



Sustaining the grassroots: How community organizations mitigate the downsides of collaborating with unions

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ABSTRACT

Coalitions of community organizations and labor unions have played a central role in the recent expansion of municipal legislation regarding low-wage work. To date, most studies of community-labor coalitions have focused on their successes in meeting policy goals set by organized labor. This paper shifts focus to the challenges community organizations encounter when they participate in union-led campaigns. Analyzing survey data from a national study of community organizations, we show that collaborating with unions can inhibit community organizations' resource-intensive strategies, local-level organizing, and mobilizing capacity. Using data from fieldwork with community-labor coalitions in Chicago, St. Louis, and Denver, we then explore three strategies community organizations use to mitigate these downsides: shaping campaigns, rationing participation, and not participating. Each strategy has distinct benefits and drawbacks. Regardless of the strategy community organizations adopt, our analysis shows that the experience of participating in union-led campaigns leads community organizations to reexamine their approaches to organizing, movement building, and public policy.

Introduction

Coalitions of community organizations and unions drive the progressive economic policy agenda in a growing number of U.S. cities (Doussard & Lesniewski, 2017).¹ Since 2013, more than 50 cities and counties have passed minimum wage laws and dozens more have taken action on achieving paid sick time and reducing erratic work schedules (UC Berkeley Labor Center, 2020). Additionally, a growing number of cities are undertaking policy experiments on universal child care, free community college, and a universal basic income (Atchison & Workman, 2015; Landergan, 2020; Trammell, 2019). These measures appear most commonly in states whose legislatures give cities the power to regulate their own economies; however, even in states with oppositional legislatures, progressive economic policies are being passed (UC Berkeley Labor Center, 2020). The success of these initiatives can be partly attributed to the strategic role community-labor coalitions have played in organizing such efforts throughout the country (Luce, 2017).

The current era of urban economic and population growth diminishes the earlier threat that cities that take action to mitigate economic inequality will be punished by the departure of private investment and wealthy residents (Greenberg & Lewis, 2017; Schragger, 2016; Scott, 2014). In short, cities now enjoy more leverage to address economic inequality. One important aspect of this historical change is how labor and community activists have reworked their political strategies to take advantage of their newfound leverage. Since the late 1990s, labor unions have devoted organizational and financial resources to building political coalitions with community-based organizations (Jayaraman & Ness, 2015; Milkman & Ott, 2014; Ness & Eimer, 2015). Now, these mature community-labor

coalitions regularly force action on inequality by making economic fairness a core political issue (Brown, 2018), electing city council members and mayors who pledge action on economic inequality (Doussard & Lesniewski, 2017), and providing draft legislation, testimony, and expertise on the minimum wage, earned sick time, and other issues relevant to lower-income families (Doussard & Gamal, 2016).

The increasingly robust research on community-labor coalitions focuses on their growing successes (typically from the point of view of organized labor). However, partnerships between unions and community organizations also can have negative impacts on some community organizations (DeFilippis et al., 2010). Specifically, community organizations that collaborate with labor unions tend to engage in less neighborhood-level organizing, have fewer volunteers, and turn out fewer members to organizing actions (Doussard & Fulton, 2020). Unchecked, these drawbacks can undermine the grassroots organizing activities on which not only community organizations but also community-labor coalitions depend. Accordingly, this article examines two basic questions about community-labor partnerships vital to the current wave of municipal distributive economic policy:

- In what ways does collaborating with unions negatively impact community organizations' core organizing capacities?
- What strategies do community organizations use to mitigate the drawbacks to working with unions?

We address these questions using a multimethod approach that takes advantage of two unique data sources on community organizations and unions. The first source comes from a national survey of community organizations, which we analyze to identify drawbacks community organizations encounter when collaborating with unions. We then examine our second data source—a large archive of interviews with participants in community-labor coalitions—to identify strategies community organizations use to mitigate those drawbacks.

Community-labor coalitions and the perils of partnership

Current coalitions between community organizations and labor unions result from decades of concerted coalition-building efforts (Milkman & Ott, 2014; Tattersall, 2013). Ad hoc community-labor partnerships such as Chicago's "neighborhoods" movement and a coalition coordinated by Massachusetts Fair Share played important roles in municipal responses to deindustrialization in the 1970s and 1980s, when they supported isolated reformers such as Chicago's Harold Washington and Boston's Ray Flynn (Clavel, 2010). These coalitions and others, such as the Baltimore living wage coalition, later negotiated settlements to mitigate the community impacts of mass job loss (Jonas, 1998). In the late 1990s, the AFL-CIO extended and systematized community-labor relationships by increasing support for local Central Labor Councils (CLCs) in urban regions across the United States. CLCs assemble local labor unions within a given geography with the goal of coordinating organizing and political campaigns. Examples of influential CLCs include the Chicago Federation of Labor and MLK Labor in Seattle—both of which played key roles in driving forward employment policy proposals in their cities (Lesniewski & Doussard, 2017; Rosenblum, 2015). Every CLC is charged with coordinating outreach to and collaborating with geographically proximate community organizations. In practice, the composition of the resulting community-labor coalitions varies depending on the resources, policy orientation, and organizing culture of both the local unions and community organizations (Ness & Eimer, 2015). The institutional structure of CLCs proved especially effective in larger cities, where dynamic local labor unions and community organizations with strong political connections, such as MLK Labor and the Greater Boston Labor Council, formed successful campaigns to pass living wage legislation and related workplace measures (Luce, 2004). In the early 2000s, a number of high-profile union organizing campaigns, such as the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign, drew on participation by popular community organizations, ranging from Mexican

hometown associations to the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, to overcome the illegal employer interference that derails most U.S. union organizing drives (Doussard, 2013; Milkman, 2006).

Such successes, however, remained rare through the 2000s, largely due to the challenges unions (federated, hierarchical, and top-down in their operation) and community organizations (local, grassroots, and member-driven) faced in learning to work together (Tattersall, 2013, 2018). Time and shared experiences helped coalition members to develop relationships and working conventions that gradually made the community-labor relationship more effective. After Occupy Wall Street popularized the issue of economic inequality with the 2011 occupation of Zucotti Park in New York City, increasingly mature community-labor coalitions in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle began to focus their efforts on municipal economic policy (Rolf, 2015).

The first Fight for \$15 fast food strikes in 2012, staged in New York, Chicago, and Detroit by coalitions of Service Employees International Union locals and community partners, led to a wave of minimum wage campaigns and subsequent laws in the following years (Rolf, 2015). Seattle enacted the first \$15 minimum wage legislation in 2014, and in the following years San Francisco; Los Angeles; New York; Minneapolis; St. Paul; Washington, D.C.; Chicago; and Denver passed similar \$15 minimum wage ordinances. Emboldened by these successes, several city-based community-labor coalitions expanded their scope to state-level campaigns. Examples of successful coalitions include Raise Up Massachusetts and Fight for \$15 Chicago, both of which won a state-level \$15 minimum wage (Miller, 2018; Quig, 2019). Other, less-publicized employment and economic policy measures initiated by community-labor coalitions, such as the Santa Clara (California) County Wage Theft Coalition and the Chicago Fair Workweek Coalition, addressed topics including wage theft, earned sick days, and predictable schedules (Doussard & Gamal, 2016; Elejalda-Ruiz, 2019; Milkman & Appelbaum, 2013).

The proliferating body of studies on community-labor coalitions focuses primarily on their effectiveness at achieving the goals of unions. Two decades of collaboration appear to have smoothed many of the operational challenges that initially limited such coalitions' ability to achieve organized labor's goals. Ruth Milkman's (2006) prescient study of long-term coalition building in greater Los Angeles noted the value of community organizations and unions developing a "shared strategic repertoire." Milkman showed that joint campaigns, frequent meetings, and constant contact between organizational leaders created community-labor coalitions that now function smoothly and efficiently. Today, mature coalitions in larger cities—including coalitions anchored by Make the Road New York in New York City (Milkman & Ott, 2014), the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy in Los Angeles (Milkman et al., 2010), Jobs with Justice San Francisco and the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy in the San Francisco Bay Area (Larson, 2013), Grassroots Collaborative in Chicago (Doussard & Lesniewski, 2017), and Puget Sound Sage and MLK Labor in Seattle (Rolf, 2015)—run multiple campaigns at any one time. Although the first community-labor coalitions focused on the narrow goal of unionizing individual low-wage workplaces, such coalitions now support public policy changes that have broader economic impact, such as public investment in mass transit, a progressive income tax, and affordable housing (Doussard & Lesniewski, 2017).

However, the value of community-labor coalitions specifically to community organizations remains much less clear. Some benefits have been observed: Community organizations that work with unions gain strategic capacity and organizing scope through access to organized labor's financial resources, technical expertise, political connections, and federated structure (Doussard & Fulton, 2020). Such organizations generate more media attention, possess a broader tactical repertoire, and are more likely to mount state-level advocacy campaigns (Doussard & Fulton, 2020). More broadly, collaborating with different types of organizations spurs innovation in practice (Fulton, 2016): Witnessing union-led strikes, political negotiation, and policy development drives the leaders of community organizations to entertain new ideas about their own approaches to power, politics, organizing, and even service delivery (Leitner et al., 2008; Lesniewski & Doussard, 2017; Nicholls, 2008).

These benefits, however, come at the cost of tying up human resources that community organizations need to engage in the time-intensive work of grassroots organizing, which includes canvassing neighborhoods, writing letters, collaborating with organizations, and developing volunteer leaders (Christens & Speer, 2015; Han, 2014). Labor leaders acknowledge the challenges their campaign methods can pose to community organizations; the Service Employees International Union and other common participants in community-labor coalitions frequently make payments to community-organization partners to compensate them for their time and effort on union-led campaigns (Rosenblum, 2017). Nonetheless, union-led policy campaigns often make claims on organizations' time and resources that financial compensation alone cannot remedy. Tattersall's (2013) comparative international study of community-labor coalitions found that U.S. coalitions reduce the organizing capacity of participating community organizations. More recently, Doussard and Fulton (2020) found that community organizations that work with unions show reduced mobilizing capacity: Compared to community organizations that do not collaborate with unions, organizations in these coalitions contact fewer neighborhood residents, engage in fewer neighborhood actions, and turn out lower numbers of members to the actions they undertake. These findings support longstanding concerns that the "air game" of union-led political organizing and electoral pressure redirects community organizations' activities away from the "ground game" of neighborhood organizing and organizational development (McAlevey, 2015; Milkman, 2006). This immediate challenge leads to the longer-term threat of community-labor campaigns undermining the grassroots development on which community organizations depend.

Why can collaborating with unions weaken community organizations?

The growing body of scholarship and popular writing on community-labor coalitions suggest two main mechanisms through which such collaborations can weaken community organizations. The first is the unpredictable, time-intensive schedule of policy advocacy, which upends the strategic and rational planning through which organizations make optimal use of their limited resources. The second mechanism is organizational bandwidth, or the limited capacity community organizations have to juggle multiple organizing campaigns. Narrative histories of union-led organizing campaigns (Doussard, 2015; Milkman & Ott, 2014) and our own research on community organizations that collaborate with unions suggest that the campaign demands of organizing strikes and boycotts, testifying to state legislatures, and making media appearances, leave little room for community organizations to do anything else. This combination of unpredictability and resource monopolization can undermine grassroots organizing efforts, which require constant attention and effort (Lesniewski & Doussard, 2017).

Narrative histories of union-led organizing campaigns clearly illustrate the time-management challenges top-down policy advocacy can produce. For example, community-labor coalition members in St. Louis and Chicago (Doussard & Lesniewski, 2017) found the basic task of scheduling their members to testify on labor-backed bills unmanageable: Testifying required traveling to distant state capitols, or interrupting a day's work to go to city hall, for legislative calendars that often changed at a moment's notice. Community organizers were reluctant to ask rank-and-file members plagued by short work shifts and erratic schedules to plan ahead for legislative testimony that elected officials often cancel, delay, or reschedule.

Top-down policy activities, such as testifying at hearings and traveling to state capitals for meetings, compete for resources with grassroots organizing work that entails many time-intensive activities of its own. Such grassroots organizing begins with outreach to community members involving engaged and repeated discussions about their needs. Over time, organizational leaders plan actions and events—such as door-knocking, public protests, accountability sessions, or phone-banking—that develop organizational members into leaders with the capacity to repeat and expand the process (Rothman, 1974; Schutz & Miller, 2015; Warren & Wood, 2001). This process of grassroots organizing accommodates few shortcuts, and requires extensive time and focus from the individuals who lead it.

Activists and scholars familiar with the process of grassroots organizing acknowledge its potential incompatibility with top-down policy advocacy (McAlevy, 2016).

The unpredictability of political processes and schedules adds to these challenges. The experience of a Denver-based employment law advocacy organization we call Colorado Equity² illustrates the challenges with participating in top-down advocacy campaigns. In 2018, the organization canvassed 30 regional community organizations to tally and rank-order legislative priorities for action in that year's state legislative session. This rational, disciplined process was operationally crucial for Colorado Equity, which had only one full-time staff member and volunteers from its member organizations. However, Colorado Equity's plan to focus advocacy on the issues of paid medical leave and retirement security fell apart after less than two months, when the legislature passed a surprise measure to defund the Colorado Civil Rights Commission. At that point, Colorado Equity dropped its planned advocacy issues, in order to redirect all resources to preventing the elimination of the Civil Rights Commission. When the legislature restored the Civil Rights Commission's funding in May, the session ended with Colorado Equity not advocating top-down for the bills it had originally planned to support and implementing only a few of the planned grassroots organizing activities that had been designed to organize its constituents, mobilize them for public actions, and build the leadership skills of individuals in its membership organizations.

This example from Colorado Equity illustrates the linked problems of political unpredictability and organizational capacity. Unpredictable changes to the legislative cycle led the organization to both abandon its original top-down advocacy plans *and* neglect its grassroots work of organizing members, engaging in public actions, and developing leaders. These problems surface systematically and not epiphenomenally. Narrative descriptions of union-led organizing campaigns convey with exhausting detail the all-consuming focus and effort—and the abrupt lurches in organizational attention—needed to win a workplace election to unionize, a key vote on a law, or a candidate's election (Brown, 2018; Milkman, 2006; Rolf, 2015).

Such planning problems are well documented within unions. Union members and staffers speak casually of being “pulled” from whatever they are working on and moved to full-time work on a new project on short notice (McAlevy & Ostertag, 2014). Campaigns to pass laws and ballot measures, such as the \$15 minimum wage passed in Seatac, Washington in 2013, can absorb tens of thousands of person-hours, many of which inevitably go to waste when deadlines move, meetings are canceled, or organizing materials do not arrive on time (Thomas, 2015). In contrast, there is substantially less research on how such challenges affect community organizations that participate in union-led campaigns.

Large, diversified community organizations could, in theory, accommodate unpredictable campaign crises and mobilization needs without compromising attention to everyday, core organizing activities. In practice, many community organizations face systematic austerity. Through the mid-2010s, foundations significantly reduced support to such organizations in order to compensate for losses to their endowments (Doussard & Lesniewski, 2017). As a result, leadership and organizers embedded in community organizations have found that the fundamental balancing act between organizing community members and mobilizing those members to achieve organizational goals is more difficult (Fulton, 2020; Lesniewski & Doussard, 2017; McAlevy, 2016).

These realities suggest that community organizations that collaborate with labor unions differ from their otherwise equivalent peers in ways that directly limit their organizational capacity. We conceptualize the difference as an organizational bandwidth limitation. That is, devoting an organization's limited resources and capacity to time-intensive and unpredictable union-led campaigns leaves organizations with fewer resources to allocate elsewhere. These organizations have less time and attention to devote to local (i.e., neighborhood-level) organizing and fewer resources to devote to grassroots mobilization.

Although prior research—primarily case studies—has observed these drawbacks, no study has systematically examined the challenges community organizations encounter when they collaborate with unions and how they address those challenges. We advance this research by analyzing survey data

from a national study of community organizations to assess the generalizability of the outcomes observed in the case studies. Noting that the quantitative analysis indicates that collaborating with unions can limit a community organization's attention to basic grassroots organizing, we then explore, via interview data from such organizations, how they adapt to ensure that collaborating with unions does not compromise basic organizational goals.

Quantitative data and methods

To identify drawbacks community organizations experience when partnering with unions, we analyze data from the National Study of Community Organizing Organizations (NSCOO; Fulton et al., 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 organization recruits a broad array of community institutions to become dues-paying members. These institutional members 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, and the board of directors function as the organization's core leadership team, meeting together on a regular basis to lead the organization (Wood et al., 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 multi-level study achieved a response rate of 94%, 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).³

Community-labor coalitions exist in a wide variety of configurations and for the quantitative analysis we use a relatively high bar to indicate the existence of a community-labor coalition. 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 dues-paying 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*.⁴ Although the qualitative analysis that follows this section focuses primarily on the downsides community organizations experience from partnering with unions and participating in union-led campaigns, the NSCOO lacks a direct measure for the extent to which community organizations participate in union-led campaigns. The closest measure available is whether the community organization has a union as an institutional member. Twenty-three percent of the organizations have at least one union as an institutional member. Among the 40 organizations that have at least one union as an institutional member, 13 have one union as a member, 13 have two unions as members, and among the 14 remaining organizations, the number of union members range from 3 to 19.⁵

To identify how collaborating with unions can hinder community organizations' grassroots organizing efforts, this study analyzes multiple measures of organizational output, specifically an organization's resource-intensive strategies, local-level organizing, and mobilizing capacity. The analysis uses two dependent variables for each of the measures.

Resource-intensive strategies

Strategies are the activities in which an organization engages to achieve its goals, and some of these strategies require more resources than others (Walker & McCarthy, 2010). Because organizations have a limited amount of resources, they must decide which strategies to implement and which ones to forgo in light of their resource constraints (Ganz, 2000). Collaborating with a union can consume a community organization's human resources, thereby limiting its capacity to implement its core grassroots organizing strategies, which also tend to be resource intensive. To assess the relationship between union membership and an organization's implementation of resource-intensive strategies, the analysis employs two variables that capture an organization's use of human resources on particularly labor-intensive activities: (1) uses mass letter writing as an organizing tactic and (2) number of multi-organizational collaborations. Mass letter writing campaigns require substantial labor for writing, signing, addressing and mailing envelopes. Multi-organizational collaborations are themselves labor-intensive, as they require community organizations to engage in frequent meetings to plan and coordinate activities with their partners.

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 two years to address issues. Mass letter writing was among the tactics listed; the binary variable *uses mass letter writing as an organizing tactic* was constructed from this item. Respondents were also asked to indicate the number of multi-organizational collaborations of which their organization is a member. The count variable *number of multi-organizational collaborations* was constructed from this item.

Local-level organizing

Although organizing communities to address local-level issues is a mainstay of grassroots organizing activity (Wood, 2002), in recent years, entrenched metropolitan and regional inequality has motivated pursuit of solutions at higher levels of government (Rusch, 2012; Young et al., 2018). However, when a community organization participates in higher-level political advocacy, this focus can compete with the organization's local-level organizing activities (Wood et al., 2014). Because unions often adopt the strategy of addressing issues at higher levels of government (Milkman, 2006), collaborating with a union can undermine a community organization's capacity to maintain its engagement at the local level of building support and developing leaders. To assess the relationship between union membership and an organization's local-level organizing activity, the analysis uses two variables: (1) percentage of organizing activity occurring at the neighborhood level and (2) actively addressing at least one issue at the neighborhood level.

The continuous variable *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 neighborhood, city/county, state, multi-state, national, and international levels (Wood, 2007). The binary variable *addressing at least one issue at the neighborhood 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 two years. For each issue area selected, respondents were asked to indicate the level(s) at which their organization was addressing that issue; "neighborhood" was one of the options (Wood & Fulton, 2015).

Mobilizing capacity

Grassroots organizations demonstrate power through the process of mobilizing people from their surrounding communities, and an organization's mobilizing capacity corresponds with the number of volunteers it deploys and constituents it assembles (Wood, 2002). Due to the substantial time and resources that union-led campaigns require, it is expected that collaborating with a union will reduce a community organization's mobilizing capacity by taking time away from mobilizing activities. To assess the relationship between union membership and an organization's mobilizing capacity, the analysis uses two variables: (1) number of volunteers and (2) largest single turnout.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the field of institution-based community organizing organizations.

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
<i>Resource-intensive strategies</i>					
Uses mass letter writing as an organizing tactic	.48	.50	0.00	1.00	171
Number of multi-organizational collaborations	2.27	2.50	0.00	11.00	173
<i>Local-level organizing</i>					
Percentage of organizing activity occurring at the neighborhood level	24.98	23.25	0.00	95.00	171
Actively addressing at least one issue at the neighborhood level	.69	.46	0.00	1.00	173
<i>Mobilizing capacity</i>					
Number of volunteers (x 100)	1.11	1.02	0.03	6.00	171
Largest single turnout (x 100)	6.03	6.26	0.00	40.00	169
<i>Union involvement</i>					
At least one of the organization's institutional members is a union	.23	.42	0.00	1.00	173
<i>Characteristics of the organization and its context</i>					
Annual revenue (x \$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
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

The count variable *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). The count variable *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, 2021).

Controls

The analysis controls for the organization's annual revenue and age, its number of paid staff members, and its number of member institutions as well as the estimated density of union membership in the organization's state derived from data from the 2011 Current Population Survey (Hirsch et al., 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 seven multivariate regression models examining the relationships between the presence of a union in the organization and its resource-intensive strategies, local-level organizing, and mobilizing capacity.⁶ Regarding an organization's resource-intensive strategies, the analysis indicates that having at least one union as a member is negatively associated with using mass letter writing as an organizing tactic and the number of multi-organizational collaborations in which the organization participates.⁷ Having union members is associated with an organization: (1) being 61% less likely to use mass-letter writing as an organizing tactic and (2) participating in 19% fewer multi-organizational collaborations. The analysis indicates similar negative relationships between having union members and the organization's local-level organizing. Having at least one union member is associated with an organization: (1) having 66% less organizing activity occurring at the neighborhood level and (2) being 46% less likely to address an issue at the neighborhood level. The analysis also indicates negative relationships between having at least one union member and an organization's mobilizing capacity. Having union members is associated with having: (1) 34% fewer volunteers and (2) 45% fewer people turning out to large-scale events. Overall, the findings are consistent with previous case study research. The analysis indicates that having at least one

Table 2. Linear, logistic, and Poisson regressions estimating the relationship between union involvement and organizational outcomes.

	<i>Resource-Intensive Strategies</i>		<i>Local-Level Organizing</i>		<i>Mobilizing Capacity</i>	
	Uses mass letter writing as an organizing tactic ^b	Number of multi-organizational collaborations ^c	Percentage of organizing activity occurring at the neighborhood level ^d	Actively addressing at least one issue at the neighborhood level ^b	Number of volunteers ^c	Largest single turnout ^c
At least one of the organization's institutional members is a union	.394*** (.051)	.809*** (.044)	-3.349** (1.270)	.537*** (.006)	.660*** (.023)	.554*** (.026)
Annual revenue ^a	.553*** (.057)	1.197*** (.040)	5.110*** (1.102)	2.097*** (.191)	1.144*** (.032)	1.133** (.041)
Number of paid staff ^a	3.269*** (.390)	1.309*** (.056)	-1.451 (1.218)	1.502*** (.155)	1.026 (.030)	.901* (.039)
Number of institutional members ^a	1.098 (.124)	.962 (.040)	-6.197*** (1.299)	.804* (.087)	1.695*** (.0628)	2.081*** (.104)
Age of the organization ^a	.923 (.065)	.947 (.027)	4.328*** (.690)	1.091 (.076)	1.264*** (.031)	1.095** (.032)
Union membership density of the organization's state	1.047*** (.010)	1.042*** (.004)	.051 (.097)	.994 (.009)	.976*** (.003)	.982*** (.004)
Number of organizations	171	173	171	173	171	169

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

^aLogged values

^bOdds ratios reported for the logistic regressions

^cIncidence rate ratios reported for the Poisson regressions

^dBetas reported for the linear regression

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

union member is negatively associated with an organization's resource-intensive strategies, local-level organizing, and mobilizing capacity.⁸ In doing so, it identifies multiple ways in which collaborating with unions can diminish community organizations' grassroots organizing capacity.

Qualitative data and methods

While the quantitative analysis identifies downsides to collaborating with unions, the qualitative analysis explains how community organizations seek to mitigate those drawbacks. To identify community organizations' mitigating efforts, we analyzed an archive of more than 150 transcribed interviews conducted with community organizations, labor unions and low-wage workers from 2013 to 2019. Our qualitative analysis draws on a subset of 68 interviews focused on the mechanics of community-labor collaborations in Chicago (34), St. Louis (27), and Denver (7). The 68 interviewees consisted principally of community organization staff members (41), supplemented by union representatives (19) and low-wage workers who participated in campaigns (8). The second author conducted these interviews over the course of multiple research studies that focused on the strategies and tactics of campaigns to advance employment policies in U.S. cities (e.g., minimum wage, wage theft, earned sick time, fair workweek). The different time frames and goals of each study precluded the possibility of uniform questions or applying the same set of codes to all interviews. Some interviews, for example, focused on legislative advocacy techniques without turning to questions about organizational resources. Others interviews investigated

organizational strategy and did not ask interview subjects to provide details on negotiations between their organizations and collaborating unions. Within these constraints, we focused on analyzing the finely grained campaign details available from the transcribed interviews.

As a first step, we used Miles et al.'s (2014, p. 110) matrix method to chart across the interviews the presence of drawbacks to collaborating with unions and the presence of different organizational responses to those challenges. Comparing the matrix results to the quantitative findings, we identified three basic categories of community organization responses to the challenges of collaborating with unions; we list these as the three main strategies below. We then validated the strategies by seeking negative and contradictory evidence (Miles et al., 2014) and triangulating results by ensuring that they applied to multiple organizations, multiple types of organizations, and organizations in multiple cities. Unless we specifically note otherwise, our findings cover organizational response strategies for which no discrepant or contradictory information appeared in the transcripts.

Qualitative analysis

From coded summaries of the interviews, we identified three basic strategies community organizations use to adapt to the challenges of conducting grassroots organizing while participating in time- and labor-intensive union-led political campaigns: *shaping* campaigns, *rationing* participation, and *not* participating. Within our interview transcripts, the decision to ration participation appeared most frequently. The prevalence of observing this strategy, however, is likely partly due to the reality of organizations adjusting to campaigns on the fly. In addition, the uneven coverage of interview questions and differences in the individual rounds of interviewing preclude us from drawing any kind of statistical conclusions about the prevalence of particular strategies. Instead, we identify and analyze these responses as a means of illuminating the types of challenges such community organizations face and how they respond to those challenges. The task of elaborating on those responses and statistically validating them will fall to future research.

Unions provide financial resources and organizational capacity for community organizations to achieve goals of high importance to their members and missions. Accordingly, the case for community organizations working with unions rests on achieving minimum wage increases, collective bargaining agreements, paid sick time laws, and other political or collective bargaining goals that directly increase the income and well-being of organization members who work low-wage jobs. Every community organization we encountered in our fieldwork voiced support for those goals, and many made them priorities in terms of resource allocation. However, the need to balance union-led organizing campaigns with other organizing priorities forced leaders to develop strategies for balancing union collaboration with grassroots organizing.

Some organizations *shape* the campaigns in which they participate to align with their organizational goals. Organizations that shape campaigns in their favor seek to ensure that the result of mobilizing members behind a union-led campaign justifies the underlying claim on their resources. A second response entails organizations rationing their participation: joining only in selected campaigns or selected campaign activities, as a way to limit demands on their resources. Like the strategy of shaping campaigns, this approach seeks to align costs and benefits, usually by minimizing the potential costs of participation. The third response is simplest: not participating in the campaign or coalition.

Shaping campaigns

The most intensive response to the drawbacks of collaborating with unions requires community organizations to implement their own vision and plan for labor-led campaigns. This approach involves shaping a union-led campaign to support organizational goals. The directors of community organizations describe this strategy instrumentally, as a way to bend events to toward their targeted outcomes. This self-interested behavior, however, has broader positive effects on the coalition. Campaigns that

reflect the priorities of organizations involved in grassroots community organizing appeal to larger segments of the public. This grassroots approach can influence politicians more efficiently than visiting them in their offices.

Two campaigns that community organizations actively shaped demonstrate this efficiency. Movements to pass a Chicago wage theft law in 2013 and to improve conditions in Denver's public schools in 2019, described below, resulted in victories that achieved campaign goals with remarkably strong support from elected officials and minimal drawbacks for the community organizations. These campaigns suggest that community organizations' active and strategic involvement in shaping union-led campaigns has the potential to both achieve short-term organizing goals and expand a coalition's powers over the long-term.

The 2013 campaign to pass a Chicago wage theft law ran with support from organized labor while building on the actions and members of one of the city's worker center community organizations. These organizations conduct organizing and advocacy for workers but do so outside the framework of collective bargaining agreements (Fine, 2005). At the time, few U.S. cities had wage theft laws (Doussard & Gamal, 2016). Chicago seemed an unlikely location in which to secure such legislative reform as then-mayor Rahm Emanuel had used his first two years in office to pursue anti-labor policy goals that won him the epithet "Mayor 1%." The Emanuel administration had won pay and benefits concessions from the city's public sector unions, reduced library hours, and closed more than 45 schools while reorganizing nearly 150 others (Lipman, 2013). Against this backdrop, North Side alderman Ameya Pawar's push to pass the nation's strictest wage theft bill appeared to face very long odds.

Nevertheless, City Alliance, a worker center on the North Side, not only joined the campaign but also proceeded to shape it in ways that benefited both City Alliance and the broader community-labor coalition. The proposed bill would increase the penalty for wage theft by enabling the city to confiscate the business license of any employer who knowingly paid workers less than the legal minimum or contractually agreed hourly rate. This provision would make it significantly easier to punish offenses ranging from underpaid overtime to employee misclassification. The complexity of wage theft bills requires supporters to use extra finesse and messaging skill when explaining this legislation to the public (Doussard & Gamal, 2016). City Alliance, whose low-wage members had organized extensively around wage theft in their own workplaces, played a crucial role in clarifying the goals of the campaign. City Alliance's director explained:

The core role of the organizer is figuring out a way, how you talk about this, that's acceptable for your various audiences . . . Our members do that. Folks know what it's like for their paycheck to look funny, so that's a way to talk about wage theft And [the public] knows what it looks like. [Interview, organization leader].

As the campaign developed, City Alliance members vetted campaign messages in addition to providing public testimony about their own experiences with wage theft. The organization distributed maps based on data from its own members that documented the prevalent wage theft its members experienced across most of Chicago's 50 wards. City Alliance leaders also provided advice to Pawar and other supportive city council members.

City Alliance's work in framing the campaign and representing workers' stories to elected officials simultaneously advanced the causes of the bill and City Alliance's goals of building political connections and developing members' leadership capacity. The campaign strengthened ties with city council members, making City Alliance more effective at city hall. Conceptualizing the problem of wage theft in forms accessible to various stakeholders and communicating these concepts to the public developed the leadership skills of City Alliance's members, the overwhelming majority of whom are low-wage workers who speak English as a second language.

The city council's 50-0 vote in favor of the bill marked a significant policy victory for City Alliance. The organization's participation in the development of Chicago's wage theft legislation also strengthened support for the measure allowing the city to confiscate the business license of any firm found to deliberately steal pay. That measure in turn provided City Alliance members with

a new tool to use in organizing and holding employers accountable. Combined with the Chicago Teachers Union winning concessions from the Emanuel administration after a September 2012 strike, the unanimous passage of the wage theft bill convinced community and labor activists to continue to push for policy goals they had previously deemed unrealistic. In subsequent years, the coalition won a \$13 Chicago minimum wage followed by a \$15 state-level minimum wage, legislation guaranteeing earned sick time and paid time off, and a “fair workweek” law that guaranteed stability in scheduling and work shifts.

The actions of Denver United, a community organization focused on grassroots organizing in low-income communities of color, yielded similar results through its support of the 2019 Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) walk-off.⁹ The campaign responded to low pay and poor classroom conditions for Denver teachers. These conditions, which commonly occur in Colorado school districts, result from statutory tax limitations created by the state constitution’s Taxpayer Bill of Rights. The DCTA initially ran an “air game” campaign focused on legislative lobbying and public media. Several community organizations offered support, which commonly took the form of sending members to meetings and rallies to voice support for the teachers. Denver United decided to instead participate in the campaign by organizing parent and community members to voice their own concerns with the schools. This approach differed from the media-led campaign by de-centering the issue of teacher compensation, and instead focusing attention on basic community issues relevant to a broad range of community members:

The question is, “How do the leaders of the school see the school itself?” It can be a narrow view, “let’s teach the kids and send them off,” or it can be a broader view, where there are opportunities for the kinds of conversations that can’t happen elsewhere. So, you have the natural conversation, “What’s going on with the school, what do you need?” And in that conversation, you hear, “Hey, did you hear about the drive-by [shooting] two blocks away, did you notice there’s no playground in the park?”

This broad-based community organizing approach built a network of involved parents who eventually joined in support of the walk off. As negotiations between the DCTA and the school board stalled and the likelihood of a work stoppage grew, Denver United persuaded the DCTA to expand its political advocacy to include the parents Denver United had organized:

That was a turning point in our involvement, and frankly in how the union went about it. The DCTA was very much marching towards delivering their members. And what we said was, “You can be more powerful if you bring the community with you. Because what the community can do is put pressure on public officials. So, why not leverage the community who’s standing with you already?”

In the weeks before the work stoppage, the DCTA held public meetings to educate teachers who were not members of the union. Denver United urged the parents it had organized to attend these meetings. The size and intensity of these meetings in the lead-up to the work stoppage appeared to change public perception of the problem. The 3-day work stoppage ended when the school board granted the teachers’ demands.

These examples represent the comparatively rare instances in which community organizations decide to actively shape union-led organizing campaigns. They are important because they indicate transformative potential. Existing studies of community-labor organizing emphasize the instrumental and functional role that community organizations play in realizing strategic goals selected by unions. The successful DCTA work stoppage and passage of the Chicago wage theft law point to the important dynamism community-shaped campaigns can contribute to the U.S. labor movement. Community organizations can be important sources of new strategies and tactics with which unions can counter falling membership, right-to-work laws, and the *Janus* Supreme Court decision denying public sector unions the ability to automatically collect dues for the services they provide to members (Brown, 2018; McAlevey, 2016).

Rationing participation

The strategy of rationing organizational participation in labor-led campaigns involves limiting exposure to the most time- and labor-intensive aspects of collaborating with unions. This strategy has the advantage of limiting an organization's exposure to the demanding, time-intensive, and unpredictable tasks of rounding up signatures, meeting with elected officials, testifying, making media appearances, and responding to sudden political crises. Organizations that pursue this strategy preserve their resources for other activities and, by virtue of targeting only the most ideal interventions, enjoy concrete gains from collaborating with unions.

Chicago's Northwest United, a community organization active in housing and immigration work in a rapidly gentrifying section of the North Side, typifies this approach. Like many of the city's neighborhood-based community organizations (Chaskin and Greenberg, 2015), Northwest United receives nearly constant requests to lend its credibility and membership to city- or state-level political organizing campaigns. After committing significant organizing resources to the failed, union-led campaign for a Chicago living wage in 2006, the organization declined similar requests for its support. For example, Northwest United did not pledge its organizers and members to organizing support for the Fight for \$15's various fast food strikes or for subsequent legislative action on the minimum wage, earned stick time, or fair workweek legislation. However, the organization did participate in union-led campaigns in two select circumstances.

First, Northwest United sent motivated members to union-planned rallies only when members were available and the costs to participating were low. This selective approach restricted commitment to the time and cost of sending members to local, preplanned rallies and limited exposure to the open-ended and potentially more resource-intensive work of organizing rallies and knocking on doors. Such measures, Northwest United's leader explained, allow the organization to preserve both resources and political capital for causes more essential to its members.¹⁰

Second, and more significantly, Northwest United participated vigorously in campaigns led by the Chicago Teacher's Union because those campaigns supported Northwest United's other organizational goals. As an organization that represents low-income residents who rely on public schools, organizing on educational issues held unique importance for Northwest United:

Our schools get decimated by gentrification. They also get squeezed because the city's built so many charters. TIF [tax increment financing], gentrification, charters [are key problems]: You replace households with kids with single people, lock the school into old revenue and out of growth, and then peel off students with [a] charter.

Northwest United organized in support of the Chicago Teachers Union in its 2012 strikes (Ashby & Bruno, 2016) and subsequent strikes and political activism, sending members to school board meetings and to knock on doors in support of the teachers. These activities directly supported action on the core issue of schools, which in turn helped Northwest United build relationships and resources for advocacy on other core member issues, including housing, property taxes, and public service delivery. Building relationships through the neighborhood territory of schools, the organization's director explains, expanded the organization's connections and influence with other organizations active on those issues. This decision about managing Northwest United's resources allowed it to continue working with unions, while ensuring that its efforts supported not only the goals of unions, but also the community organizing capacity on which community organizations depend.

Northwest United's approach to collaboration with unions combines the two principal ways of rationing participation: pursuing union collaboration with only a strategic portion of the organization's resources or with only a strategic subset of its members. Northside Power, another Chicago neighborhood organization, also decided to ration participation in union-led campaigns after the 2006 living-wage campaign. Today, the organization limits its participation to referring neighborhood residents with low wages to union-led campaigns for the minimum wage, earned sick time, and other legislation focused on low-wage work.

Similarly, Colorado Fights, a Denver-based community organization that focuses on economic issues, decided after participating in resource-draining, union-led campaigns in the 2000s to limit its involvement in state-level campaigns to activities that align directly with its organizational goals. The organization declines to produce research or organize testimony and protests for state-level campaigns because, as a lead organizer explained, state-level organizing steers resources and attention away from the basic organizing needed to build a movement.

Colorado Fights participated in the 2016 ballot-initiative campaign to raise the state minimum wage to \$12, but did so in a way that minimized the campaign's claims on its resources and supported the goal of movement-building without tying up its staff and volunteers in the campaign. Colorado Fights and its allies secured from the campaign's funders a provision that earmarked a portion of the campaign funding for developing organizational capacity and political skills in organizations that served the members of minority populations (Doussard, 2020). By focusing on this unique funding model and declining to commit its own organizers and members to signature-gathering for the ballot measure, Colorado Fights both limited the demands the ballot initiative campaign made on its own resources, and furthered the goal of developing the organizing capacity of allied organizations.

Research indicates that in the short-term, withholding participation weakens coalitions: Landmark victories to win collective bargaining for low-wage workers and pass labor-friendly laws relied on vigorous participation from community organizations (Milkman, 2006; Milkman & Ott, 2014; Rolf, 2015). Our field research, however, identifies several ways that the decision to ration participation can provide long-term benefits by strengthening the community organizing that is part of the foundation of contemporary movements to address economic inequality. Freedom from the greatest demands of union-led campaigns leaves community organizations with more time and resources to renew the outreach and movement-building vital to their efforts: Northwest United, Northside Power, and Colorado Fights pursued this strategy after participating in campaigns that sapped their resources for bread-and-butter organizing work.

Beyond the immediate impacts of preserving resources, confronting the dilemmas of coalition participation also appears to spur community organizations' strategic development and refinement of their long-term goals. Northside Power decided to limit its support for union campaigns after committing far more hours than anticipated to the failed 2006 campaign for a living wage for Chicago's big-box retailers. However, the experience of meeting with elected officials during that campaign led the organization to prioritize building its own political connections. Similarly, identifying the dead end of state-level organizing on unions' terms led Colorado Fights to launch organizing campaigns designed to build power in low-income communities of color. These adaptations limit the resources available to union-led campaigns in the short-term, but maintain and likely strengthen the capacity of community organization over the long-term.

Not participating

Some organizations stop working with unions after finding that union-led campaigns consume their resources. Others decline to ever begin work with unions because of the expected high demands on their resources. One particularly clear illustration of the latter response comes from Housing First in St. Louis. Housing First began as a small organization devoted to providing housing services for low-income renters. In the early 2000s, the organization decided to focus its activities at the level of individual neighborhoods, where it could build strong political relationships. Rather than spreading its resources "thinly across a really big region . . . We came to the solution of owning housing" in a single place, an organizer explained. Accordingly, Housing First began to organize low-income renters and reach out to elected officials.

Noting this focus on organizing and political relationships, unions approached the organizations to participate in minimum wage and other employment policy campaigns after 2012. However, Housing First declined to collaborate, citing their relatively limited resources and priority to focus on housing work. "There's no magic solution" to doing the work efficiently, a lead organizer explained. "We took

our old model and turned it into participatory planning.” Simply engaging members and developing participation amounted to a full-time job for organizers. Housing First’s decision highlights a tension in the community-labor organizing model: The work of outreach and leadership that makes community organizations valuable to labor-related organizing campaigns also makes participation in those campaigns less feasible.

Many community organizations throughout the country eventually came to the same conclusion as Housing First after working on union-led campaigns and determining that the costs outweighed the benefits. The costs to community organizations for participating in union-led campaigns reach especially high levels when unions ask community organizations to lobby elected officials to pass a given law (Imbroscio, 2006). The 2006 campaign to pass a “Big Box” minimum wage for large retailers in Chicago provides a direct illustration. The Big Box campaign consumed many of the resources of unions and community organizations for approximately one year, as representatives of both types of organizations met with city council members to enlist veto-proof supermajority support for what was at the time the most ambitious city-level minimum wage proposal in the U.S. The bill’s eventual failure, combined with unions’ requests for community organizations to engage in resource-consuming door-knocking, office visits, and public protests, led multiple organizations to opt out of future work with unions. For example, this experience with the Big Box campaign led South Side Power, a community-organizing organization focused on building the political power of African American city residents, to limit collaboration with unions. South Side Power accepted invitations to collaborate only for campaigns in which unions had organizing actions that were both clearly defined and time-limited. Otherwise, the organization’s director explains, collaboration with unions had the potential to overwhelm the organization:

The unions told us we could play the inside game, but it was unclear what the inside game meant, whether it was lobbying or whether it was election drive promises. This stopped us from working with the unions for a while.

The organization’s subsequent work has eschewed collaboration on union-led campaigns in favor of increasing direct organizing activity (door-knocking, meetings, leadership development) in its immediate neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side.

EQUITY!, a citywide organizing organization that participated in the Big Box campaign, derived a similar lesson from the experience. EQUITY!’s leaders determined that union-led campaigns, which focused on lobbying elected officials, diverted too many resources from the mission of grassroots organizing. This experience prompted EQUITY! to return to its own organizing with a clearer vision of how grassroots organizing, rather than contact with elected officials per se, is essential to achieving political goals at city hall:

What I’ve kind of been learning from [organizing] is that community groups kind of have to take the issue direct to voters, direct to neighborhoods, to move the mayor. The alderman and the mayor aren’t going to move unless it’s safe to move something.

As a result, EQUITY! pulled back from citywide political campaigns, and instead devoted its efforts to the basic organizing that leveraged city leaders’ fear of voter protest by pushing them to address popular demands. “I think [doing] that [organizing] makes you a better coalition,” the lead organizer explained.

Not participating with unions constitutes the simplest and most drastic adaptation strategy for community organizations. Our field data highlight ways that this defense mechanism can in fact enhance the capacities of community-labor coalitions over the long term. In Seattle, Chicago, and other cities that have recently passed high minimum wages and other worker-friendly policy reforms, broad popular sentiment in favor of union-backed policies played a substantial role in securing legislation, as did resource-intensive campaigns to lobby individual legislators (Doussard & Lesniewski, 2017; Rolf, 2015). The votes for higher minimum wages, earned sick time laws, and fair workweek ordinances arrived not because unions and community organizations successfully won over individual city council members, but rather because elected officials *en masse* responded to the broad

public support that results from basic organizing on issues of economic equity. To the extent that not participating ensures that resources remain available for this crucial movement-building, community organizations may contribute most effectively to union-led organizing campaigns when they appear not to participate at all.

Discussion

The activities of community-labor coalitions are of great interest to the field of urban politics, in which dominant theoretical perspectives on both the left and right long indicated that such coalitions' city-level efforts to address economic inequality were both improbable and ill-advised (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Peterson, 1981; Stone, 1989). Our study complements a growing body of work on the outcomes of community-labor activity by shifting focus to the process of developing and implementing campaigns focused on influencing public policy. In doing so, we reveal the crucial balancing act negotiated by community organizations. Although participating in union-led policy campaigns provides a strategic opportunity to impact legislation, the quantitative analysis indicates that collaborating with unions often monopolizes the organizational resources essential to continued grassroots organizing. Organizations that fail to balance the two imperatives see their organizing capacity—and thus their effectiveness in achieving their own missions and supporting policy campaigns—dwindle. Our field data show that organizations employ three principal strategies in an attempt to find a balance: shaping campaigns, rationing participation, or not participating. Selecting the appropriate strategy has important implications for both the community-organization's long-term health and the urban politics in which it participates.

Not participating is community organizations' most drastic response to finding their membership, time, and capacity monopolized by union-led campaigns. Organizations that decline to participate with unions effectively refuse to balance their organizational mission with the demands of union-led campaigns. While dramatic, our data suggest that declining to participate more likely alters, rather than cancels, a community organization's contributions to labor-focused campaigns. First, the experiences and lessons learned from collaborating with unions nonetheless impacted these organizations' subsequent development. For example, EQUITY! and South Side Power withdrew from union-led campaigns in large part because the experience of those campaigns led them to determine that policy-focused campaigns detracted from the more important goal of building grassroots membership. Second, a community organization's decision to focus on immediate, community-level organizing provides a different kind of support for labor-focused campaigns. Redirecting resources to build an activist membership engaged in focusing the public's attention on problems in low-wage workplaces also proved to be an effective means of changing public policy. The impact is visible in Chicago's recently passed Fair Workweek law, which secured a 50–0 city council vote despite the absence of a traditional mobilization campaign built around door-knocking, visits to aldermanic offices, and public events designed to pressure city officials. Neighborhood-level organizing that engaged organizational members to build broad popular support for action on the problems of inequality and low-wage work made such labor-intensive work unnecessary.

In contrast to not participating, the impact of rationing participation depends on what an organization rations and why. The community organizations that took this approach limited participation both as a way of reducing their exposure to the demands of open-ended policy campaigns and as a means of focusing attention on interventions consistent with their organizational goals. Colorado Fights succeeded in steering the allocation of resources in the state minimum wage campaign toward low-income community organizations representing marginalized minorities. Chicago's Northwest United used the Chicago Teachers Union strike to deepen its own connections with community members and community organizations. These outcomes indicate that what is rationed may be less important to campaigns than the reasons why organizations decided to withhold resources. The examples in our study suggest that campaigns rarely miss the withheld resources, but appear to benefit from participating organizations' careful reassessment of how to best use their limited resources.

The optimal response appears to be the strategy of shaping campaigns. Organizations that manage to shape campaigns in ways that support their own goals also make contributions that improve the effectiveness of community-labor coalitions. The contributions of community organizations to the 2019 Denver Classroom Teachers Association work stoppage illustrate the point most directly: Denver United's intervention in the campaign served the goal of developing its own members and helped the teachers' union to connect more directly with the city residents whose eventual support for the strike proved vital to the teachers' victory. Prior studies of community-labor organizing focus far more on the material resources and grassroots legitimacy community organizations provide to union-led campaigns than on their strategic and tactical contributions (Doussard, 2013; Milkman, 2006). Our findings here suggest many unexplored opportunities to recognize and evaluate community organizations' multiple contributions to urban politics that focus increasingly on economic inequality.

Conclusion

Analyzing the survey data reveals how collaborating with unions can hinder community organizations' grassroots organizing efforts; examining the field data identifies ways in which community organizations seek to mitigate those drawbacks. Taken together, the actions of the community organizations we studied point to the need to consider how partnerships between unions and community organizations spur development and change for both types of organizations. The consensus analysis of twenty-first-century unions' success in policy advocacy credits community organizations with helping organized labor to address past systemic racism and value the "ground game" of grassroots organizing on par with the "air game" of lobbying elected officials (Milkman, 2006). The impact of both ground and air strategies, however, endures after the conclusion of the campaigns in which they were employed. Even when collaborating with unions overwhelms community organizations and forces them to withdraw or ration their efforts on behalf of organized labor's causes, the experience of having engaged elected officials on the behalf of workers and unions leads organizers to approach power-building and urban politics in new ways. The now-widespread success of labor-backed policies for the minimum wage, earned sick time, wage theft, and related measures suggests that future studies should replace the question of where community-labor coalitions succeed with the question of what they will become.

Notes

1. Throughout this article, we use the term "community organizations" as shorthand for grassroots community organizations engaged in community organizing.
2. All organization names in this article are pseudonyms. This example comes from the second author's fieldwork.
3. The population included every institution-based community organizing organization in the U.S. 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.
4. Although this definition for a community-labor coalition does not include community organizations that participate in temporary or one-time collaborations with unions, the definition does provide a consistent and relatively comparable measure of union involvement across organizations.
5. Two sets of additional analyses (results not displayed) code the union membership variable as: (1) an ordered categorical variable (0, 1, 2, and 3+) and (2) the proportion of the organization's institutional members that are unions. Both sets of analyses produce results that are similar to the results of the analyses that code the union membership variable as a binary variable. The alternative transformations of the union membership variable do not change the significance of the relationship between union membership and organizational outcomes; however, in general, the greater the number/proportion of union members, the larger the effect sizes.
6. Because this study surveyed the entire population of institution-based community organizing organizations in the U.S. and received responses from 94% 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 169 organizations (out of 189) that provided data for all of the variables used in the analysis.

7. Because the quantitative analysis uses cross-sectional data, causal order cannot be determined; thus, the interpretations of the quantitative results avoid using language that implies causality. This study relies on the qualitative field data to explain how partnering with unions can cause some community organizations to reduce their involvement in grassroots organizing efforts.
8. Because the NSCOO data are cross-sectional, we do not know whether the organizations that have union members were smaller or weaker organizations prior to acquiring union members. However, we conducted a supplemental analysis (results not displayed) that compares organizations that have at least one union member with organizations that do not have any union members. Mean difference tests on each of the independent variables indicate that none of the variables' mean values differ significantly from each other except for the variable measuring the number of institutional members an organization has. Organizations that have at least one union member tend to have more institutional members than organizations that do not have any union members. Consequently, it does not appear that organizations that bring unions in as members are systematically smaller or weaker than organizations that do not bring unions in as members.
9. Under Colorado law, public employees cannot strike.
10. It is possible that participation in successful top-down organizing campaigns would improve a community organization's ability to win support from foundations and donors. However, our interviews did not include questions on this topic, because this insight emerged from the model after the interviews had been completed.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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