Strategic Alliances: The Political Efficacy of Religious-Secular Ties*

Richard L. Wood, Brad R. Fulton, and Rebecca Sager†

This multimethod study investigates strategic collaboration in alliances connecting politically engaged religious and secular social movement organizations. We assess the impact of religious-secular strategic alliances on movement political efficacy by analyzing data from a national survey of the community organizing field to compare organizations that do/do not participate in religious-secular alliances. The conceptual framework draws on the literatures in social movements, political sociology, and organizational sociology to argue that political efficacy is fundamentally shaped by an organization's strategic capacity and mobilizing capacity. We analyze four organizational outputs that serve as indicators of strategic capacity and find that participating in religious-secular alliances is associated with greater strategic capacity but lower mobilizing capacity. A complementary ethnographic case study identifies likely mechanisms underlying both findings. Our analysis suggests that collaboration across the religious-secular divide can increase a movement's political efficacy within a democratic polity but with accompanying complexities that participants must manage.

Organizations strive to overcome obstacles and leverage opportunities via "strategy" (Briscoe and Safford 2018; Fligstein and McAdam 2011, 2012; Gamson 1975; Jasper 2004, 2006). In social movements, strategy can be defined as comprising timing, tactics, and targets (Ganz 2009; Smithey 2009) and has been well-studied in a broad theoretical context (Amenta, Caren, Chiarello, and Su 2010; Fligstein and McAdam 2011; Levy and Scully 2007) and in a variety of applied settings including labor (Dixon and Martin 2012; McAlevey 2016, 2020; Milkman 2006), community organizing (Edwards and McCarthy 2004; Walker and McCarthy 2010), and neoliberal movements (Spicer, Kay, and Ganz 2019). Less attention has been given to the role of strategy in alliances between and among these different organizational applications. While such "strategic alliances" have been well-studied in the corporate sector (Knoke 2009; Todeva and Knoke 2002), less is known about their use among social movement organizations (but see Doussard and Fulton 2020; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010; Stearns and Almeida 2004; Zihnioğlu 2019). This study addresses this gap by focusing on strategic collaboration between civic action organizations (Sampson, McAdam, MacIndoe, and Weffer-Elizondo 2005), sometimes termed civic associations (Andrews, Ganz, Bagetta, Han, and Lim 2010; Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson 2000). Strategic alliances form when the allying social actors lack sufficient political capacity to achieve their goals independently, thus seeking to bolster their political efficacy via collaboration.

* Richard L. Wood is Professor of Sociology at the University of New Mexico, on leave to serve as the President of the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at the University of Southern California. Brad R. Fulton is Associate Professor at the O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University. Rebecca Sager is Professor of Sociology at Loyola Marymount University. Richard L. Wood can be reached as corresponding author at rlwood@usc.edu.

† Authors hereby appreciate fine critical readings by colleagues at UNM, IU, LMU, and an audience at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR); and by anonymous reviewers and the editor of this journal. We gratefully acknowledge primary funding provided by the National Science Foundation and Interfaith Funders, along with secondary grants from the Hearst Foundation, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Loyola Marymount University and LMU's Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts, Louisville Institute, Religious Research Association, William K. Kellogg Foundation, Center for the Study of Philanthropy and Voluntarism, Duke University's Graduate School and Department of Sociology, and the Haynes Foundation. The authors thank Elisabeth Andrews for providing expert editorial assistance.

© 2023 Mobilization: An International Journal 28(3):279-300
DOI 10.17813/1086-671X-28-3-279

To the extent that democracy depends upon civic engagement, understanding strategic alliances may be especially important in light of the central finding by Sampson et al. (2005) that the dominant sources of collective civic engagement have become organizational rather than individual; and Gawerc's (2020, 2021) research on the centrality of diverse coalitions within social movements. This study analyzes a specific type of diverse coalition: Strategic alliances formed between religious and secular organizations, assessing the impact of such partnerships on political efficacy.

Political efficacy broadly assesses how effective a given organization is in the public arena. As we argue in the theoretical framework section below, political efficacy is too broad and context dependent to measure directly. Instead, we treat it as fundamentally shaped by the organization's *strategic capacity* and *mobilizing capacity* and measure organizational outputs in each dimension.

Religious-secular strategic alliances are crucial for understanding social movement influence for three reasons. First, religious organizations and institutions remain potent actors in American politics and civil society within both politically liberal and conservative movements in the United States (Braunstein 2017; Braunstein, Fuist, and Williams 2017; Lindsay 2008) as well as in other societies (Altinordu 2010; Bretherton 2015; Mahmood 2011; McKenna 2020; Wariboko 2014). Second, some of these religiously identified actors are motivated to form alliances with secular actors to improve political efficacy (Reed 1996), whereas secular actors of various political leanings seek such partnerships for similar reasons and/or to gain cultural legitimacy (Koesel 2014; Margolis 2020; Martí 2018; Thompson 2012; Williams 1999). Third, radically secularized political movements eschewing connection to religious principles or collaborators have historically struggled to gain purchase in the American political context (Gorski 2017). Thus, religious-secular alliances may impact the political efficacy of the participating organizations, the surrounding public sphere, and the lives of the constituencies they seek to serve and represent.

Of course, effective politics can be used toward positive or negative ends; nothing in this analysis assumes that religious-secular alliances are necessarily positive in their impact on society. However, when politics appears increasingly driven by racial, religious, and ideological divisions, studying collaborative political models and the efficacy of religious-secular alliances may help explain contemporary societal challenges and how to overcome them.

Religious-secular alliances involve at least one organization rooted in a religious culture and one rooted in a secular culture collaborating to advance shared political goals in the public arena.[1] Such alliances may form because: (1) some organizations aspire to public influence but lack an understanding of the logic and practices of the political field and seek to gain such insight from organizations with greater political experience in the local public arena, which may be structured in more religious or more secular directions;[2] (2) secular political actors seek religious sources of cultural legitimacy but lack the capacity to engage and mobilize religious entities successfully; and/or (3) the religious and secular organizations share political priorities but different social bases, thus creating opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration (Zihnioğlu 2019).

We analyze the impact of religious-secular alliances on political efficacy by examining alliances involving faith-based community organizing (hereafter FBCO, also known as"broad-based" and "institution-based" community organizing; all refer to similar models sharing historical and institutional roots (see Braunstein, Fulton, and Wood 2014; Yukich, Fulton, and Wood 2020). A typical FBCO organization brings together a coalition of institutions in a city or metropolitan area, often including religious congregations, labor unions, public schools, parent-teacher organizations, and neighborhood associations. These institutions are termed "member institutions" of their respective FBCO organizations, which mobilize people for political actions and electoral turnout to change public policy on issues such as working-class wages, the quality of public education, criminal justice reform, racial equity, public housing, immigrant rights, and access to healthcare. On average, about 70 percent of FBCO member institutions are religious congregations (Wood and Fulton 2015). While all FBCO member institutions may not be explicitly religious, they share in the coalition's religious practices (such as beginning FBCO meetings with prayer) and use of religious language as participants in the coalition. FBCO organizations typically build their organizational cultures by drawing on stories, symbols, and

teachings rooted in religion (Braunstein et al. 2014) as well as public education (Warren 2010), labor (Fulton and Doussard 2023), and other strands of civil society. Important for our analysis is that some FBCO organizations collaborate with external secular organizations while others do not. Our analysis examines the impact on political efficacy of participating in religious-secular alliances and explores potential explanations for this impact.

To assess the impact of religious-secular alliances on political efficacy, this study uses a multimethod research design. Our quantitative analysis of a national census of FBCO organizations indicates that participating in religious-secular alliances increases political efficacy on the dimension of strategic capacity but decreases political efficacy on the dimension of mobilizing capacity. Our qualitative analysis of ethnographic data from one major site suggests that these patterns result from specific internal dynamics, including sharing of organization-based knowledge and skills; the complementarity of organizational profiles and constituencies; the dynamics of public legitimacy; a self-reinforcing cycle of organizational respect; and specific tensions inherent in alliances generally or religious-secular alliances specifically.

WHY ALLY? POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF ORGANIZATIONAL ALLIANCES

Research on organizational alliances suggests significant benefits can flow to those entering such collaborations. Among businesses, such benefits include an increase in cash, scale, skills, and market access (Bleeke, Ernst, and Ernst 1993; Kale and Singh 2007; Knoke 2018). In community-labor alliances, participating community organizations' benefits include social media training, lobbying, political representation, corporate and campaign research, and sophisticated policy development (Fowler and Hagar 2013; Milkman 2006; Doussard and Fulton 2020). Politically oriented civic organizations may seek increased organizing scope, leadership skills, political or media access, or mobilizing power in religious-secular alliances.

Alliances do not always produce benefits, however. Potential liabilities arise if the allying organizations are not well-matched. As Todeva and Knoke (2005: 127) argue regarding business alliances:

> An asymmetry exists in organizational abilities to exert power and control over another organization and its resources. Effective cooperation requires mutual recognition of these differences and a serious commitment by the partners not to take advantage of one another when opportunities arise. Institutionalizing cooperative agreements is very problematic because it requires new structures, routines, and organizational practices to emerge from routine interactions and transactions between partners.

Business alliances often encounter such difficulties; many prove "fundamentally self-defeating, unstable, and transitional in nature" (Das and Teng 1998: 493). Successful alliances thus require trust-building, adequately navigating organizational asymmetries, and developing new structures, routines, and practices to allow the alliance to take advantage of members' complementary strengths (Fulton 2021). In political settings, alliances produce "hybridized cultural discourses in democratic institutions" that complicate sustaining shared cultural norms (Lo 2018). Similarly, among community-labor alliances, collaborating with unions can inhibit community organizations' resource-intensive strategies, local-level organizing, and mobilizing capacity (Fulton and Doussard 2023). Religious-secular strategic alliances can expect to face similar challenges. Partners entering these alliances presumably hope to increase their efficacy, but extant research does not establish whether or through what mechanisms they succeed.

Theoretical Framework: Political Efficacy via Strategic Capacity and Mobilizing Capacity

Jasper (2006) argues that assessing political efficacy directly via policy outcomes across different political contexts is extraordinarily difficult because those contexts present qualitatively different opportunities and challenges.[3] So rather than examining direct measures of

political efficacy (such as policy outcomes), we analyze the impact of strategic alliances by measuring organizational outputs that contribute to political efficacy. Our framework draws on two strands of theory: *strategic capacity* from organizational and political sociology and *mobilizing capacity* from the social movements literature. Together, these concepts link structural and cultural accounts of causation, allowing for a robust exploration of the mechanisms behind religious-secular alliances' impact on political efficacy.

Strategic capacity is the collective ability of an organization's leaders to learn from their own and others' political experience, gain access to crucial information from the political environment, and design and implement effective strategy (Ganz 2009, drawing on Amabile 1996, updated in Amabile and Pratt 2016). Greater strategic capacity allows the organization to innovate more nimbly, enabling more flexible responses to changing and unpredictable political opportunities and challenges. Strategic capacity thus refers to an organization's ability to navigate its political environment. As Ganz shows, strategic capacity is a complex product of multiple factors within an organization, including embeddedness within relevant networks, leaders' social-background diversity, relational organizing, and broad leadership development. Rather than measuring this complex construct directly, we assess four indicators of strategic capacity—four elements that we expect will be products of an organization's strategic capacity.

For our analysis, four elements serve as indicators of strategic capacity. First, in the contemporary democratic arena, political efficacy depends substantially on an organization's ability to generate media coverage (Andrews and Caren 2010). A second element arises from the fact that, in the federated (local-state-federal) system of governance in the United States, political actors can maximize their influence by interfacing with multiple levels of government (Skocpol et al. 2000). This imperative presents a significant challenge for the type of locally rooted movement organizations studied here. We refer to organizations' influence on different levels of political action as their "organizing scope" (DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge, 2010; Rusch 2012). Third, following Ganz's account of the diversity of political tactics driving political efficacy (*op cit.),* we assess organizations' tactical repertoires by examining the extent to which they utilize political and communicative tactics (including social media) beyond the standard community organizing toolbox of political actions and accountability sessions (Earl and Kimport 2011; Karpf 2016). The final element is reputational. In politics, a perception that an organization is politically effective forces other political actors to consider that organization's views and priorities (Han, Andrews, Ganz, Baggetta, and Lim, 2011). Accordingly, we treat an organization's reputation for being effective as another organizational output that reflects its strategic capacity.

Mobilizing capacity is a narrower concept focused on a movement's ability to draw large numbers of participants. In adopting "mobilizing" to describe this capacity, we recognize that numbers mobilized (or turnout) is alone a very inadequate way to assess efficacy. As Speer and Han (2018) have argued, much contemporary political work has eschewed real organizing in favor of rapid "mobilization" (for particular protests or voting, often using social media) in ways that undercut their effectiveness.[4] But we do not assess mobilizing capacity alone, and turning people out still matters: Increased mobilizing capacity improves political efficacy by signaling to the public and to political leaders widespread support for the organization's agenda and its potential to mobilize that support in future elections (Han 2016; Han et al. 2021; Reger and Staggenborg). We assess the mobilizing capacity of FBCO organizations through straightforward measures of the number of people mobilized for organizational leadership and political action.

Mobilizing capacity and our four indicators of strategic capacity do not fully measure political efficacy, which is impossible to measure exhaustively (particularly for these FBCO organizations, which typically see their long-term role as developing grassroots political leaders within civil society and improving the quality of life in poor and working-class communities). But as organizational outputs, they represent reasonable and measurable assessments of an FBCO's political efficacy. Underlying these organizational outputs are dynamic processes of organizing often built upon relational practices analyzed elsewhere (Delehanty 2023; Han, McKenna, and Oyakawa 2021; Speer and Han 2018; Wood 2002).

We expect that participating in religious-secular alliances will be associated with greater FBCO political efficacy via the alliance's influence on strategic capacity and mobilizing capacity. Specifically, we anticipate that movement organizations embedded in religious-secular alliances will display heightened levels of our four indicators of strategic capacity: media attention, scope of political arenas in which they act, breadth of tactics, and reputation for efficacy. We also expect them to mobilize more people than similar civic organizations that eschew such alliances. Our quantitative findings support most of these hypotheses, except for mobilizing people; our qualitative analysis explores the underlying mechanisms of these findings. Together, these measures reveal fundamental dynamics that shape political efficacy in a modern democratic arena.

Our quantitative data cannot entirely rule out some role of reverse causation: that those organizations with greater strategic capacity are more likely to enter into religious-secular alliances (perhaps because they have greater political ambition or imagination). Rigorously ruling out the possibility of reverse causation would require longitudinal data not currently available. Our qualitative data allow us to address this concern below, at least in the interpretive sense of organizers' own view that these alliances increased their political efficacy. But future research should explore the complex causal pathways likely at work.

Our qualitative analysis draws on additional theoretical strands. In their agenda-setting theory of strategic action fields, Fligstein and McAdam (2011) characterize "the creation of identities, political coalitions, and interests" as fundamentally serving "to promote the control of actors vis-à-vis other actors" (p. 7). An organization's decision to form a religious-secular alliance can be understood, applying their terminology, as an effort to acquire greater control within the strategic action field of political contestation in which the religious and secular partners are engaged. The success of such efforts depends on participants' ability "to 'get outside their own heads,' take the role of the other, and work to find some collective definition of interest" (Jasper 2004: 7 and 2006). Fligstein and McAdam (2011: 6-8) explain that successful coalition building relies on participants having specific kinds of "social skills" being able to read people and environments, frame lines of action, and mobilize people along those lines. The success of religious-secular alliances thus depends partly on the social skill of the religious and secular participants. In subsequent work, Fligstein and McAdam (2012: 290-1) articulate a "political-cultural approach to strategic action" that theorizes how "institutional entrepreneurs" use this social skill to secure cooperation and catalyze collective action. Our ethnographic analysis reveals how participants in religious-secular strategic alliances act as institutional entrepreneurs by drawing on such skills to construct a collective definition of interest and how such actions shape their strategic and mobilizing capacities. These dynamics illustrate the "multi-institutional politics" (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Bernstein 2013) and the "organizational design choices" that go into driving the strategic capacity and mobilizing capacity of these alliances (Han et al. 2021).

QUANTITATIVE DATA

This study analyzes data from the National Study of Community Organizing Organizations to assess the relationship between participating in religious-secular alliances and political efficacy (Fulton, Wood, and Interfaith Funders 2011).[5] The organizations in this study are community-based organizations that bring together member institutions to address social, economic, and political issues affecting American society's poor, low-income, and middle-class sectors. Each organization has paid staff and a board of directors comprising representatives from its member institutions, including religious congregations, nonprofit organizations, schools, unions, and other civic organizations. These commonalities enable our analysis to hold the organizations' form relatively constant while allowing their partnerships, activities, and outcomes to vary.

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 and 628 paid staff members affiliated with these organizations (Fulton and Wood 2018). Congregations comprise the large majority of member institutions, and it is not uncommon for an

FBCO organization to have a member base composed exclusively of congregations. Although the proportion of noncongregational members has grown, congregations and their faith commitments remain central to FBCO organization operations. Most organizations regularly incorporate religious practices (e.g., prayer, sacred music, scriptural stories) into their organizing activities. Furthermore, participants' shared identity as "people of faith" and associated practices often provide the cultural glue that holds a socially diverse organization together (Braunstein et al. 2014; see also Gawerc 2020, 2021). Beyond their member institutions, a growing number of FBCO organizations partner with secular organizations by participating in multiorganizational collaborative efforts. Sixty-two percent of FBCO organizations are members of at least one multiorganizational collaboration, which we treat as religious-secular alliances if respondents said the collaboration includes secular partners.

As discussed above, we analyze strategic capacity and mobilizing capacity as contributors to political efficacy.[6] We analyze nine measures of organizational outputs that reflect strategic capacity. Two variables measure the media attention the organization recently received (Andrews and Caren 2010). Directors were asked to indicate the number of times their organization was referenced in local and regional newspapers over the previous twelve months. Four variables measure an organization's organizing scope. Directors were asked to provide the name and position of every political official with whom their organization had met in the previous twelve months. One dichotomous variable indicates whether the organization had met with a state governor, and another dichotomous variable indicates whether the organization had met with a U.S. Representative. Directors were also asked to indicate the highest level of government to which their organization was actively addressing its efforts. One dichotomous variable indicates whether the organization was addressing any issue at a state level; another dichotomous variable indicates whether the organization was addressing any issue at a national level. Two variables measure an organization's repertoire of political and communicative tactics. A count variable indicates the number of tactics the organization used in the past two years to address sociopolitical issues. Respondents could select up to nine tactics: boycotts, leafleting, mass letter-writing, prayer vigils, press conferences, accountability sessions, rallies, sit-ins, and strikes, as well as two open-ended response options. Another count variable indicates the number of modes used in the past year to communicate en masse with the organization's constituents. Respondents could select up to 11 modes: bulk mail, robocalling, email listservs, Facebook, Evite, YouTube, Twitter, podcasts, online photo albums, blogs, and websites. Finally, one variable measures an organization's reputation within the field. Each director was asked to list the names of three FBCO organizations that they considered the most effective. A dichotomous measure indicates whether a director nominated the organization as being one of the most effective in the field. Directors could not nominate their organization; only nominations from directors outside the coalition's organizing network were counted.

We analyze three measures of mobilizing capacity. Directors were asked to indicate: how many different people had attended at least one of their events in the previous 12 months, the number of people that had attended their largest single event in the previous 12 months, and the total number of volunteer leaders affiliated with the organization.[7]

The key independent variable is a dichotomous measure: whether the FBCO organization is a member of a multiorganizational collaboration that includes a secular partner (i.e., is part of a religious-secular alliance). The analysis controls for the organization's total annual revenue, number of paid staff, number of member institutions, age, and whether it is located in the South. Table 1 on the adjacent page displays the descriptive statistics for the variables used in the quantitative analysis.

Quantitative Analysis [8]

The analysis examines the relationship between an organization's involvement in a religious-secular alliance and each measure of political efficacy. We perform logistic regressions for the binary dependent variables and Poisson regressions for the count dependent variables. Table 2 (next page) displays the results of nine multivariate regression models. Organizations that partici-

Table 1. Desciptive Statistics for Impact LA and the Entire Field of Faith-Based Community-Organizing Organizations

Variable	Impact LA	Field	SD	Min	Max
Media Attention					
Local newspaper articles	3.00	7.04	8.95	0.00	75.00
Regional newspaper articles	9.00	2.64	6.73	0.00	50.00
Organizing Scope – Level of Political Influence					
Met with a governor	0.00	.20	.40	0.00	1.00
Met with a U.S. Representative	0.00	.60	.49	0.00	1.00
Addressing at least one state-level issue	1.00	.84	.36	0.00	1.00
Addressing at least one national-level issue	1.00	.63	.48	0.00	1.00
Tactical Repertoire					
Organizing tactics	5.00	4.37	1.96	0.00	9.00
Mass communication modes	5.00	4.55	2.24	0.00	10.00
Reputation					
Nominated by peers as an effective organization	0.00	.18	.39	0.00	1.00
Mobilizing Capacity					
Volunteer leaders (x 100)	1.10	1.12	1.02	0.03	6.00
People mobilized (x 1,000)	1.20	1.26	1.45	0.00	11.86
Largest single turnout (x 1,000)	.80	.60	.62	0.00	4.00
Secular Collaborations					
Member of a multiorganizational collaboration	1.00	.62	.49	0.00	1.00
Characteristics of the Organization					
Annual revenue (x $100,000)	3.83	2.97	6.33	.11	75.00
Number of paid staff	3.00	3.56	3.26	1.00	25.00
Number of member institutions	15.00	23.71	14.23	4.00	82.00
Age	8.00	13.60	8.68	1.00	40.00
Located in the south	0.00	.28	.45	0.00	1.00

Source: 2011 National Study of Community Organizing Organizations; n = 166

pate in a religious-secular alliance receive almost 50 percent more local newspaper attention and 85 percent more regional newspaper attention. The odds of meeting with a governor are nearly five times greater for organizations participating in a religious-secular alliance. Likewise, the odds of meeting with a U.S. Representative are 42 percent greater for organizations collaborating with secular organizations. Participating in a religious-secular alliance more than sextuples the odds of addressing an issue at the state level and more than doubles the likelihood of addressing an issue at the national level.

Similar patterns emerge regarding tactical repertoires: Participating in a religious-secular alliance is associated with a roughly twenty-five percent increase in the organization's political and communicative tactics. In addition, FBCO organizations that collaborate with secular organizations are twice as likely to be nominated as one of the field's most effective organizations.

In contrast, as shown in Table 3, participating in a religious-secular alliance is associated with a *lower* organizational mobilizing capacity. Participation is associated with having fewer volunteer leaders and turning out smaller groups of people at large events. In the qualitative analysis that follows, we explore possible dynamics underlying this somewhat surprising finding, here simply noting that it is consistent with some previous lines of research, especially those showing that a more socially diverse base (in this case, having a mixture of religious and secular

Table 2: Poisson and Logistic Regressions Estimating the Relationship between Secular Collaborations and Indicators of Strategic Capacity

	Media Attention		*Organizing Scope – Levels of Political Influence*				*Tactical Repertoire*		*Reputation*
	Local Newspaper Articles[b]	Regional Newspaper Articles[b]	Met with a State Governor[c]	Met with a U.S. Representative.[c]	Addressing State-Level Issues[c]	Addressing National Issues[c]	Organizing Tactics[b]	Mass Communication Modes[b]	Nominated as Being Effective[c]
Member of a multi-organizational collaboration	1.466*** (.088)	1.855*** (.224)	4.762*** (1.003)	1.420** (.181)	6.683*** (1.285)	2.673*** (.362)	1.26*** (.035)	1.279*** (.037)	2.201*** (.461)
Annual revenue[a]	1.123** (.040)	1.139 (.078)	.720* (.100)	1.058 (.122)	1.167 (.206)	1.558*** (.179)	.971* (.014)	1.067*** (.018)	1.622*** (.232)
Number of paid staff [a]	1.622*** (.100)	1.346*** (.118)	1.442 (.291)	1.535** (.182)	1.291 (.213)	1.996*** (.279)	1.230*** (.023)	1.201*** (.027)	2.443*** (.464)
Number of member institutions[a]	1.062 (.059)	2.042*** (.201)	3.782*** (.661)	1.406** (.178)	.655* (.117)	.621*** (.084)	.983 (.023)	1.020 (.025)	1.797*** (.305)
Age of the organization[a]	.869** (.037)	1.138 (.119)	1.026 (.096)	1.009 (.074)	1.613*** (.188)	.762** (.066)	1.053***	.987	1.684***
Located in the South	1.178** (.071)	.592*** (.066)	1.44* (.264)	.500*** (.068)	.208*** (.036)	.432*** (.062)	.876*** (.023)	.854*** (.025)	1.135 (.226)

Note: Linearized standard errors reported in parentheses; constants are not displayed; n = 166.
[a] Logged values
[b] Incidence-rate ratios reported for Poisson regressions
[c] Odds ratios reported for logistic regressions
* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table 3: Poisson Regressions Estimating the Relationship Between Secular Collaborations and Mobilizing Capacity.[a]

	Number of Volunteer Leaders[b]	*Number of People Mobilized*[b]	*Largest Single Turnout*[b]
Member of a multiorganizational collaboration	.791***	.979	.761***
	(.041)	(.047)	(.041)
Annual revenue[a]	1.113**	.943	1.005
	(.038)	(.060)	(.038)
Number of paid staff[a]	1.129***	1.780***	1.105*
	(.040)	(.185)	(.052)
Number of member institutions[a]	1.626***	1.406***	1.967***
	(.067)	(.116)	(.107)
Age[a]	1.293***	1.251***	1.146***
	(.039)	(.049)	(.039)
Located in the South	1.219***	1.294***	1.346*
	(.068)	(.065)	(.075)

Note: Linearized standard errors reported in parentheses; constants are not displayed; n = 166.
[a] Logged values
[b] Incidence-rate ratios reported for Poisson regressions
* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

members) can complicate an organization's efforts to generate internal solidarity (Putnam 2007; Rusch 2012; Smock 2004).

Overall, the quantitative analysis provides robust evidence that collaborating with secular organizations is associated with greater strategic capacity, albeit at the cost of somewhat lower mobilizing capacity. Because we argue that the roots of political efficacy lie in the combination of strategic and mobilizing capacity, the overall effect of religious-secular alliances on political efficacy could initially appear indeterminate. However, in the cases analyzed here, the net effect appears to be positive: the negative impact on mobilizing capacity is relatively small, and the positive impact on many of the dimensions of strategic capacity most proximate to political efficacy is relatively large. Politically oriented civic organizations that participate in religious-secular alliances receive more media attention, have greater organizing scope (*i.e.,* operate in higher-level political venues), engage in a broader range of political and communicative tactics, and are more likely to have a reputation for being highly effective. Crucially, these gains come despite experiencing marginally lower mobilizing capacity, which might have been expected to impact any or all of the other indicators negatively. Organizations that participate in religious-secular alliances thus appear to navigate the strategic action fields of political life more effectively than those who eschew such alliances.

QUALITATIVE DATA

To better understand how collaborating with secular organizations can impact FBCO organizations' political efficacy, specifically their strategic capacity and mobilizing capacity, we analyze qualitative data collected during electoral campaign seasons between 2012 and 2015 with one of the FBCO organizations that participated in the national survey: Impact LA in Los Angeles.[9] Case study selection was driven by the fact that Impact LA has particularly broad experience with religious-secular alliances—consonant with Seawright's (2016) argument, drawing on statistical modeling and simulations, in favor of "extreme-on-X" case selection for discovering the mechanisms underlying regression findings.

Between 2012 and 2015, Impact LA partnered with several secular organizations to pass two statewide ballot initiatives, Proposition 30, a 2012 statewide initiative to increase taxes to fund education, and Proposition 47, a 2014 statewide sentencing reform initiative.

Field research was conducted during the 2012 and 2014 campaign seasons (approximately April to mid-November), and interviews with secular and religious organizers taking place after the elections and into 2015. Impact LA is part of a prominent national faith-based community-organizing network, Organizing for Action, currently operating in twenty-two states. Since its founding in 1972, Organizing for Action has grown to include approximately fifty local-level organizing affiliates in medium and large metropolitan areas and some state-level affiliate federations. In 2012, Impact LA had nineteen member congregations from a variety of theological and predominant racial-ethnic backgrounds. To address issues affecting low-income communities across Los Angeles, Impact LA also participated in religious-secular alliances by collaborating with a variety of secular organizations, including labor groups, community organizing agencies, and voter engagement organizations. During the field research period, many of Impact LA's organizing efforts were conducted with Organizing for Action's state office, called Organizing California. As a result, although field notes were taken at Impact LA events, the work being done on these initiatives was often a tandem effort by Impact LA and the statewide faith-based organizing group.

The first phase of ethnographic data collection occurred in 2012 and focused on Impact LA's organizing around Proposition 30. Additional data were collected in 2014 on Impact LA's work on Proposition 47. During both phases, field research was conducted at various events, including strategy meetings, organizing meetings, and canvassing for voters. In 2015, sixteen in-depth interviews were conducted with participating ministers, congregation-based organizers, and secular organizers regarding the 2012 and 2014 initiative drives; eleven worked with Impact LA, and five were from secular partner organizations. Questions were asked about their organization, alliance work, religious beliefs, and organizing history. The field observations and interviews help us analyze how collaborating with secular organizations can increase an organization's strategic capacity and decrease its mobilizing capacity, thus using original ethnographic data to explain, contextualize, and add nuance to the quantitative findings.

For its work on the Proposition 30 and 47 campaigns, Impact LA formed alliances with several secular groups, seeking to increase the knowledge, strategic capacity, political capital, and power on which it could draw. In this section, we identify the main mechanisms through which religious-secular alliances may increase organizations' strategic capacity and limit their mobilizing capacity. Because these causal dynamics require alliances to be sustained over time, we analyze the general benefits to Impact LA and its secular partners that undergird alliance longevity. We show that secular and religious partners working together created specific advantages that both groups saw as fundamental to their organizing success.[10]

QUALITATIVE MECHANISMS UNDERLYING THE QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Knowledge and Skills Sharing

Impact LA and its secular partners reported gaining new information and knowledge through their partnerships. The resulting organizational learning enabled both sides of the alliance to deploy wider tactical repertoires.

Impact LA benefited from the information and technology to which secular groups with more experience in electoral politics had access. For example, to reach voters, Impact LA relied on their secular partner Voter Engagement Group for information on voters, use of their predictive dialing machines, and expert knowledge on the multiple steps and forms of outreach required to maximize the likelihood that people would get to the polls and vote on the propositions they saw as beneficial. Through these alliances, Impact LA thus gained access to technology and organizing

methods the organization did not previously possess. A leader from one of Impact LA's secular partners explained:

> We did a lot of training on just the basic mechanics of a field program and how many contacts you're making, going to make in a realistic way. Because everyone in Organizing California [and Impact LA] was like, "We're going to talk to 300,000 people," and we're like, "Dude, no, you're not. Break it down; if you have this many volunteers on this many days for this many hours…." They beat their goal in the end. It's going to take all of us to win the kind of change that's needed.

Without this kind of tactical expertise, Impact LA would have been much less likely to get out the votes among its constituents to help pass the measure. Furthermore, in place of the likely organizational frustration that follows setting unrealistic goals and failing to meet them, Impact LA gained the important political experience of contributing to alliance success by meeting ambitious but realistic goals.

Similarly, secular partners learned new skills from Impact LA, particularly how to mobilize the power of stories and moral framing in the work of organizing (Davis 2012; Hochschild 2016; Polletta 2006; Polletta, Chen, Gardner, and Motes 2011; and Somers 1994; on moral framing in politics see Chong and Druckman 2007; Lakoff 2008; and Delehanty 2023). The organizing process advocated by Impact LA includes a focus on helping people understand one another more deeply by sharing stories that shape their deepest commitments, then incorporating the most compelling stories into political actions. This more "relational" organizing model was new for Impact LA's secular partners, who were steeped in more "transactional" mobilizing processes. Impact LA's storytelling emphasis required them to shift from their prior practice of focusing on a policy's monetary or practical benefits and (or instead) frame the organizing work and political choices in moral terms. For some of the secular partners, thinking about framing issues in these terms was a new and useful tool:

> [The faith-based organizers] bring a moral argument to the discussion. So you have very proud atheists whose arguments are very fiscal or humanity [-based] arguments, but it changes the discussion when you have a faith leader talk about the immorality of locking people in cages for the rest of their lives. . . . But if you're a person of faith, and a faith leader taps into your consciousness that "doesn't our faith as Christians say that we're supposed to be merciful and doesn't our God say that there's a way to treat other people," that moral compass is important in shifting the narrative.

These linked lessons in storytelling and framing were sufficiently important that all five of the secular partners interviewed mentioned how faith-based partners framed issues around a moral agenda as a significant new tool. Many of them noted that doing so via storytelling reaches people in a different way than arguments about economics or policy. One organizer had a particularly good understanding of these mutual learnings because he had worked with Impact LA through a faith-based partner but had recently joined a secular organizing voter advocacy group conducting outreach to religious communities.

> [The Impact LA staff] have learned methodologies: Organizing methodologies, voter engagement methodologies that they never would have known. That's one thing. . . . For Voter Engagement Group, well, it's a ton of stuff. . . . There's this whole new way of thinking and talking about issues that they had not been really familiar with but can be really effective at reaching people. And part of it is that this is a huge constituency that they would not reach otherwise.

Our interviews showed that both organizations saw benefits in working together and creating complementary tactical repertoires. Thus, the religious-secular alliances in our case study are perceived by participants as broadly benefiting both secular and religious partners—thus providing a reason to sustain the alliance—and as specifically contributing to the tactical elements of strategic capacity.

Complementary Organizational Profiles and Constituencies

Why might religious-secular alliances help participating organizations increase their organizing scope? We identify three plausible mechanisms from our qualitative observations: (1) Complementarity of access: religious-secular alliances give the less politically linked partner greater access to higher-level political officials; in secularized polities (such as California) the faith-based partner is more likely to benefit from this, but in more religiously infused polities the benefit might flow to the secular partner. (2) Complementarity of public profiles: through these alliances, religious and secular partners can broaden their constituent profiles to increase their value and credibility to political officials. (3) Issue complementarity: once the alliances build political relationships with higher-level political officials, they can more readily address a range of political issues they could not address via local officials.

First, although religious groups have a long and important history of work for progressive causes (Braunstein et al. 2017; Morris 1984; Young 2006), more recently, secular voices have come to dominate policy-oriented activism outside the particular issue areas that conservative religious activists have prioritized (e.g., pro-life/anti-abortion politics, science curricula, traditional marriage). Likewise, the policy arena varies considerably across states in the U.S., with some highly secularized and others quite open to religious voices. As a result of these two realities, in many progressive issue areas nationally and in more secularized state policy arenas, secular organizations have higher public profiles than religious organizations. This imbalance remains true, although religious progressives have recently rebuilt their political capacity and gained a greater policy voice (Braunstein et al. 2017; Fulton and Wood 2012). Faith-based groups may parlay these political relationships into increased access to high-level government officials by building alliances with more well-known secular political groups. In a more religious state context (say Alabama), secular groups might similarly parlay these alliances into higher-level access.

In the case of Impact LA in more secular California, the organization had significant prior experience in traditional community organizing at the local level. Still, their capacity for electoral turnout work was very limited. As one of the religious leaders in Impact LA who worked on Prop. 30 noted: "It was hugely important what we did [on the get-out-the-vote work linked to ballot initiatives]. We helped ourselves tremendously." Organizational learning, as described in the previous section, was important for electoral work and for the organization's reputation in the secular political arena and how it will project influence in the future. The same leader went on to say:

> So it changed our relationship with all these allied organizations. …We are doing a mayoral forum, and one of the things we have to do at the mayoral forum is report on the voter engagement work our organizations did. Because when the political figures understand our ability to turn out voters, it's going to have a big effect on our ability to be at the table with them, not just with other issues, but really be considered key allies.

As one pastor stated, Impact LA's new role as a political player in Los Angeles meant that "civic officials are more worried about us." Before forming the partnerships with secular organizations and the resulting political wins they achieved via electoral turnout at the state level, Impact LA had rarely been recognized as a broadly influential political organization. Another organizer who had worked for both Impact LA and one of their secular partners argued, "[The alliance] gives [Impact LA] the chance to be at the table with groups [with political power] that maybe they had not been at the table with before." These claims make sense in light of research showing that what elected officials value most from politically oriented civic organizations is the capacity to repeatedly deliver a constituency within the electoral and broader political arenas (Han 2014; Han et al. 2011; Han et al. 2021). Impact LA repeatedly drew on this benefit of the alliance. For example, one of the secular groups with which they worked on Proposition 47 was tied to two key political leaders, a current L.A. city councilman and a key

leader in the California State Assembly, both of whom subsequently became important political partners with Impact LA.

Religious-secular alliances may also increase an organization's strategic capacity via a second mechanism, which operates through political credibility generated by the complementary constituencies the partners mobilize. At a time when much political mobilization occurs along racial lines and when progressive political actors often speak only in secular terms, these alliances appear to offer an unusual political profile that combines multiracial, multifaith, and religious-secular collaboration. We argue—and our interviewees suggest—that such diverse alliances garner legitimacy and value in the eyes of politicians, who then buttress their own credibility by building public relationships with the alliances (Egholm, Heyse, and Mourey 2020).[11] One Impact LA organizer attributed the collective power of the organizational alliance to the fact that it transcended so many of the boundaries that traditionally kept groups apart:

> I do think that [the alliances] are an incredibly good idea because decision makers in our city or in our communities don't expect to see those kind of [secular/religious] partnerships. And they don't expect to see those kind of partnerships across racial boundaries either. So there's not a lot of people that are strongly galvanizing Latinos and African-Americans and Whites together to have some of these conversations. And because that's rare, there's more power in it …when you see everybody on the same page, there's more power in that.

The third mechanism operates very simply: As a result of these first two complementarities, these alliances gain stronger political relationships in higher-level arenas such as state and federal governments, so they can credibly address issues previously beyond their capability to address via local organizing. We saw this process develop as Impact LA developed in tandem with its statewide and national networks over the past two decades. Impact LA followed the lead of Organizing California in the early 2000s, entering into alliances with secular statewide civic organizations to influence California policy on education—including leading a successful ballot initiative that increased public education funding. The expertise and credibility established in that effort allowed both organizations to gain a greater voice on more controversial aspects of California educational policy and major health policy decisions later in the 2000s (Wood 2008). In turn, Organizing California's experience with high-level political actors was central in the move by the national network to shape national policy on immigration, racial justice and mass incarceration, and (most successfully) children's health insurance and what became the Affordable Care Act (Wood and Fulton 2015).

All three mechanisms—complementarity of access, public profiles, and issue range—plausibly undergird our finding that religious-secular alliances are associated with increased organizing scope (and thus overall strategic capacity).

Public Legitimacy

Interviewees' comments suggested various ways that religious-secular alliances generate increased public legitimacy that helps participating civic organizations gain strategic capacity, including garnering greater media attention. First, organizers draw on the presence of religious leaders to bring an air of moral authority to what the alliance is hoping to accomplish beyond what secular groups could provide (Gorski 2017). One of the religious leaders in the Proposition 30 alliance described the role of FBCO leaders in these efforts:

> I think it gives an authenticity to it. People are jaded by politicians, so they don't believe what comes out of their mouths. But they believe that if this is coming out of the mouth of my religious leader, they are people who are rooted in prayer. They're not doing this for political gain or an ulterior motive. They're doing it for the good of the people. . . . When a religious leader gets up and speaks, it gives it credibility.

For example, it comes as little surprise when the teachers' union endorses Proposition 30's spending on public education, but having a priest, pastor, rabbi, or imam convene a press conference around the issue helps create a plausible sense that the proposition is not only about teachers' jobs but also about a moral imperative to keep education accessible in California. Both the religious and secular partners in the alliance believed that elected officials would take a religious person delivering a message more seriously than a secular activist or politician.

However, having *only* a religious profile may have its own costs: Newspapers may be less inclined to cover what they perceive as "religious" events, at least in their news sections devoted to coverage of political action and issue campaigns. Secular cosponsorship may heighten the perception of the event or campaign as addressing the broad public sphere. Events with religious and secular sponsors may thus be more likely to be perceived as legitimate interventions in public discourse relevant to all readers/viewers and thus worthy of media attention. Relatedly, the more varied networks of religious-secular alliances offer more personal ties to media decision makers and interested officeholders who may help generate greater media coverage.

American political culture treats religion as simultaneously part of the private and public realms. On the one hand, religious devotion within a particular sect or tradition is considered a private affair, largely irrelevant in the public arena. On the other hand, religious actors willing to operate within the pluralistic assumptions of the public arena are often accorded significant legitimacy as moral voices underpinning different public policy options. This dual private/public structure of religious discourse presents challenges for secular and religious political voices. The media may perceive policy advocacy on purely secular grounds as legitimate and yet as failing to achieve "frame resonance" (Koopmans 2004; Snow and Benford 1988) with the broad American public (at least in some settings). The media may perceive policy advocacy done on purely religious grounds or from a narrow religious profile as sectarian or not newsworthy.

Religious-secular alliances with broad religious representation may thus gain legitimacy in public life, at least within those sectors of American political society that value pluralism. As one secular organizer said of Impact LA: "They have Muslims, they have Jews, they have Christian communities . . . and I think that's very powerful. It's really important." Such multi-faith religious-secular alliances can position themselves with an "institutional isomorphism" (Scott and Davis, 2015) that parallels the religious *and* secular character of the American public arena. Within these alliances, voices from diverse faith traditions are in dialogue with secular political reason, advocating for particular public policy to address "justice" and "the common good"—concepts that have both secular and religious valence. We suspect that these mechanisms underlie our findings regarding the association between religious-secular alliances and increased access to political officials, and increased media coverage, but we cannot be certain without wider interviewing of politicians and media decision makers.

Self-Reinforcing Organizational Respect

Finally, we suspect but lack the longitudinal data to verify that a fourth mechanism underlies our findings. To the extent that the dynamics described above play out over extended periods for a given alliance, they build a self-reinforcing cycle into that alliance. Other political organizations likely come to respect groups that successfully build broad-based coalitions, achieve strategic political goals over time, and repeatedly deliver voters and media coverage around shared priority issues (Han 2014; Han et al. 2011). Religious-secular alliances that take advantage of the potential benefits identified above likely capture greater organizational respect, constituting a key resource for strategic capacity and, thus, ongoing political efficacy. This factor may be especially crucial in a period in American history in which more sectarian voices have dominated the religious presence in the public sphere (Hout and Fischer 2014). In such a context, faith-based groups capable of operating with respect for secular commitments may gain particular legitimacy.

This posited mechanism's complex, iterative nature makes it difficult to confirm from our data. Still, we suspect it helps explain the increased strategic capacity of religious-secular strategic alliances and thus deserves further investigation. However, we note that this mechanism depends on sustainable alliances over time. As one Impact LA organizer stated, "[Long-term success] is going to be about alliances and really coming down to values we share. . . . That's an important thing for progressives to say—there are multiple motivations for the work we do, but we have to find a common ground around values."

Together, four dynamics playing out over time provide plausible mechanisms that we suggest undergird our quantitative finding that civic organizations' participation in religious-secular alliances is associated with increased strategic capacity (as indicated by the increased media attention, organizing scope, tactical repertoires, and political reputation generated by their strategic capacity). These same dynamics—and organizers' perceptions—lend plausibility to our argument that the alliances drive the increased strategic capacity. We document three of the mechanisms through qualitative data: (1) knowledge and skills sharing (here, around electoral skills and the power of storytelling), both leading to broader tactical repertoires; (2) organizational complementarity leading to increased organizing scope; and (3) public legitimacy leading to increased organizing scope and media attention. The fourth mechanism we posit but cannot verify with our data: accumulating organizational respect via the self-reinforcing mechanisms of success, leading to heightened organizational reputation.

Of these four mechanisms, two (complementarity and legitimacy) depend substantially on the fact that these are religious-secular alliances, while the other two might occur in any civic alliance. Thus, our findings are relevant for the particular importance of religious-secular collaboration and for strategic alliances generally.

Limiting Mobilizing Capacity: Drawbacks, Trade-offs, and Tensions in Alliances

Our qualitative case study and the prior literature allowed us to identify three mechanisms that may reduce mobilizing capacity in organizations in religious-secular alliances: time constraints, cultural misalignment, and issues involving respect for people with other belief systems.

First, mobilizing turnout takes a considerable investment of a limited resource: organizational time. One religious leader succinctly noted, "When you are doing work on building alliances, your organizers are not doing as much work on your own events." An organizer with Impact LA explained, "I and other organizers have to invest time to engage the coalition partners in a meaningful way." Such concerns may have previously deterred alliance building among these organizations, as one secular organizer described:

> I remember talking in the early days with [a significant national leader of the Organizing for Action network] and saying to him, "Are you working with Center for Community Change? Are you working with this group? Are you working with that group?" and he said, "Coalition work is a trap." Well, when you're part of a coalition, it takes a tremendous amount of time, and I think that what he felt then was the time you're spending in these coalitions doesn't really pay off, and it takes all the time away from the kind of leadership development, base building work that you need to do.[12]

Such trade-offs appear to be inherent in building long-term political efficacy—and help explain the decreased mobilizing capacity we observe in our quantitative data.

Second, latent tensions between religious and secular adherents may dilute religiously based mobilization strategies even within effective alliances. In our fieldwork, we witnessed some expression of such tension: One secular organizer saw religion as "destroying the world," and another believed his partners in organizing needed "forgiveness" for their religious beliefs. It is reasonable to assume that some religious participants may hold similarly judgmental views of their secular partners, perhaps believing only people of faith are acceptable in the sense of "being saved." Still, the latter views were not expressed in our interviews. Issues of respect also

emerged for religious partners in these alliances who were wary of being utilized instrumentally for political gain. Our data contain several examples of such instrumentalization and associated guardedness. For example, one member of a secular organizing group called on its religious partners to "get a collar" for an upcoming public event, i.e., to have a religious leader dressed in clerical vestments at the event. One secular organizer explained: "I do think the whole faith-based thing when you have a bunch of pastors [in collars] in front of a press conference, that's always helpful. It's like, 'Okay, Father, damn it. I can't be mean to you.'" In another instance, a bishop at an event sponsored by a religious-secular alliance noted afterward, "I mostly feel great about what we did here, but there's always a risk of the church being utilized, and we have to guard against that." Such wariness may not affect strategic capacity built upon the careful cultivation of knowledge sharing, organizational complementarity, and public legitimacy—but might undermine the enthusiasm-driven dynamics of mobilizing turnout for big events.

Third, such tensions within religious-secular alliances may challenge the key cultural bridging practices—spiritual practices for generating meaning, engagement, and motivation—through which faith-based organizations unite their internal constituencies across internal religious, racial, and socioeconomic divides (Braunstein et al. 2014). Accordingly, when groups like Impact LA bring in new partners who do not share these pre-existing meaning structures, it may dilute the organization's shared culture, lessen internal cohesion, and lower mobilizing capacity. This represents an instance of the difficulties of "the emotional management of structural difference" (Delehanty 2018).

Of course, these potential costs within alliances might undermine strategic and mobilizing capacity. But our evidence strongly suggests that, even if this is the case, any negative impact on strategic capacity is overwhelmed by the positive impact of collaboration: organizations in religious-secular alliances gain greater media attention, organize on a broader scope, employ wider tactical repertoires, and have built reputations as more politically influential than organizations outside of such alliances—despite lower mobilizing capacity and whatever negative toll these potential costs exact on strategic capacity. Thus the benefits of alliances appear to outweigh the costs—and certainly do so in terms of our reputational and objective indicators of strategic capacity—but in the long term, these tensions could undermine the political trust needed for collaboration. These alliances may either be unstable over time or generate new perceptions of the "other" across the religious-secular divide. Future research might usefully explore the long-term evolution of such alliances and their strategies for managing the challenges to mobilizing capacity we describe here.

CONCLUSION

Democracy and the egalitarian ideals it fosters face significant challenges in the United States and globally. This article has focused on strategic alliances, one tool for more effectively addressing those challenges and overcoming contemporary societal divisions.

Movement organizations enter into alliances to pursue various potential advantages, and increased political efficacy is one potential benefit. Earlier research demonstrates that organizations entering such alliances face drawbacks, such as time costs and potential internal tensions. These trade-offs may be particularly acute for alliances across the religious-secular divide, in which differences in culture and identity may be considerable. Nonetheless, in the national social movement field we studied, participating in a religious-secular alliance was associated with multiple organizational outputs associated with greater strategic capacity: the movement organizations' ability to generate media attention, gain access to high-level political officials, address issues at the state and national levels, draw on wider tactical repertoires, and gain a reputation as being politically effective. However, participating in a religious-secular alliance is associated with lower mobilizing capacity, suggesting that while alliances enhance political efficacy in many ways, some trade-offs exist in entering into them.

We argue that our quantitative findings result from three ways faith-based and secular grassroots organizing models complement one another. First, because religious and secular constituencies and organizing models are often distinct from each other, faith-based organizations and secular organizations tend not to overlap greatly in *who* they organize or in *how* they go about organizing. Although both types of organizations in our study are built on serving the interests of working families within diverse urban communities, they did not compete directly for the same constituent base or funding and status. Instead, they could learn from each other while focusing on similar issues but different constituents. This pattern indicates that cultural and identity differences between faith-based and secular organizations do not prohibit shared concerns, and such alignment allows for productive alliances.

Second, given their different constituent bases, organizing models, and relational networks, knowledge and resources from religious and secular organizations can be highly complementary. Our qualitative study indicates that sharing knowledge and resources allowed the alliance to work on state-level political issues, raising their ability to address issues affecting poor communities. One secular participant noted, "We're learning how to move beyond our little weird lefty bubble and actually build effective alliances with other sectors."

Third, one set of complementary exchanges was particularly valuable to the participants in the religious-secular alliance examined in our ethnographic study in a relatively secularized state. In that setting, secular organizations introduced new electoral skills into the alliance. In contrast, faith-based organizations introduced new approaches to moral framing of political issues and new practices of storytelling within political venues. In more religiously oriented political settings—say, the American South—religious organizations might bring electoral skills to the table. In any case, as argued above, these complementary approaches heightened the strategic capacity of the FBCO organization, appearing to outweigh the reduction in mobilizing capacity resulting from engagement in religious-secular alliances.

Comparative research is needed to ascertain whether these findings apply only in progressive alliances, are U.S.-specific, or apply more generally. Do similar advantages accrue to religious-secular alliances around more conservative political issues? Do religious-secular alliances also increase participants' political efficacy in radically secularized societies, in more homogenously religious societies, in religious societies with more extreme forms of church-state separation, and in societies with strongly state-established religious institutions? Certainly, the public legitimacy of religious-secular alliances varies greatly crossnationally and, in some national settings, may be seen as highly illegitimate. Likewise, the strategic action fields within which alliances operate vary greatly, and whether religious-secular alliances can be strategically effective depends partly on those field dynamics. All democratic societies, however, face the question of how politically oriented civic organizations can contribute most effectively to advancing democratic governance and confronting authoritarianism. Similarly, in societies currently governed by autocratic regimes, people inclined toward democracy face the challenge of how to project democratic power effectively. In both cases, religious-secular alliances may offer one important tool—but their efficacy must be assessed in different settings and regarding different political preferences before we can know how broadly this applies. Furthermore, as noted above, future research could assess the potential causal complexity in the relationship between strategic capacity and the decision to join religious-secular alliances.

In the settings studied here, strategic alliances across the religious-secular divide appear viable and valuable in contemporary society, despite the highly contentious relations between many secular political elites and more sectarian religious actors. Important faith-based and secular actors exist on both sides of the partisan divide; not all political liberals are secularists, and not all people of faith are political conservatives. Religious-secular alliances face complex challenges in a polarized society, but this research suggests that strategic alliances can play a role in strengthening the fabric of democratic life and constructing a shared societal future.

NOTES

[1] In principle, this definition over-simplifies the complex dynamics of organizational cultures as they change over time and elides the permeable boundary between the secular and the religious. In this study's operationalization, however, it works: the authors' extensive prior fieldwork in the FBCO organizations at the heart of the study shows that they draw substantially on diverse religious languages in their internal organizational dynamics; and we accepted their own definition of whether they engaged in external partnerships with secular organizations.

[2] An anonymous reviewer noted that in secularized political environments such as California, where our key case study originates, it is likely a religious organization would be seeking secular expertise; but in a religiously infused political environment, this might well be a secular organization seeking political expertise from a faith-based "insider" organization.

[3] Our use of "political efficacy" overlaps with but differs from how the term is used in political science and social psychology, where it connotates others' *perception* that a given individual or organization is politically effective. As outlined later in the text regarding strategic capacity, we use the concept more broadly, to include empirical measures of efficacy as well as a reputational/perceptual assessment.

[4] Indeed, as Han (2016) and McAlevey (2016) point out, many of these organizations would eschew the term "mobilization" entirely, sharply distinguishing "organizing" (building grounded networks of leaders and developing their political skills) from "mobilizing" (turning out large numbers of people for political purposes). However, nearly all of them periodically host large events (termed political actions, accountability sessions, founding conventions, public actions, or demonstrations) and spend months working to turn out anywhere from a few hundred to ten thousand attendees; thus, "mobilizing capacity" as operationalized here is highly relevant to their work, albeit as a product of their commitment to organizing.

[5] The population for this study included every faith-based community organizing organization in the U.S. that has an office address, at least one paid employee, and institutional members. Faith-based organizing differs from other types of community organizing in that the organizations have institutional members rather than individual members. 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. Organizational list available upon request from authors.

[6] In analyses not shown, we also assessed more specific measures than those listed here. Examples include use of Twitter specifically and use of strikes and sit-ins (for a measure of a specific protest tactic). These analyses did not produce significant findings, which we interpret to mean that it is broad tactical and communicative range and diversity that matters for flexible strategic response, rather than one "best practice" tactic or communications tool.

[7] For the latter variable, directors were asked "Approximately how many leaders does your organization currently have?" "Leaders" was defined as "people who regularly attend planning meetings or work on your organization's projects." Directors were instructed to exclude people who only attended public actions or accountability sessions.

[8] Because this study surveyed the entire population of FBCO organizations in the U.S. 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 170 organizations (out of 189) that provided complete information on all of the variables used in the analysis.

[9] "Impact LA" and all names are pseudonyms in order to protect individual-level anonymity. The statewide organizing effort in which Impact LA participated also forged several secular partnerships during this time; however, in this paper we concentrate on the secular alliances of Impact LA itself.

[10] This perception on the part of organizers from both sides of the alliances adds plausibility to our argument that alliances in fact increased organizational strategic capacity, but does not eliminate the possibility that the reverse causal direction might also have played out—i.e., that organizations with greater strategic capacity were more likely to enter alliances in the first place.

[11] The authors of the literature review cited here note "how legitimacy in one sector or arena, or by certain actors, can be strategically utilized in another realm. [That literature] stresses how the legitimacy of civil society can be used by political actors (Koopmans 2004) and governments (Fraser 2007). . . . Political parties, states, and organizations thus can gain legitimacy by being attentive to civil society or using the rhetoric of civil society goals" (p.8).

[12] The authors' more recent ethnographic work suggests that much more coalitional work is going on nationally at present than is reflected in this quote.

REFERENCES

Altinordu, Ateş. 2010. "The Politicization Of Religion: Political Catholicism and Political Islam in Comparative Perspective." *Politics & Society* 38(4): 517-51.

Amabile, Theresa M. 1996. "Creativity and Innovation in Organizations." Pp. 123-167 in *Research in Organizational Behavior*, edited by B.M. Staw and L.L. Cummings. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Amabile, Teresa M. and Michael G. Pratt. 2016. "The Dynamic Componential Model of Creativity and Innovation in Organizations: Making Progress, Making Meaning." *Research in Organizational Behavior* 36(2): 157-83.

Amenta, Edwin, Neal Caren, Elizabeth Chiarello, and Yang Su. 2010. "The Political Consequences of Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36: 287-307.

Andrews, Kenneth T. and Neal Caren. 2010. "Making The News: Movement Organizations, Media Attention, and the Public Agenda." *American Sociological Review* 75(6): 841-66.

Andrews, Kenneth T., Marshall Ganz, Matthew Baggetta, Hahrie Han, and Chaeyoon Lim. 2010. "Leadership, Membership, and Voice: Civic Associations that Work." *American Journal of Sociology* 115(4):1191-1242.

Armstrong, Elizabeth A., and Mary Bernstein. 2008. "Culture, Power, and Institutions: A Multi-Institutional Politics Approach to Social Movements." *Sociological Theory* 26(1):74-99.

Bernstein, Mary. 2013. "Power, Politics and Social Movements: A Multi-Institutional Politics Approach." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 1(1): 87-93.

Bleeke, Joel, David Ernst, and Ernst Ernst. 1993. *Collaborating to Compete: Using Strategic Alliances and Acquisitions in the Global Marketplace*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.

Braunstein, Ruth. 2017. *Prophets and Patriots: Faith in Democracy Across the Political Divide*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Braunstein, Ruth, Brad R. Fulton, and Richard L. Wood. 2014. "The Role of Bridging Cultural Practices in Racially and Socioeconomically Diverse Civic Organizations." *American Sociological Review* 79(4): 705-25.

Braunstein, Ruth, Todd N. Fuist, and Rhys Williams, eds. 2017. *Religion and Progressive Activism: New Stories About Faith and Politics.* New York: New York University Press.

Bretherton, Luke. 2015. *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Briscoe, Forrest, and Sean Safford. 2018. "Movement-Led Institutional Change." Pp. 83-127 in *Social Movements, Stakeholders and Non-Market Strategy*, edited By Forrest Briscoe, Brayden G. King, and Jocelyn Leitzinger. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group.

Chong, Dennis, and James N. Druckman. 2007. "Framing Public Opinion in Competitive Democracies." *American Political Science Review* 101(4): 637-655.

Das, Tarun K. and Bing-Sheng Teng. 1998. "Between Trust and Control: Developing Confidence in Partner Cooperation in Alliances." *Academy of Management Review* 23(3): 491-512.

Davis, Joseph E. 2012. *Stories of Change: Narrative and Social Movements*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Defilippis, James, Robert Fisher, and Eric Shragge. 2010. *Contesting Community: The Limits and Potential of Local Organizing*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Delehanty, Jack. 2018. "The Emotional Management Of Progressive Religious Mobilization." *Sociology of Religion* 79(2): 248-272.

———. 2023. *Making Moral Citizens: How Faith-Based Organizers Use Vocation for Public Action*, in the Where Religion Lives book series edited by Kristy Nabhan-Warren. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Dixon, Marc and Andrew Martin. 2012. "We Can't Win This On Our Own: Unions, Firms, and Mobilization of External Allies in Labor Disputes." *American Sociological Review* 77(6): 946-69.

Doussard, Marc and Brad R. Fulton. 2020. "Organizing Together: Benefits and Drawbacks of Community-Labor Coalitions for Community Organizing." *Social Service Review* 94(1): 36-74.

Earl, Jennifer, and Katrina Kimport. 2011. *Digitally Enabled Social Change.* Boston: MIT Press.

Edwards, Bob, and John D. McCarthy. 2004. "Resources and Social Movement Mobilization." *The Blackwell Companion To Social Movements.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Egholm, Liv, Liesbet Heyse, and Damien Mourey. 2020. "Civil Society Organizations: The Site of Legitimizing the Common Good—A Literature Review." *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 31(1): 1-18.

Fligstein, Neil, and Doug McAdam. 2011. "Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields." *Sociological Theory* 29(1): 1-26.

———. 2012. "A Political–Cultural Approach to the Problem of Strategic Action." Pp. 287-316 in *Rethinking Power in Organizations, Institutions, and Markets*: Bingley, UK: Emerald Group.

Fowler, Tim, and Doug Hagar. 2013. "'Liking' Your Union: Unions and New Social Media During Election Campaigns." *Labor Studies Journal* 38(3): 201-28.

Fulton, Brad R., 2021. "Engaging Differences: How Socially Diverse Organizations Can Mobilize Their Resources More Effectively." *Social Forces* 99(4):1518-46.

Fulton, Brad R., and Marc Doussard. 2023. "Sustaining the Grassroots: How Community Organizations Mitigate the Downsides of Collaborating with Unions." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 45(4): 835-54.

Fulton, Brad R., and Richard L. Wood. 2012. "Interfaith Community Organizing: Emerging Theological and Organizational Challenges." *International Journal of Public Theology* 6(4): 398-420.

———. 2018. "Civil Society Organizations and the Enduring Role of Religion in Promoting Democratic Engagement." *Voluntas* 29(2018): 1068-79.
Fulton, Brad R., Richard L. Wood, and Interfaith Funders. 2011. *National Study of Community Organizing Organizations: Datafile*. Durham, NC: Duke University.
Gamson, William A. 1975. *The Strategy of Social Protest*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.
Ganz, Marshall. 2009. *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Gawerc, Michelle I. 2020. "Diverse Social Movement Coalitions: Prospects and Challenges." *Sociology Compass* 14(1):1-14.
———. 2021. "Coalition-Building and the Forging of Solidarity across Difference and Inequality." *Sociology Compass* 15(3):1-15.
Gorski, Philip. 2017. *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Han, Hahrie. 2014. *How Organizations Develop Activists: Civic Associations and Leadership in the 21st Century* New York: Oxford University Press.
———. 2016. "The Organizational Roots of Political Activism: Field Experiments on Creating a Relational Context." *American Political Science Review* 110(2): 296-307.
Han, Hahrie, Kenneth T. Andrews, Marshall Ganz, Matthew Baggetta, and Chaeyoon Lim. 2011. "The Relationship of Leadership Quality to the Political Presence of Civic Associations." *Perspectives on Politics* 9 (1): 45-59.
Han, Hahrie, Elizabeth Mckenna, and Michelle Oyakawa. 2021. *Prisms of the People: Power & Organizing in Twenty-First-Century America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2016. *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. New York: The New Press.
Hout, Michael, and Claude S. Fischer. 2014. "Explaining Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference" *Sociological Science* 1: 423-47. DOI: 10.15195/v1.a24
Jasper, James. 2004. "A Strategic Approach to Collective Action: Looking for Agency in Social-Movement Choices." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 9(1): 1-16.
———. 2006. *Getting Your Way: Strategic Dilemmas in the Real World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Kale, Prashant, and Harbir Singh. 2007. "Building Firm Capabilities Through Learning: The Role of the Alliance Learning Process in Alliance Capability and Firm-Level Alliance Success." *Strategic Management Journal* 28(2004): 981-1000.
Karpf, David. 2016. *Analytic Activism: Digital Listening and the New Political Strategy*. Oxford University Press.
Knoke, David. 2009. "Playing Well Together: Creating Corporate Social Capital in Strategic Alliance Networks." *American Behavioral Scientist* 52(12): 1690-708.
———. 2018. *Changing Organizations: Business Networks in the New Political Economy*. New York: Routledge.
Koesel, Karrie. 2014. *Religion and Authoritarianism: Cooperation, Conflict, and the Consequences.* New York: Cambridge University Press.
Koopmans, Ruud. 2004. "Movements and Media: Selection Processes and Evolutionary Dynamics in the Public Sphere." *Theory and Society* 33(3): 367-91.
Lakoff, George. 2008. *The Political Mind: A Cognitive Scientist's Guide to Your Brain and its Politics*. London: Penguin.
Levy, David, and Maureen Scully. 2007. "The Institutional Entrepreneur as Modern Prince: The Strategic Face of Power in Contested Fields." *Organization Studies 28*(7): 971–991. DOI 10.1177/0170840607078109.
Lindsay, D. Michael. 2008. "Evangelicals in the Power Elite: Elite Cohesion Advancing a Movement." *American Sociological Review* 73(1): 60-82.
Mahmood, Saba. 2011. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Margolis, Michele F. 2020. "Who Wants To Make America Great Again? Understanding Evangelical Support for Donald Trump." *Politics and Religion* 13(1): 89-118.
McAlevey, Jane F. 2016. *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age*. New York: Oxford University Press.
———. 2020. *A New Collective Bargain: Unions, Organizing, and the Fight for Democracy*. New York: Ecco Press/HarperCollins.
McKenna, Elizabeth. 2020. "The Revolution Will Be Organized: Power and Protest in Brazil's New Republic, 1988-2018." Ph.D. in Sociology, University of California, Berkeley, CA.

Milkman, Ruth. 2006. *LA Story: Immigrant Workers and the Future of the U.S. Labor Movement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Russell Sage Foundation.
Morris, Aldon. 1984. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. New York: The Free Press.
Polletta, Francesca. 2006. *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Polletta, Francesca, Pang Ching Bobby Chen, Beth Gharrity Gardner, and Alice Motes. 2011. "The Sociology of Storytelling." *Annual Review of Sociology* 37(2011): 109-30.
Putnam, Robert D. 2007. "*E. Pluribus Unum:* Diversity and Community in the 21st Century. The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30(2): 137-66.
Reed, Ralph. 1996. *Active Faith: How Christians Are Changing the Soul of American Politics*. New York: The Free Press.
Reger, Jo, and Suzanne Staggenborg. 2006. "Patterns of Mobilization in Local Movement Organizations: Leadership and Strategy in Four National Organization for Women Chapters." *Sociological Perspectives* 49(3): 297-323.
Rusch, Lara. 2012. "Going Regional: The Evolution of an Organizing Strategy in Detroit." *City & Community* 11(1): 51-73.
Sampson, Robert J., Doug McAdam, Heather MacIndoe, and Simon Weffer-Elizondo. 2005. "Civil Society Reconsidered: The Durable Nature and Community Structure of Collective Civic Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 111(3): 673-714.
Scott, W. Richard, and Gerald F. Davis. 2015 [1981]. *Organizations and Organizing: Rational, Natural and Open Systems Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.
Seawright, Jason. 2016. "The Case for Selecting Cases That Are Deviant or Extreme on the Independent Variable." *Sociological Methods and Research* 45(3): 493-525.
Skocpol, Theda, Marshall Ganz, and Ziad Munson. 2000. "A Nation of Organizers: The Institutional Origins of Civic Voluntarism in the United States." *American Political Science Review* 94(3): 527-46.
Smithey, Lee A. 2009. "Social Movement Strategy, Tactics, and Collective Identity." *Sociology Compass* 3(4): 658-71.
Smock, Kristina. 2004. *Democracy in Action: Community Organizing and Urban Change*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Snow, David A., and Robert D. Benford. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization." Pp. 198-217 in *International Social Movements Research,* edited by Bert Klandermans, Hans-Peter Kreisi, and Sidney Tarrow. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
Somers, Margaret R. 1994. "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach." *Theory and Society* 23(5): 605-49.
Speer, Paul W., and Hahrie Han. 2018. "Re-Engaging Social Relationships and Collective Dimensions of Organizing to Revive Democratic Practice." *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 6(2) 745-58.
Spicer, Jason, Tamara Kay, and Marshall Ganz. 2019. "Social Entrepreneurship as Field Encroachment: How a Neoliberal Social Movement Constructed a New Field." *Socio-Economic Review* 17(1): 195-227.
Stearns, Linda Brewster, and Paul. D. Almeida. 2004. "The Formation of State Actor-Social Movement Coalitions and Favorable Policy Outcomes." *Social Problems* 51(4): 478-504.
Thompson, Warren. 2012. "Evangelizing the State: Mennonite Brethren Technocrats in Paraguayan State Reform, 2003-2008." M.A. thesis in Sociology, University of New Mexico.
Todeva, Emanuela, and David Knoke. 2003. "Strategic Alliances and Corporate Social Capital." Pp. 345-380 in *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, Organisations-Sociologie,* edited by Jutta Allmendinger and Thomas Hinz.
Van Dyke, Nella, and Holly J. McCammon, eds. 2010. *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Walker, Edward T., and McCarthy John D. 2010. "Legitimacy, Strategy, and Resources in the Survival of Community-Based Organizations." *Social Problems* 57(3): 315-340.
Wariboko, Nimi. 2014. *Nigerian Pentecostalism*. Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer.
Warren, Mark R. 2010. "Community Organizing for Education Reform." Pp. 139-72 in *Public Engagement for Public Education: Joining Forces to Revitalize Democracy and Equalize Schools*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
Williams, Rhys. 1999. "Public Religion and Hegemony." Pp. 169-186 *The Power of Religious Publics*, edited by J. Wellman and W. Swatos. Westport, CN: Praeger.

Wood, Richard L. 2002. *Faith in Action: Religion, Race, and Democratic Organizing in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. 2008. "Raising the Bar: Organizing Capacity in 2008 and Beyond." Washington, DC: Neighborhood Funders Group.

Wood, Richard L. and Brad R. Fulton. 2015. *A Shared Future: Faith-Based Organizing for Racial Equity and Ethical Democracy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Young, Michael P. 2006. *Bearing Witness Against Sin: The Evangelical Birth of the American Social Movement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Yukich, Grace, Brad R Fulton, and Richard L Wood. 2020. "Representative Group Styles: How Ally Immigrant Rights Organizations Promote Immigrant Involvement." *Social Problems* 67(3): 488-506.

Zihnioğlu, Özge. 2019. "The Prospects of Civic Alliance: New Civic Activists Acting Together with Civil Society Organizations." *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 30(1): 289-99.