

**ARTICLE**

# Social movement coalitions: Formation, longevity, and success

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**Abstract**

Social movements rely on coalitions to help mobilize the mass numbers of people necessary for success. In this article, we review the literature on social movement coalition formation, longevity, and success. We identify five factors critical to coalition formation: (a) social ties; (b) conducive organizational structures; (c) ideology, culture, and identity; (d) the institutional environment; and (e) resources. Next, we explore the extent to which coalition survival is influenced by these same factors and argue that emergent properties of the coalition, such as commitment and trust, also facilitate longevity. Our review of the literature reveals that two factors specific to coalitions influence their success: coalition form and the nature of institutional targets. Interaction, communication technology, and the availability of physical and virtual spaces that facilitate communication are themes that run throughout our discussion, as they undergird many of the elements that shape coalition formation and survival. We conclude by evaluating the state of the research area and suggesting directions for further research.

On November 9, 2016, people all over the United States took to the streets in protest. Chanting, "Not our President!" and "Trump, Trump, Go Away, Racist, Sexist, Anti-Gay!" individuals expressed their profound distress at the previous day's election results. On the University of California, Merced, campus, a broad coalition of students and student organizations protested, including the Lambda Alliance (LGBT+ group), Black Student Union, Movimiento Estudiantil Chican@ de Aztlán (MEChA), and Students Advocating Law and Education (an undocumented students' group). Even the campus Bakery Club mobilized members. Many students on the majority Latino/a campus expressed fear that they or their friends and family would face harassment or deportation under Trump's administration. This mobilization is not surprising, given the circumstances, nor given what we know about social movements and coalitions. Political threats are powerful motivators to collective action, and as we describe below, one of the most powerful incentives for coalition formation.

All social movements include coalitions, or organizational collaborations wherein distinct organizations pool resources to pursue shared goals (Levi & Murphy, 2006; Tarrow, 2005; Zald & Ash, 1966). Organizational coalitions are part of the network of individuals and organizations that comprise a social movement. Coalitions vary in both their duration and degree of formality (McCammon & Moon, 2015; Tarrow, 2005). Many protest actions involve temporary, informal coalitions of organizations, where groups come together to plan and participate in a single event, what some

have called event coalitions (Levi & Murphy, 2006; Tarrow, 2005). Sometimes groups work together over time on multiple events yet maintain separate organizational structures and goals, and at other times, groups work together in more formal, named alliances over a long time. Scholars have documented coalitions within virtually every social movement, and between organizations in different movements, as Table 1 illustrates.

The importance of coalitions to social movements is illustrated both by research that documents how coalitions influence success, as well as by social movement theory. Mobilizing large numbers of people and demonstrating widespread support for an issue is one of the few ways social movements exercise power (Koopmans, 1993; Lipsky, 1970; Tilly, 1978), and coalitions help make this happen (Almeida, 2008; Jones, Hutchinson, Van Dyke, Gates, & Companion, 2001). Research provides multiple examples of cases where a movement was unsuccessful because coalitions failed to materialize (Almeida, 2010; Ferree & Roth, 1998; Gelb & Shogan, 2005). Almeida (2010) compares mobilization against neo-liberal reforms in five Latin American countries and finds in countries where activists formed broad coalitions, movements were more successful. Gelb and Shogan (2005) find a similar result in their study of mobilization against the privatization of hospitals in the United States. Thus, it is no wonder scholars increasingly study movement coalitions.

**TABLE 1** A review of coalition studies by movement

| Movement                                | Publication  |
|---|--|
| Environmental                           | Beamish & Luebbers, 2009; Di Gregorio, 2012; Ellingson, Woodley, & Paik, 2012; Grossman, 2001; Haydu, 2012; Khagram, 2004; Lichterman, 1995; Mix, 2011; Murphy, 2005; Park, 2008; Shaffer, 2000; Stearns & Almeida, 2004   |
| Labor                                   | Cornfield & McCammon, 2010; Dixon et al., 2013; Dixon & Martin, 2012; Heery, Williams, & Abbott, 2012; Isaac, 2010; Patmore, 1997; Reynolds, 1999; Valocchi, 2009; Williams, 1999  |
| Peace and Disarmament                   | Beamish & Luebbers, 2009; Corrigan-Brown & Meyer, 2010; Hathaway & Meyer, 1993; Heaney & Rojas, 2008; Reese et al., 2010; Rose, 2000; Meyer & Corrigan-Brown, 2005; Rochon & Meyer, 1997   |
| Community                               | Altemose & McCarty, 2001; Barvosa-Carter, 2001; Diaz Veizades & Chang, 1996; Dolgon, 2001; Chung, 2001; Croteau & Hicks, 2003; Regalado, 1995; Richards, 1990; Sonenshein, 1989  |
| Identity Based                          |  |
| Women's and Reproductive Rights         | Arnold, 1995; Arnold, 2011; Banaszak, 2010; Borland, 2008; Borland, 2010; Coe & Schnabel, 2011; Ferree & Hess, 1994; Ferree & Roth, 1998; Guenther, 2010; Joyner, 1982; Kretschmer, 2014; McCammon & Campbell, 2002; Reger, 2002; Rupp & Taylor, 1990; Staggenborg, 1986; Whittier, 1995 |
| Civil Rights and Immigration            | Barkan, 1986; Enriquez, 2014; Maney, 2000; McAdam, 1982; Morris, 1984; Okamoto, 2010; Reese, 2005;   |
| Gay Rights                              | Adam, 1995; D'Emilio, 1983; Van Dyke & Cress, 2006   |
| Conservative Right                      | Buss, 2003; Edsall, 2007; Gandsman, 2016; Herman, 2001; Rohlinger & Quadagno, 2009; Southworth, 2009; Whittier, 2014   |
| International                           |  |
| Anti-Capitalist and Global Justice      | Atton, 2003; Brooks, 2005; Gerhards & Rucht, 1992; Gillham & Edwards, 2011; Levi and Murphy, 2005; Staggenborg, 2015; Vélez-Vélez, 2015; Vicari, 2014  |
| Transnational Labor and Anti-Free Trade | Almeida & Walker, 2006; Anner & Evans, 2004; Bandy, 2004; Carty, 2004; Garwood, 2005; Kay, 2005; Seidman, 2007; Stillerman, 2003   |
| EU Advocacy                             | Cullen, 2015; Cullen, 2005; Ruzza, 2004; Zippel, 2004  |
| Cross Movement                          |  |
| Labor-Environment                       | Dreiling, 1998; Mayer et al., 2010; Obach, 2004; Obach, 1999   |
| Labor-Community                         | Brecher & Costello, 1990; Krinsky & Reese, 2006  |
| Labor-Women's                           | Roth, 2003   |
| Multi-Movement                          | Chazan, 2016; Rose, 2000; Van Dyke, 2003   |

Just as a full understanding of social movement activity requires that we study individual participation in collective action and the role of organizations in mobilization, so too do we need to study the origins and dynamics of organizational collaboration. For example, because frames are often developed through interchanges between coalition partners, failing to examine organizational interaction, including cooperation and conflict, could result in a misspecified explanation of the frame's origin (Croteau & Hicks, 2003; Luna, 2010).

While some of the factors influencing coalitions are consistent with those influencing organizational action and the dynamics of movements as a whole, others are unique to coalitions and stem from the involvement and interaction of distinct organizational entities, each with their own ideology, identity, structure, and operating process. We argue that processes of connection and interaction are crucial to coalition formation and longevity. Many studies examine how social ties, or connections between individuals, draw people into movement participation (e.g., McAdam, 1986; Snow, Zurcher, & Ekland-Olson, 1980). However, in addition to these, ties connecting individuals to organizations and organizations to one another influence mobilization and movement success. Space and technology play crucial roles in making these connections possible by providing opportunities and forums for interaction. We suggest that these are critical elements of coalitions and social movements more broadly.

In this article, we review the literature on social movement coalitions and explore coalition formation, longevity, and success. We identify five factors critical to coalition formation: social ties; conducive organizational structures; ideology, culture, and identity; institutional environment; and resources. Our review describes the elements of ideology that can impede coalition formation and the conditions under which shared ideology is important. We discuss how opportunities and threats motivate collaboration and consider the types of threats that matter. We explore how resource scarcity can both inspire and inhibit organizational collaboration. We then interrogate the extent to which these same factors and emergent properties of coalitions influence longevity. Connection and interaction are themes that run throughout our discussion, as they are crucial to so many aspects of coalition formation and survival. Our review of the literature reveals that we now have more information about the types of organizations that facilitate coalition formation and longevity, as well as how social conditions influence coalition survival and success. We conclude by evaluating the state of research on this topic and suggest directions for further research.

## 1 | COALITION FORMATION

Both internal organizational characteristics—including organizational ideologies, the presence of individuals with social ties, and commonalities and connections between organizations—as well as external social and political conditions, inspire groups to work together for a common cause. Research suggests that it is often a combination of two or more of these factors that inspires and enables coalition work. In a meta-analysis of the research on social movement coalitions, McCammon and Van Dyke (2010) find a confluence of plentiful resources and congruent ideologies are often integral to coalition formation. Moreover, research has shown other factors often combine to influence collaboration (Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010); however, for conceptual clarity, we discuss these factors separately here.

### 1.1 | Social ties and a history of interaction

Consistent with the general social movements literature, which emphasizes the importance of social ties to social movement recruitment, social ties between individuals and organizations also influence which organizations will participate in a coalition (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Corrigan-Brown & Meyer, 2010; Heaney & Rojas, 2014; Maney, 2000; Obach, 2004; Reese, Petit, & Meyer, 2010; Richards, 1990; Rose, 2000; Roth, 2003; Shaffer, 2000). Whether or not a coalition forms, as well as which organizations join a particular coalition, are profoundly influenced by the presence of “coalition brokers” or “bridge builders,”—individuals with ties across organizations (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Grossman, 2001; Obach, 2004; Rose, 2000). Corrigan-Brown and Meyer (2010) demonstrate that past organizational collaborations and the social connections of five key activists explain which particular organizations joined the

Win without War coalition against the U.S. war in Iraq. Rose (2000) finds bridge builders played a critical role in helping environmental, labor, and peace organizations overcome class divides that made it difficult for them to collaborate. The importance of bridge builders to coalition formation cannot be overstated.

Ties between individuals and organizations reflect histories of interaction, which can profoundly shape whether coalitions form and what they look like. Activists and movements are embedded in milieus with particular material circumstances and cultural traditions, including histories of interaction (Beamish & Luebbers, 2009). Guenther (2010) shows a history of interaction and social ties between feminists in an East German town and city in Sweden led an East German women's group to seek coalition partners in Sweden after reunification; while contrastingly, another East German town, lacking these ties, sought out collaborators in West Germany. Spatial isolation and limited opportunities to interact and form these important ties can impede transnational coalition formation (Bandy & Smith, 2005; Maney, 2000; Young, 1992). This was especially true prior to the advent of social media and widespread Internet use. For example, a coalition between Northern Irish activists and their supporters in the United States in the 1960s eventually collapsed in part due to communication challenges; activists in the United States sometimes learned of protests staged by their Irish partners only via the newspaper (Maney, 2000). As Bandy and Smith (2005:12) note, global coalitions require "the creation of spaces for respectful and open dialogue both within and across societies."

Space, and specifically the availability of free space, facilitates the organization of coalitions. Free spaces are "settings within a community or movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in, and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization" (Polletta, 1999: 1). Increasingly, world and regional conferences and forums provide physical space that facilitates connection across geographic boundaries, and Internet and social media provide a virtual space that connects individuals and organizations (Bandy & Smith, 2005; Castells, 2009; Della Porta, 2005). The World Social Forum provides a space where progressive groups from around the world can interact, share information, and form new alliances. It is credited with generating the worldwide protests against the Iraq War in February 2003 (Verhulst, 2010) and other actions (Hammond, 2007; Smith et al., 2014). Simi and Futrell (2010) observe racist-only spaces, such as Bible studies, music festivals, and Internet chatrooms, act as sites of linkage for historically distinct racist organizations including racist skin heads, neo-Nazis, and KKK members. Online, right-wing group websites create opportunities for interaction and connection, often featuring numerous international and inter-organizational hyperlinks (Burris, Smith, & Strahm, 2000; Daniels, 2009). As Polletta (1999: 3) notes: "Free spaces supply the activist networks, skills, and solidarity that assist in launching a movement." Certainly groups can and do form alliances with other groups with whom they have no connections, but ties and a history of interaction make coalition work much more likely.

## 1.2 | Organizational characteristics

A range of organizational factors, including broad or multi-issue goals and a more formal organizational structure, are associated with coalition formation. Research finds social movement organizations with broad goals or a focus on multiple issues are more likely to enter into coalition (Borland, 2008; Obach, 2004; Van Dyke, 2003). Van Dyke (2003) finds multi-issue organizations, such as the Students for a Democratic Society and the Democratic Socialists, helped bring together broad coalitions of protesters on college campuses over a 60-year time span. Heaney and Rojas (2014) provide insight into the importance of multi-issue organizations, and how they are able to facilitate coalition formation. They describe hybrid antiwar movement organizations that straddle multiple identities, including individuals with past experience in a range of social movements. The presence of these individuals enables hybrid organizations to serve as bridges between organizations focused on different specific issues.

Organizational structures, such as a division of labor (Borland, 2008) and professional leaders (Shaffer, 2000), facilitate coalition. A clear division of labor can facilitate coalition by making it possible for organizations to send a representative to attend meetings with potential coalition partners (Borland, 2008). Organizations pursuing participatory democracy, with a nonhierarchical structure and shared decision making, may have difficulty working in coalition (Arnold, 1995). Arnold (1995:277) notes, "a unique source of the difficulties in sustaining coalitions among feminists

is a contradiction between the structural features of coalitions and the organizational requirements of some feminist ideologies." In addition to the importance of leaders' social ties, as discussed above, leaders' human and cultural capital can facilitate coalition formation (Bob, 2005; Nepstad & Bob, 2006). For example, Bob (2005) describes how media and messaging savvy on the part of their leader, Ken Saro-Wiwa, helped the Ogoni people of the Niger Delta gain international coalition partners. Other tribes in the area with similar grievances were unsuccessful at doing so largely due to their lack of skilled leadership.

### 1.3 | Ideology, culture, and identity

Scholarship demonstrates that cultural similarities between movement actors (Bandy & Smith, 2005; Jung, King, & Soule, 2014), consistent ideologies (Altemose & McCarty, 2001; Brecher & Costello, 1990; Cullen, 2015; Di Gregorio, 2012; Dreiling, 1998; Enriquez, 2014; Gerhards & Rucht, 1992; Lichterman, 1995; Mayer, Brown, & Morello-Frosch, 2010; Park, 2008; Staggenborg, 2015; Whittier, 2014) and collective identity (Barvosa-Carter 2001, Corrigan-Brown & Meyer, 2010; Heaney & Rojas, 2014; Krinsky & Reese, 2006; Maney, 2000; Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2014; Takeshi 2014; Valocchi, 2009; Vicari, 2014; Whittier, 2014) aid in coalition formation. Indeed, ideological and cultural congruence is a pivotal factor in promoting or preventing coalition formation. In a meta-analysis of factors influencing coalition formation, ideological congruence emerged as a critical condition, sometimes sufficient to inspire a coalition (McCammon & Van Dyke, 2010).

Numerous studies demonstrate that ideological differences can inhibit coalition formation (Barkan, 1986; Diaz Veizades & Chang, 1996; Gerhards & Rucht, 1992). Obviously, we would not expect groups with diametrically opposed goals, such as pro- and anti-LGBT rights, to work together. However, even organizations within the same movement who share broadly similar goals may hold ideological positions inimical to coalition. Roth (2010) demonstrates that many women's organizations in the early 1970s failed to form coalitions across racial and ethnic lines because of a widely shared belief that activism is best pursued by those whose direct interests are at stake and that others should not take action on others' behalf. Lichterman (1995) describes an environmental group unwilling to join a coalition because of their construction of activism as an individualistic rather than community project—shared goals and multi-cultural values notwithstanding. Thus, while some elements of two groups' ideologies may overlap, they may hold other positions that prevent collaboration.

A broad ideology coupled with opportunities for interaction can help overcome status differences and enable alliances. Enriquez (2014: 155) shows how a broad social justice ideology encouraged interaction among undocumented and citizen college students, noting, "conflict among members can be best negotiated through the development of discursive and interactive spaces that allow individuals to engage across their different social locations." A lack of social ties and spaces for interaction can prevent groups from seeing their shared interests and thereby inhibit coalition formation. Ferree and Roth (1998), in their study of a strike of day care workers in Berlin, show how feminist organizations never joined a coalition with the day care workers because the feminists were focused on other issues, not viewing the plight of day care workers as an issue worthy of pursuit. The lack of social connections, or bridge builders, between the two movements meant that there was no one within the feminist organizations to make the case for the striking day care workers. Staggenborg (1986: 384) observes, "a lack of overlap in membership among diverse groups exacerbates ideological differences, creating many disagreements and misunderstandings which might be avoided with better communication."

Cultural congruence is a dynamic project. Groups with little connection at one point in time may make cultural changes to facilitate alliance formation. This was the case with the Raging Grannies movement: a rowdy aging women's group in Canada that tempered its strategies to comport with their indigenous environmental allies, creating space for indigenous activists at their gatherings, adopting mainstream dress, lending resources to Indigenous protests, and initiating action to ameliorate colonial abuses (Chazan, 2016). McCammon and Campbell (2002) provide evidence that women's suffrage groups and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) did not work in coalition initially because of conflicting ideas regarding gender roles. Once suffragists changed their rhetoric to emphasize

gender differences and women's special knowledge and its value in politics, they found more common ground with WCTU activists and began working in coalition. Similarly, Cornfield and McCammon (2010) demonstrate the AFL and CIO merged only after the AFL broadened their policy agenda making it more consistent with the comparatively expansive policy goals of the CIO.

Haydu (2012) cautions us not to overstate the importance of shared ideology in coalition formation. In his study of the Clean Food movement in the late 19th Century, he finds the Farmer's Alliance, Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and National Consumers' League engaged in a range of political actions together, while using varying ideologies. The Farmer's Alliance in the West mobilized because of the perceived threat of Eastern big business; the WCTU argued impure food led to diseased appetites and alcohol consumption; the National Consumers' League argued that women needed to mobilize politically around food issues because of their role in protecting the household. "Multiple and varied interpretations of food adulteration, then, were not obstacles to building a wide coalition, differences to be transcended with some more inclusive master frame. They instead helped make a broader coalition possible" (Haydu, 2012: 106).

Haydu's findings fly in the face of much of the accepted wisdom about social movement coalitions, where it is widely assumed that shared ideology is necessary to collaboration. Why the difference in findings? Our review of the literature suggests that the necessity of a shared ideology, or the degree to which organizational ideologies must overlap for collaboration, depends on the structure and nature of the coalition. A looser fit between organizations may be sufficient for ad hoc or casual alliances (Dixon, Danaher, & Kail, 2013; Guenther, 2010; Haydu, 2012; Van Stekelenburg & Boekkooi, 2013). In more intensive coalitions, where participants are working closely together, attending meetings, and planning joint events, a greater degree of ideological and cultural fit is necessary. Van Stekelenburg and Boekkooi (2013) describe a formal anti-war coalition in the Netherlands whose conflicts over strategy and framing impeded their ability to mobilize. Others suggest that because of their focus on local, geographically constrained issues, community change coalitions often involve a great deal of interaction and therefore require greater ideological congruence (Arnold, 1995; Beamish & Luebbers, 2009).

#### 1.4 | Institutional environment: Political opportunities, threats, and institutional structures

A number of conditions in the broader social environment facilitate coalition formation. Perhaps not surprisingly, these conditions are consistent with factors important to all movement mobilizations. Political opportunities and threats facilitate coalition formation, and institutional structures can shape which groups work together.

Consistent with political opportunity theory, research shows coalitions are more likely when movements experience increased political opportunities (Diaz-Veizades & Chang, 2006; Lee, 2011; Maney, 2000), threats (Chang, 2008; Clarke, 2011; Dolgon, 2001; Hathaway & Meyer, 1993; McCammon & Campbell, 2002; Okamoto, 2010; Poloni-Staudinger, 2009; Reese et al., 2010; Rochon & Meyer, 1997; Rohlinger, 2006; Van Dyke, 2003), or both (Juska & Edwards, 2005; Obach, 2004; Reese, 2005; Rose, 2000; Staggenborg, 1986). Maney (2000) shows civil rights organizations in Northern Ireland found international coalition partners interested in their cause in the late 1960s partially due to the political opportunity provided by high levels of social movement mobilization in many countries at that time.

A range of threats, genuine or perceived (Bandy & Smith, 2005; Grossman, 2001; Kadivar, 2013), provoke organizational collaboration, spanning from the presence of antagonistic political actors at various levels, such as Governors or Presidents or WTO leaders (Levi & Murphy, 2006; Gerhards & Rucht, 1992; Van Dyke, 2003), to hostile employers (Anner & Evans, 2004; Brecher & Costello, 1990; Dixon & Martin, 2012), and even mortal threats such as violence or war (Okamoto, 2010; Reese et al., 2010; Van Dyke & Cress, 2006). Chang (2008) finds government repression of protest spurred the creation of alliances in South Korea's pro-democracy movement. Similarly, Dixon and Martin (2012) find threats from employers help labor unions gain more allies, including other unions, politicians, social movement organizations, and religious and civic groups and inspire these allies to provide higher levels of

material support, including donations of money and food. Van Dyke and Cress (2006) find that the mortal threat of AIDs and rise of the Christian Right inspired gay men and lesbians to collaborate to an extent not seen previously. Analogously to political threats, economic threats can precipitate coalitions, as detailed below.

Threats sometimes inspire groups to overcome ideological or cultural differences in order to work together against a common foe (Staggenborg, 1986). Reger (2002), for example, demonstrates how threats brought together Cleveland NOW chapters previously divided along class lines. Pro-life efforts to close local abortion clinics led to a unified, cross-class coalition among the different NOW chapters and other groups in the city. Staggenborg (1986) suggests that threats or opportunities may inspire groups to overcome their differences because of how they interact with resources. Movements enjoy greater financial resources when there is a chance for victory or the threat of a loss, as supporters are more motivated to provide donations to help. Lower levels of competition for resources coupled with issues requiring action foster the development of coalitions.

Some find a combination of political threats and opportunities inspire coalition formation (Almeida, 2010; Juska & Edwards, 2005; Kay, 2005; Reese, Giedraitis, & Vega, 2006; Staggenborg, 1986; Stillerman, 2003; Zippel, 2004). Staggenborg (1986) finds that pro-choice organizations came not only to work in coalition when they faced threats to their goals, such as potential cuts to Medicaid funding of abortions, but also to take advantage of new opportunities, such as when states cut their anti-abortion laws. Almeida (2010), in his study of coalitions in five Latin American countries, demonstrates threats associated with government austerity programs combined with opportunities for mobilization created by democratization to inspire the formation of new alliances. Scholars studying labor coalitions opposed to NAFTA argue international organizations and agreements create threats that bring groups together across national boundaries while also creating opportunities by providing an arena for the presentation of grievances (Kay, 2005; Stillerman, 2003). The European Union similarly provides an international body for whom advocacy groups can present their grievances while also generating grievances through its policy making (Ruzza, 2004; Tarrow, 2005; Zippel, 2004).

For social movements with an interest in shaping social policy via the institutional political system, the structure of that system can shape and channel activism (Gray & Lowery, 1998; Krinsky & Reese, 2006; Obach, 2010). Obach (2010) suggests that U.S. governmental separation of labor and environmental protection into two separate policy arenas inhibits collaboration of labor and environmental groups even when issues are of interest to both. Furthermore, research demonstrates coalition work within U.S. governmental systems is exceptionally volatile. The work of Jenkins-Smith, St. Clair, and Woods (1991) shows that American lobbying coalitions must constantly adapt to electoral, resource, policy, and political climate changes, while Gray and Lowery (1998) show that interest group formation is dependent on oppositional type, resource availability, and policy systems.

## 1.5 | Resources

Resources also matter to coalition formation. Groups weigh the costs and benefits of participation when deciding to join a coalition. One incentive for organizations to work in collaboration is to gain valuable resources their own organization lacks (Almeida & Stearns, 1998; Chung, 2001; Staggenborg, 1986). For example, Chung (2001) finds that Korean immigrants and African Americans formed a public space coalition in Los Angeles in part because they each brought something different to the table. The Korean immigrants had greater financial resources, while the African American community, with their long history of organizing, had greater skills as activists and more organizational ties. Bob (2005) suggests that disadvantaged people's movements around the globe increasingly seek out international NGOs' assistance precisely because they don't feel that they have the resources or influence to successfully fight for change on their own.

Although limited resources may make pooling resources attractive, coalitions require significant resources, both financial and temporal, and are therefore unlikely when either of these are scarce (Zald & McCarthy, 1980). At these times, movement organizations may be inwardly focused, utilizing their limited resources for organizational maintenance and action and may have limited funds to spare for collaboration (Barkan, 1986; Cullen, 2005; Staggenborg,



1986). Conversely, when resources are abundant, groups are better able to commit some of them to joint projects. Consistent with resource mobilization theory, social movement coalitions are more likely when resources are plentiful (Borland, 2008; Cornfield & Canak, 2007; Diaz Veizades & Chang, 1996; Grossman, 2001; Hathaway & Meyer, 1993; Obach, 2004; Reese, 2005; Staggenborg, 1986; Williams, 1999; Zald & McCarthy, 1980).

At the same time, economic grievances may stimulate coalition formation as groups band together to work for redress of those grievances (Almeida, 2008; Almeida & Walker, 2006; Borland, 2010; Brecher & Costello, 1990). Economic grievances and threats may operate the same way political threats do, by inspiring groups to overcome their differences to work together. Borland (2010) describes how political and economic crises in Argentina inspired some women's groups to overcome their ideological and identity-based differences to work together. Similarly, Brecher and Costello (1990) outline how widespread economic threats in the late 80s led to large scale, grassroots, and community-labor coalitions.

Entering into a coalition can be a risky endeavor for organizations when there is a large disparity in resources between themselves and their coalition partner. Scholars studying transnational coalitions have repeatedly documented the challenges that resource poor organizations face when forming coalitions with more powerful and well-resourced international organizations (Bandy, 2004; Bob, 2005; Khagram, 2004; Mix & Cable, 2006; Seidman, 2007). Well-resourced groups may try to control the coalition or may be perceived as doing so, which can lead to conflict or harm the interests of the less powerful group. Bob (2005) shows how the indigenous Ogoni people of Nigeria deemphasized their primary goal of indigenous rights and autonomy and focused instead on their opposition to environmental degradation and economic exploitation in order to gain the support of international organizations such as Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, and Amnesty International. Bob (2005) and Khagram (2004) demonstrate that international partners can facilitate success for a group; however, their assistance sometimes comes at a cost.

## 2 | COALITION LONGEVITY AND SUCCESS

Many of the same factors that influence social movement coalition formation continue to shape organizational collaboration over time, as we might expect. Just as political opportunities or threats inspire collaboration, so does a decrease in opportunities and threats sometimes play a role in coalition dissolution. Heaney and Rojas (2011) show how the disappearance of a political threat, which had motivated coalition work, led to the dissolution of an antiwar coalition. Once the Democrats won control of the White House, many Democrats demobilized because they viewed Republican political leadership as the source of the problem and the coalition dissolved. Obach (1999), in his study of the Wisconsin Labor Environmental Network (WLEN), argues that union-provided resources, such as support staff and means of communication, were pivotal in WLEN's 10-year lifespan, and the decline of such resources was an integral part of its collapse.

Just as ideological and cultural compatibility are necessary for coalition formation, so are they essential to coalition longevity. Groups coming from different social locations in terms of race, class, gender, or culture may have difficulty working together. Even if they are able to overcome differences in order to collaborate, these may eventually lead to conflict and division. Kleidman and Rochon (1997) show how organizations involved in national level coalitions may face difficulties in resolving the demands or interests of both their coalition partners and their local members, which do not necessarily coincide. International coalitions may face challenges due to their geographic gap, having to resolve the attitudes and culture of domestic organizations with the beliefs and culture of international partners (Maney, 2000).

While many of the factors influencing formation and dissolution are the same, there are nonetheless a number of factors that emerge as organizations and individuals interact over time that shape a coalition's trajectory. In addition, shifting social environments may create conflict between groups.

As coalition partners interact, the extent to which they develop shared goals, a commitment to the coalition, and trust (Altemose & McCarty, 2001; Beamish & Luebbbers, 2009; Dixon et al., 2013; Krinsky & Reese, 2006) can



influence the coalition's survival. Krinsky and Reese (2006) find that a commitment to the coalition helped labor and community groups maintain their collaboration, as did community groups' deferral of worker representation to the unions. Altemose and McCarty (2001) describe an inter-faith coalition that endured through a shared value system, which emphasized empathy and accountability. Accountability sessions, where agents who acted on behalf of the coalition were subject to interrogation of intentions by grass roots supporters, helped the coalition bureaucracy maintain ideological synchronization with its base. This research once again highlights the importance of interaction and the space, either physical or virtual, for connection.

Coalitions may live or die on the basis of the quality of their interpersonal interactions (Beamish & Luebbers, 2009; Cullen, 2005; Obach, 1999). Cullen (2005), in her study of an EU focused movement coalition group, finds continued collaboration strengthens both individual and organizational ties, which then propel the coalition forward. Likewise, Obach (1999) shows how, over time, interaction in a labor and environmental organizational coalition led the different organizations to support and pursue action on issues on which they had not previously taken a stand. Bridging organizations can play a key role in coalition survival by diffusing conflict between organizational partners (Roth, 2003). Social ties "encourage a degree of trust, the sharing of detailed knowledge, and collective problem-solving mechanisms that enable coalition members to anticipate one another's preferences and behavior and overcome conflicts as they arise" (Arnold, 2011: 131). Opportunities and space for interaction do not guarantee longevity, as some groups are nonetheless unable to overcome the challenges of collaboration, and conflict leads to dissolution (Kleidman, 1993).

Shifting social environments may alter the salience of different issues, turning ideological differences into insurmountable obstacles to collaboration. For example, Kretschmer (2014) shows how Feminists for Life, which had previously collaborated with feminist organizations like the National Organization of Women on the ERA and anti-sexual and domestic violence campaigns, increasingly had difficulty finding coalition partners because of their position on abortion. While abortion was not an issue frequently discussed by feminist organizations in the early 1970s, with the passage of *Roe v. Wade*, abortion became a prominent issue for feminists and fundamentally altered the feminist boundary, excluding activists and organizations with a pro-life stance. Obach (1999) shows that declining resources coupled with ideological differences and failures in communication led to the ultimate collapse of a labor-environmental movement coalition that had endured for 10 years. Coalitions that are better able to adapt to a changing social environment will survive longer (Altemose & McCarty, 2001).

## 2.1 | Movement coalition outcomes

It is hard to separate coalition outcomes from general social movement outcomes because almost all social movements include coalitions to some extent, and coalitions pursue the same goals as social movements. However, the involvement of coalitions changes movement outcomes, and participation in a coalition can alter organizations. McCammon and Moon (2015) identify three coalition outcomes in addition to survival: organizational change, movement mobilization, and political outcomes. Entering into coalition can help organizations by building their networks, increasing resource availability (Lee, 2011; Mix, 2011), expanding tactical repertoires (Meyer & Whittier, 1994; Wang & Soule, 2012), and altering group frames (Croteau & Hicks, 2003; Luna, 2010). Paradoxically, coalitions can harm SMOs by taxing available resources and increasing organizational competition (Barkan, 1986; Hathaway & Meyer, 1993). Coalitions can impact social movements by increasing levels of mobilization and fostering sustained collective action (Almeida, 2008; Gerhards & Rucht, 1992; Jones et al., 2001; Luna, 2010). Finally, social movement political party coalitions—domestic and international—can provoke legislative change (Almeida, 2010; Banaszak, 2010; Gelb & Shogan, 2005).

A number of factors influence the outcomes of social movements and coalitions, including the movement's organization and actions; non-movement actors, including allies, elites, and opponents; and the institutional, political, and cultural context (Amenta, Caren, Chiarello, & Yang, 2010; Van Dyke & Taylor, forthcoming). We suggest that in

addition to these, the factors that specifically shape coalition outcomes include the form or activity of coalitions, as well as the institutional location and structure of their targets.

The structure and breadth of a coalition can influence its success (Almeida, 2008; Gelb & Shogan, 2005; Jones et al., 2001). In a comparison of labor campaigns against utility privatization and other threatened austerity measures in El Salvador and Costa Rica, Almeida (2008) finds that when unions organized broad coalitions, they were more successful. In describing one of the cases, Almeida (2008: 182) suggests that the broad coalition “of [telecommunications] unions, university and high school students, teachers, environmental NGOs, local church parishes, peasant federations as well as other state sector unions, made it possible to unleash a nation-wide campaign of mass disruption.” Jones et al. (2001), in a comparison of 14 protest events, find when coalition partners used a division of labor, with one organization taking the lead on planning and others focused on mobilization, they were able to mobilize more participants for protest. Collaboration with particular actors can also influence success. Several studies suggest that coalitions including political actors or parties may be more successful (Almeida, 2010; Banaszak, 2010; Isaac, 2010; Stearns & Almeida, 2004). Thus, we know that coalition form and content influences success, but research on this topic is limited.

External actors and conditions also play a role in coalition success. Scholars identify target vulnerability (Dixon et al., 2013; Soule, 2009) as an important factor. Different types of targets vary in their vulnerability, with some targets less able to withstand the costs of disruption of their business. Scholars find the combination of protest at the source, which disrupts production, combined with consumer protest and boycotts, often internationally, is effective at securing labor victories (Anner & Evans, 2004; Carty, 2004; Garwood, 2005). Coalition work is especially effective in this regard, by facilitating simultaneous protests at different locations. International NGOs may serve as important bridges, connecting and sharing information between activists in one country with those in another. Carty (2004), for example, shows how the AFL-CIO connected striking Maquiladora workers in Mexico with supportive college students in the United States. The students were able to put university contracts with Nike in jeopardy, inspiring the retailer to put pressure on the Mexican factory making their apparel to improve working conditions.

### 3 | CONCLUSION

Until recently, most studies of coalitions focused on the factors influencing their formation, and therefore, the literature on this topic is fairly well developed (Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010). Five factors are critical to coalition formation, including social ties; organizational structures; ideology, culture, and identity; the institutional environment; and resources. These same factors influence coalition longevity, but emergent properties, such as commitment to the coalition and respectful interaction, matter as well. The factors influencing coalition outcomes include properties of the coalition, including its form and goals, as well as actors in the external environment, including the nature of the coalition's target.

Years ago, Suzanne Staggenborg (2010) issued a call for scholars to study a number of under-examined topics regarding social movement coalitions, including the kinds of threats and opportunities that lead to movement alliances; social movement communities and how they shape coalition formation; the organizational structures within successful coalitions; and coalition longevity and outcomes.<sup>1</sup> The research that we have described in this article demonstrates that we have made some progress in answering these questions, but work remains.

We now have a much better understanding of the kinds of threats that inspire collaboration—political antagonists at various levels (local, state, national, and international), economic threats, as well as violence and other mortal threats. Furthermore, we know more about the organizational structures that facilitate coalition work. Organizations with a broad, multi-issue focus help create coalitions, as do organizations with a clear division of labor and professional leadership. Ideological, cultural, and identity alignment is important, and research suggests that ideological alignment may be more important for coalitions that are long term and have a formal structure. The involvement of individuals with social ties to other organizations or communities, or bridge leaders, is important both to formation

and longevity. And research increasingly demonstrates that communication and interaction, either in virtual or physical space, constrain, and shape coalition processes.

We have made less progress on a number of other questions. We need more research on how coalition structure influences longevity. There are still very few studies on social movement communities and how they influence coalition form and effectiveness. And, as is clear from the short length of the section on coalition success, we still need more research on how coalition form and other factors influence success. Additionally, evolving technology has made imperative the study of information systems and their influence on coalition formation and dynamics. Insights from this literature, such as the ablation of traditional time-space barriers and multiplication of weak ties through the social media (Castells, 2009; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Tremayne, 2014; Vicari, 2014), have yet to be applied to the study of coalitions. Finally, we need additional research on right-wing coalitions, which have been the subject of surprisingly few studies of coalition dynamics. Research has yet to explore the extent to which their formation and longevity is influenced by factors similar to those shaping progressive coalitions.

Coalitions are a part of all social movements, helping mobilize the masses for collective action. In spite of their importance, there are surprisingly few studies on the bigger questions, such as how the presence of coalitions matters to movement success, and how coalition form influences success. If we want to understand how movements succeed or fail, we would be wise to devote more attention to these topics.

## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> She also recommends research on the costs and benefits of coalition work for organizations. Sociologists have not fully elaborated the cost benefit analysis of coalitions, but we refer readers to the political science literature (e.g., Hojnacki, 1997), which, although focused on interest groups and voting blocs, explores costs and benefits in more depth.

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