labor coalitions refocusing their efforts on state houses.

Our quantitative model finds that community organizations that have unions as members are more likely to engage in state-level organizing, address issues at the state level, and meet with more state-level elected officials than their counterparts without union members. Field research with these organizations highlights both the intense demands state-level activity places on organizational resources and the benefits that compel them to participate nonetheless. State-level organizing brings many distinct costs, ranging from the hard costs of traveling to remote state capitals to the complexity of adjusting messages, tactics, and campaign goals to state-level political bodies whose electorates differ from the urban electorates with which community organizations are familiar. Representatives of community organizing organizations engaged in state-level policy named many challenges of conducting the work. However, they also named several practical reasons why state-level engagement is vital for effectively addressing economic issues.

First, they see state-level policy organizing as a logical outgrowth of city-level economic justice campaigns. Jack, the executive director of a South Side community organization devoted to addressing economic inequality, notes the logical higher-scale extension of the Chicago-focused economic

policy campaigns in which he participated: “This can happen—cities can lead. You do it, and it puts pressure up the stream,” with the end result of “getting a whole lot of places moving economic policy.” Over the 10-year period following 2005, Jack’s organization progressively expanded its work from neighborhood-level organizing, to city-level advocacy, to participation in state campaigns.

Second, state-level policy covers more employers and workers than municipal policy, and it proves easier to write and enforce. Lila, a senior activist for a poverty rights organization, explains that many of the proposed laws on which she has worked with unions are better fits for state legislation than local policy. “We’re always calculating on how to implement proworker legislation, private right-of-action, and administrative processes so that these [laws] can be enforced.” Successful municipal policy, she continues, must establish a city’s legal authority to regulate employment under the provisions of home rule law. Furthermore, cities must identify and fund an agency to enforce any such laws. Necessary legislation to establish and fund labor standards departments following new minimum wage requirements in Seattle, San Francisco, and Chicago consumed substantial resources and political capital to correct for the lesser enforcement powers of municipalities.

Third, fiscal austerity in the years after the Great Recession coupled with persistent pressure on public spending and social services spurred unions (who represented many public sector workers) and community organizations to advocate on state budget issues. A faith-based organizer and activist explains that such advocacy has the twin goals of stopping cuts in the short term and planting the seeds for long-term changes in revenue collection: “We’ll be in a meeting with a progressive legislator in Springfield who says, ‘I don’t want to hurt poor people’; and we’ll say, ‘Here [is] all the revenue you can raise and not make cuts.’ Some of our most reliable allies can’t think outside the box, can’t think outside the system, are sympathetic but ultimately not doing much. So we need to put our own people in.”

Similarly, a West Side organizer reluctantly engages in state-level activism because she sees no alternative: “My job is about building this infrastructure to continue social services to move the community forward, [from] basic needs met to longer-term support and building.”

Resource-intensive efforts to engage state-level policy makers illustrate both the benefits and the challenges to undertaking state-level campaigns. Alice and Elise, policy directors of separate Chicago-based advocacy

organizations, deepened their engagement with labor unions in the mid-2000s as Chicago-based activists launched campaigns to regulate temp agencies and to pass a living-wage law for big-box stores. Initially, their organizations provided guidance on municipal policy proposals and addressed the technical question of how city-level wage floors could be established under the provisions of home rule law. In the early 2010s, Chicago's community-labor activists began to complement these municipal policy campaigns with pressure to raise the minimum wage and address workplace problems via state legislation. Alice and Elise both welcomed the state approach. State-level legislation, they noted, covered more people; it eliminated time-consuming, technical questions about cities' home rule authority and the administration of the law; it empowered the State Department of Labor to enforce the law rather than requiring cities to add their own enforcement agencies; and state-level advocacy had the potential to expand political coalitions working on behalf of the poor.

These benefits made expensive, time-consuming, and logistically difficult travel to the state legislature worthwhile. Illinois, like a majority of US states, adds to the cost of state-level policy work by locating its state capital nearly 200 miles from its principal population center. When the legislature is in session, Alice and Elise spend Tuesday to Thursday of most weeks in the capital, sometimes carpooling or sharing a hotel room to reduce costs. The first author met both informants by chance in early 2019 in the state capitol building, where all three had been summoned by legislators supporting bills on the minimum wage and related employment standards. The hearing at which they met started later than planned and lasted for much longer than the 2 scheduled hours. Initially crowded with members of Chicago-based community organizations and unions, the audience thinned with each hour. As the hearing dragged on, the chairperson juggled the order of testimony, removed some scheduled witnesses, and asked others to cut short testimony they had spent hours or days preparing. Many participants left early to catch a return train to Chicago, while others stayed for the full hearing with the knowledge they had just committed to an overnight visit. Costs for participants were high not only in terms of the direct costs of traveling to and participating in the hearing but also the opportunity costs of preparing extensively for scheduled testimony of unknown start time and duration.

Nevertheless, the exchanges that Alice, Elise, and the first author had with several newly elected state legislators after the hearing appeared to

justify the effort of travel and testimony. As the diminished crowd filtered out of the room, Alice and Elise approached a handful of lingering representatives with information sheets about pending and proposed employment legislation. Two of the representatives asked surprisingly basic questions about the proposed laws: Who would enforce them? What did employers say about the changes? What effect did similar laws have in other states? Even as the sun set and the custodian began to sweep the room, the conversation continued. Business cards changed hands, testimony and legislative drafts were emailed, and office visits were scheduled. Alice and Elise, who would repeat this process many times during the session, turned to the question of catching up on the office duties they missed that day.

These seemingly high returns to state-level campaigns lead most members of Chicago's community-labor coalition to seek techniques for mitigating the costs of participation. Candace, the City Alliance director referenced earlier, uses state-level campaigns as a way to sustain members' enthusiasm for and participation in the organization: "We have the people. It's clear, and we have to keep them engaged. And part of the problem is that when you only engage people every 4 years, it's just the electoral cycle, and you ignore them for the other 3 years. Chicago Teachers Union had these ambitious demands; [the] Fight for \$15's had these ambitious demands. . . . Let's find villains and heroes, and let's go for it."

When the benefits to sustaining member engagement outweigh the cost, difficulty, and interruption associated with traveling several hours to the state capital, the labor advocacy organization Chicago Together encourages members to participate. For example, during the successful 2014 campaign for a \$13 minimum wage in Chicago, Chicago Together members lobbied the Illinois General Assembly against a proposed law to ban municipal minimum wages. The goals of keeping members engaged and winning a tangible victory made sense for the organization, despite the cost and logistical difficulties involved with lobbying state legislatures.

Another worker-focused organization, Chicago Forward participates in state-level labor campaigns when unions have already defined an issue, devoted resources to winning legislators' votes, and established discrete points of advocacy with legislators. As a senior Chicago Forward staff member explains, the prominence of statewide (rather than Chicago-only) bargaining coalitions, the financial and time cost of traveling to Springfield, and the difficulty of coordinating daylong visits for members mean that "there's so much we don't know about using our power in Springfield."

The organization has participated most vigorously on a campaign to defend the state's worker compensation program, advocacy that made sense given the high number of organizational members in physically demanding jobs and members' ability to benefit from trade unions' mobilization on the issue. Chicago Forward's director links the question of using the organization's power at the state level to the challenge of maintaining its power in Chicago for good reason. Our quantitative model shows that although community organizations that collaborate with unions are more likely to use union-influenced protest tactics such as strikes, they are overall less likely to undertake action that mobilizes membership behind a mass demonstration or public event. Next we investigate the apparent trade-off between state-level organizing campaigns and member mobilization.

MOBILIZING CAPACITY

The quantitative analysis indicates that having unions as members carries costs for a community organization's own mobilizing capacity. Organizations that participate in coalitions with unions report less neighborhood-level organizing than their peers, fewer volunteers, and a decrease in turnout to large-scale events. These results suggest that although collaboration with unions may dispose community organizations more favorably toward strikes, their overall capacity to mobilize members is reduced. Our fieldwork identifies the resource- and time-intensiveness of union-led campaigns as a probable explanation. With few exceptions, the organizational members we interviewed noted that the door knocking, testimony, and unpredictable timetables of union-led organizing campaigns left their organizations with few remaining resources to pursue their own grassroots mobilizing.

Even without the complications of the policy organizing campaigns unions favor, the basic work of developing leaders, cutting issues, and sustaining an organization requires constant attention. As the organizing director of a North Side community organizing organization explains, "You need weekly staff meetings with everyone [i.e., organizers] where you dig into the big complicated issues and roles; you need to hire the right people; and you need to have committees and leaders from the community." Economic justice campaigns that focus on low-wage workplaces add the ever-present economic and social uncertainties that workers and organizational members themselves face. The impact of such instability became clear to

the first author on a frigid Thursday night in February 2013, when a routine fast-food organizing meeting scheduled for the early evening spilled over to near midnight. As the scheduled start time came and went, the organizers frantically tried to round up the participating workers. Some workers' phones had been shut off due to nonpayment. Others were grappling with last-minute changes to their work schedules. Many needed rides to the meeting, but the organizers' plans to provide rides ran aground on members' changing childcare schedules, their meal plans, and uncertainty about how they would return home when the meeting ended. The meeting eventually started and proved to be extremely animated. Near midnight, as the first author rode around the West Side of Chicago with one of the many organizers assigned to drive meeting participants home, it was clear that the workers' unpredictable schedules and lives left little room for the Fight for \$15 campaign, much less participation in multiple campaigns.

Union-led policy campaigns add to these constraints. They often place substantial demands on an organization's members, who are assigned the task of educating residents in their service areas about policy campaigns. This task often carries the mandate to smooth over residents' perceptions about unions that were historically racist (Jayaraman and Ness 2005). The political cycle also brings time-management challenges. The windows of opportunity to move a bill are short and arise unpredictably (Doussard and Lesniewski 2016), characteristics that require campaign participants to drop other commitments on relatively short notice. Citizen testimony is one of community organizations' most valuable resources, but the citizens supplying that testimony must negotiate work schedules, childcare, and other necessities to show up for hearings that legislators often move or reschedule on short notice. The challenge of maintaining basic organizing and leadership development alongside political activity first became clear to members of Chicago's community-labor coalition during the 2006 campaign for a living-wage law for large retailers. That campaign, which functioned as an incubator for subsequent campaigns, made the trade-off between policy campaigns and grassroots organizing clear to participants, whose initially eager participation crowded out other organizing opportunities.

Northside Power pledged its members to the prototypical air-game approach of passing the law by pressuring city councilmembers and attempting to persuade public opinion. Led by the Chicago Federation of Labor (the region's AFL-CIO-based central labor council), the campaign

mobilized union members and community organizations to lobby city council to pass a city minimum wage for so-called big box retailers (see Dousard 2015). The law's architects limited coverage to this subset of employers in anticipation of complaints that family-owned and small businesses cannot bear the cost of an elevated minimum wage.

Through canvassing and member mobilization, Northside Power organizers attempted to build support for a campaign devised by unions. That work required time and resources, and it proved much more difficult than anticipated. The campaign architects' decision to focus on large retailers succeeded in limiting employer opposition to the bill but failed to resonate with low-income residents who were far more likely to shop at large retailers than work for them. As a senior organizer revealed in an interview: "There was a lot of education. There was a lot of 'How's this going to really impact me? They have cheap prices.' At the end of the day, working families need cheap everything. You need to be able to say, 'There's a direct connection between what you do today and what you'll have tomorrow.'"

These organizing activities diverted attention from Northside Power's core tasks of identifying, educating, and mobilizing members. The organization ultimately adapted by limiting its participation in union efforts: A few years later, organizers volunteered some individual members to work on the Fight for \$15 campaign but declined to involve the organization itself in door knocking, testimony, or turnout to public events.

Chicago Forward's organizers encountered similar challenges with the Big Box campaign as did Northside Power. Their resources were nearly monopolized in discussing the specifics of the bill with low-wage workers and neighborhood residents across all 50 city wards. Candace, City Alliance's lead organizer, recalls a typical failed attempt to rally a neighborhood resident behind the bill:

[The neighborhood resident] argued with me for 30 minutes. She wanted jobs, she didn't care if they were minimum wage. . . . And I ended up having to walk away, and I never saw her again. It was point-counterpoint, and she knew what was going on, and she had some connection to the pastors that were organizing the other side at the time. . . . In general, most people got that we needed better jobs, because they were working two, three jobs and not able to make ends meet, so they got that. But defining what a big box store was—it's complicated stuff. [Residents] wanted stores, but that's not what our organizers were talking about.

Here, Candace notes the discrepancy between the campaign's message and the lived experience of the neighborhood residents whose support would be vital to passing the Big Box bill or any economic reform like it. The strategic concession of targeting only large retailers for a higher minimum wage typified the union-led air-game approach to campaigns. It made sense in terms of countering business representatives in city council meetings, but it weakened grassroots support for the campaign. By the time Mayor Richard M. Daley vetoed the Big Box bill in September 2006, City Alliance had committed far more organizers, hours, and time to the campaign than it originally intended.

Whereas Northside Power and City Alliance committed substantial resources to teaching members about the Big Box bill and to developing public messages around the law, Chicago Forward entered labor-led policy campaigns with a membership that was already educated on the issues, and with messages it had already vetted in prior campaigns. Because it did not need to devote resources to basic education, Chicago Forward used the wage-theft campaign to advance its own long-term agenda, as an organization leader described: "The core role of the organizer is figuring out a way, how you talk about this, that's acceptable for your various audiences. . . . Folks know what it's like for their paycheck to look funny, so that's a way to talk about wage theft. . . . People know what it looks like."

In the rare instances in which a community organization's members possess detailed knowledge about the topic of a policy organizing campaign, participation carries fewer challenges to manage. For example, Chicago Forward's participation in a city-level campaign for a wage-theft law made few demands on a membership that had already been educated on the issue. As one Chicago Forward leader explains: "We sort of stumbled into city policy work. It wasn't our goal to go after city policy. We knew that we were good at building power in neighborhoods, and we wanted to be careful not to lose that. . . . We got involved on the wage-theft bill because we track complaints from our members by ward, and we could show how big a problem it was."

As of 2019, the organization's decision to participate in state-level organizing campaigns remains similarly selective. Chicago Forward was not an active participant in a state-level wage-theft campaign, and fear of compromising its capacity for direct neighborhood-level organizing led its leadership to decline most requests to contribute the organization's resources to state-level campaigns.

Regardless of their substantive expertise, all the organizations in our study linked participating in policy organizing to the challenge, or at a minimum the threat, that participating in state-level campaigns could inadvertently harm their routine organizing and leadership-development activities. After participating in several state-level political campaigns, the director of a Southwest Side community organization shifted course by restricting the organization's activities to organizing, leadership development, and neighborhood issues. He explains: "Policy campaigns are rooted in experiences of our leaders and our service users. We know what's working and not working. My job is about building this infrastructure to continue social services to move the community forward. . . . We're a community-based organization, not a political organization." These responses reflect the reality that the organizations must manage the conflicting claims on resources made by state-level policy campaigns and bread-and-butter activities that develop the organization and its membership. Past research on community-labor coalitions establishes that the air game of policy activism carries costs for labor unions in the form of diminished attention to organizing their own membership. Our results suggest that the community organizations participating in such campaigns face similar problems.

DISCUSSION

Community-labor coalitions play an important role in achieving public policy reforms that improve wages and working conditions for low-wage workers. To date, the study of these coalitions has focused on their effectiveness in achieving goals set primarily by labor unions and their members. Our survey data and field data raise important questions about the community side of community-labor coalitions. Organizations that collaborate with unions have greater strategic capacity in terms of media campaigns, access to elected officials, and participation in state-level organizing campaigns. However, our survey data also show that those benefits come at the apparent cost of diminished capacity to mobilize their members. In other words, the expanded organizational reach of unions carries with it the risk that participating in union-led campaigns will detract from the basic goals of mobilizing members in campaigns that develop their capacities and build organizational power. Our field data explain why organizations accept that trade-off and how they actively manage their partnerships with unions to mitigate the downsides of collaboration. The analysis

also reveals ways in which participation in union-led campaigns may ultimately support the core organizational goals of developing members.

Collaborating with unions offers community organizations power to achieve goals of material importance to their members and to do so at scale. Participating in state-level campaigns, which provide an effective means for achieving organizational goals, promises to enhance organizational reach in ways that make the personnel, financial, and opportunity costs of state-level activism worthwhile. Joining such campaigns to influence public policy provides community organizations the possibility of establishing laws that correspond with members' goals of raising wages and improving working conditions. When successful, such campaigns have the potential to influence the root causes of issues that organizations commonly address through individual organizing actions.

Future research on community-labor coalitions, however, must also contend with the evident downside to collaboration. Prior research suggests that the time and resource intensiveness of labor-led political campaigns may limit what community organizations gain from the collaboration (see Lesniewski and Doussard 2017). Although the benefits of partnering with unions may be weighed against these drawbacks, our research indicates the potential downside may be more problematic than such a net-upside calculation would suggest. Community organizations that collaborate with unions devote extensive resources to the unions' goals and engage in less of the core organizing activity on which their work depends. The realities of scarce organizational time, staff, and financial resources mean that devoting too much attention to the air game of union-led campaigns can harm the ground game of membership development, severely limiting its ability to engage in these or any campaigns. This detraction from the fundamental work of community organizing thus presents a problem not easily outweighed by expanded reach and political influence.

However, the narratives from our field data also point to multiple ways in which some community organizations can reconcile the resource demands of union-led organizing campaigns with the resource-intensive work of organizing at the neighborhood level, developing leaders, and mobilizing participants for discreet organizing actions. First, state-level organizing work, and union-led campaigns more broadly, fashions opportunities to engage members and develop their capacities in a sustained way. City Alliance limited the potential of union-led campaigns to diminish basic organizing and mobilization activities by integrating those campaigns

into its long-term organizing strategy. This approach seeks to convert the labor intensiveness of union-led campaigns into an asset. The recent success of community-labor coalitions in winning policy victories on the minimum wage, earned sick time, wage theft, and predictive scheduling laws increases the likelihood that involvement in such campaigns will deepen members' engagement.

Second, many of the community organizations limited the downsides to working with unions by limiting their participation to campaigns that furthered other organizational goals. Chicago Forward engaged in union-led organizing only when its members needed minimal education on the issue (as in the case of the Chicago wage-theft law) or when other organizations' responsibility for messaging on the issue reduced Chicago Forward's obligation to the bounded task of engaging elected officials. Future research can evaluate the mechanisms organizations like Chicago Forward use to select ideal campaigns in which to participate.

Third, partnering with unions supplies community organizations with ideas, experiences, and skills, which in turn provide means for mitigating the downsides of collaboration. Working with unions familiarizes community organizations with unions' legal expertise, political knowledge, political and media relationships, and their ability to give specialized advice. The impact of this contact continues long after the collaboration itself has ended. Antipoverty advocacy organizations, for example, begin to think about their work differently when they can envision action at the state level. This was the case with Alice and Elise, the two antipoverty activists, who responded to their experience working on union-supported legislation by building their own relationships with legislators and developing a range of proposals to regulate low-wage work at the state level. Thus, access to unions both expanded their organizational capacity in the short term and prodded their long-term development of different tactics, strategies, and ideas for economic advocacy. Future research would ideally evaluate how participation with unions transforms community organizations over time.

CONCLUSION

This study speaks to long-standing concerns about how community organizations balance the ground game of finding and developing members with mobilizing those members to take action on the air game of political

activism and policy support. Scarce organizational time, energy, and resources mean that few organizations can consistently pursue both avenues of engagement (Lesniewski and Doussard 2017). That challenge, in turn, points to the need for community organizations to develop strategies for managing the tension between these two priorities so that a sustainable balance can allow community organizations to be both robust and influential. Our study thus suggests the need to focus research on such partnership dynamics. The evidence that community-labor coalitions succeed in winning material policy gains for low-wage workers continues to mount. Shifting attention from unions to community organizations can answer similarly important questions about the challenges that accompany these victories and how partnering with unions can change community organizations' approaches to organizing and mobilization.

NOTE

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