

**Solidarity Through Collective Action: The Role of Community Coalitions in Grassroots  
Policy Engagement**

A Capstone project presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
in Policy Studies

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## **Abstract**

Grassroots advocacy coalitions are one mechanism in which community organizations leverage collective action to influence policy outcomes. This capstone explores the organizational dynamics of advocacy coalitions, focusing on alliance building, resource sharing, and collective action strategies. It aims to fill a gap in the understanding of advocacy coalitions as political entities, offering insights that could empower community organizations to enhance their political engagement capabilities. Utilizing qualitative methods, this study investigates the Seattle Solidarity Budget (SB) coalition, drawing upon the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) as a theoretical lens to analyze the dynamics that enable grassroots coalitions to function as political intermediaries. Key factors influencing the success of the SB include maintaining goal alignment, the strategic use of outside tactics, the ability to build and maintain strong alliances, and the practice of collective care and sustainability within the coalition. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of how grassroots coalitions can effectively mobilize communities, overcome institutional barriers, and catalyze policy change.

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## Introduction

Collective action has always been a driving force behind transformative social movements, uniting individuals and communities to challenge injustices and pursue shared goals. Different groups have diverse strategies for engagement and action, from direct action protests to research initiatives to lobbying. However, communities most impacted by systemic injustice frequently encounter obstacles to collaborative decision-making and engagement within public policy processes. Community-based organizations often lack the necessary resources and infrastructure for meaningful participation in the policy arena (Walker & McCarthy, 2010). Mobilizing collective power is a formidable approach to address this issue. Grassroots community coalitions are a vital mechanism for groups to achieve necessary changes and are an avenue for historically marginalized groups to engage in the policy process. These partnerships consolidate group interests into cohesive demands, mobilize shared resources, and build political momentum for change. Exploring the dynamics of collective action and coalition building unveils the transformative potential of “bottom-up” efforts in influencing policy landscapes.

The existing literature on coalitions spans social movement, political sociology, and public health scholarship, offering valuable insights into coalition effectiveness, strategies, challenges, and theoretical frameworks that underpin coalition dynamics. Coalitions, in this scope of research, are commonly understood as collaborative partnerships that transcend individual interests, working collectively to address community needs and achieve shared goals (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2012). Social movement research illuminates the evolutionary trajectory of social movements into coalitions, examining the role of social connections, ideologies, and political context in their formation and maintenance (Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010). These coalitions become particularly crucial in restrictive policy arenas, necessitating engagement with

diverse political resources to sustain effectiveness (Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010; Andrews & Edwards, 2004; Wiley et al., 2021). Insights from public health look at the internal collaborative tactics of community coalitions, like trust and collaboration, in driving community health and policy outcomes (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2012; Kegler et al 2020). This body of research indicates that successful coalitions leverage their collective resources and expertise to effect policy changes, implement community-based interventions, and mobilize community members. Effective coalitions also demonstrate adaptability, strong leadership, and a clear, shared vision.

While advocacy coalitions have garnered significant theoretical and empirical attention, there remains a need for a more specific understanding of how they function as political organizations (Nohrstedt & Heinmiller, 2024). While many studies have focused on the formation and impact of coalitions, this paper seeks to delve deeper into their organizational dynamics, specifically regarding practices of alliance building, resource sharing, and collective action tactics. Addressing this gap could offer guidance to community organizations and advocacy coalition members, shedding light on how to strengthen their capacity for political action. This paper explores the question, “How do community coalitions facilitate effective grassroots engagement in the policy process?” Using the Seattle Solidarity Budget (SB) as a local example of a community coalition, the study draws on the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) as a theoretical background to explore the organizational dynamics, strategies, and effectiveness of the SB in driving achieving policy outcomes. The SB showcases a positive model for transformative grassroots advocacy. By exploring this specific coalition in depth, this paper strives to offer a lens into how community coalitions can catalyze policy change.

Utilizing qualitative methods, this study reveals that grassroots community coalitions like the SB effectively leverage resources to engage in the policy process through strategic collective

action. Key findings include the critical role of goal alignment within coalitions, the importance of building strong alliances to enhance collective influence, the necessity of maintaining collective care and interdependency for coalition sustainability, and the strategic use of outside strategies to bypass institutional barriers.

## Literature Review

The field of community coalition studies encompasses a variety of theoretical perspectives that examine the function and impact of community coalitions in achieving policy changes. What they all have in common is the overarching idea that actors pool resources and coordinate strategies with each other to gain influence, achieving outcomes more effectively than they would on their own. The following literature review will explore various dimensions of coalitions through the lenses of the Advocacy Coalition Framework, focusing on three dimensions: influence, resources, and strategies. These themes will provide a structured approach to understanding how coalitions mobilize assets, exert influence, and strategize to achieve their objectives. For each dimension, I will outline the core concepts and underlying assumptions and identify dominant themes that have emerged in past research. While the ACF will serve as the primary analytical framework, this review will also incorporate seminal insights from leading social movement theorists, offering a more nuanced understanding of coalition behavior in the context of neoliberalism.

### The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Influence, Resources, & Strategies

The ACF provides a lens for understanding how actors with differing beliefs and interests come together within advocacy coalitions to navigate complex policy environments (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). This theory is considered one of the most effective frameworks to conceptualize grassroots community coalitions. It offers a structure for examining the formation, evolution, and operational mechanisms of coalitions over extended periods of time. This framework is particularly noted for its ability to dissect the interactions that coalitions have within the broader policy ecosystem, considering both internal factors like shared beliefs and external influences such as policy shifts and socio-economic changes.

Central to the ACF is the recognition of coalitions as dynamic entities that engage in coordinated collective action to achieve their policy objectives (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). This framework elucidates the beliefs, strategies, resources, and influence within advocacy coalitions, offering insights into the mechanisms driving policy outcomes. Rather than focusing on individuals or institutions as units of analysis, the ACF posits that coalitions should be conceptualized as policy subsystems – “issue-specific networks that contain coalitions of actors competing in a policy area” (Ertas & McKnight, 2019).

By conceptualizing community coalitions as political organizations, the ACF suggests that advocacy coalitions serve as platforms for collective action, providing benefits that outweigh individual efforts (Nohrstedt & Heinmiller, 2024). In this context, multi-organizational alliances act as intermediary organizations to balance the interests of the community while building political and grassroots capacity (Post, 2015). The ACF conceptualizes three components that contribute to coalition success: influence, resources, and strategies, each of which are detailed below.

### Influence

The concept of influence refers to the capacity of coalitions to shape the policy process through their collective actions. The influence of advocacy coalitions within the policy process is a central theme in both the ACF and related areas, such as social movement and political interest group research, because it addresses the fundamental question of whether coalitions are more effective at achieving policy change than individual actors working alone (Heaney & Leifeld 2018; Van Dyke & Amos 2017). The underlying assumption of a lot of research on advocacy coalitions is that they do indeed exert influence in policy processes, yet this assumption has not been thoroughly examined. Researchers are still exploring the boundaries of coalition influence

and the specific factors that enhance or limit it. Despite its importance, influence has been under-researched, partly due to the challenge of proving causation—demonstrating that a particular policy outcome was directly caused by a coalition’s actions (Betsill & Corell 2001). This gap in the literature is significant because, as noted by Nohrstedt and Heinmiller (2024), the ability to demonstrate coalition influence is crucial for validating the relevance of studying advocacy coalitions in the first place. While various case studies and qualitative comparative analyses have suggested that coalitions have an impact on policy outcomes, the focus has often been more on identifying the presence of coalitions rather than assessing their actual influence on the policy process (Aamodt 2018; Heinmiller 2023). This highlights a persistent need for more detailed investigations into how and under what conditions coalitions can shape policy outcomes, thus addressing the broader issues of collective action and coalition efficacy as originally critiqued by Schlager (1995) nearly three decades ago.

While the concept of influence is central to understanding the role of advocacy coalitions in the policy process, it remains underexplored, particularly in terms of directly linking coalition actions to policy outcomes. The literature suggests that coalitions do exert influence, yet the complexity of proving causation has led to a gap in fully validating this assumption. This highlights the need for more focused research on the specific ways that coalitions shape policy.

### Resources

Resources are a critical component of advocacy coalitions, defined as the accessible capacity of coalition members to influence policy processes (Weible et al., 2020). Within the ACF, resources encompass a wide range of assets, including financial capital, expertise, formal-legal authority, public support, and mobilizable troops (Sabatier & Weible 2007). By aggregating resources, coalitions strengthen their bargaining power and increase their ability to engage

effectively with policymakers. For instance, financial resources allow coalitions to fund research, campaign for public support, and sustain lobbying efforts that are critical for policy change. Expertise equips coalitions with the necessary technical knowledge to propose viable solutions and counter opposing arguments, making their positions more persuasive to decision-makers. Mobilizable troops can be leveraged to generate grassroots support or exert pressure on policymakers. The fundamental idea behind advocacy coalitions is that actors with shared beliefs come together to pool these resources, enhancing their collective ability to achieve policy goals more effectively than they could individually. Zakocs and Edwards (2006) define this “collaborative synergy” as the generation of innovative solutions and approaches that are not likely to emerge from any single organization acting alone. Resource pooling, therefore, is not just an operational tactic but a core reason for the existence of coalitions, as it allows for coordinated efforts in translating collective beliefs into public policy (Levi & Murphy, 2006).

Researchers studying the ACF have long recognized the significance of resource mobilization and coordination, yet the extent of joint resource use within coalitions remains underexplored. While it is assumed that coalitions form in part to facilitate the shared use of resources, empirical studies have often focused on identifying the resources held by individual coalition members rather than observing how these resources are collectively utilized. This gap in the literature is notable because different types of resources may present distinct challenges coalitions face in engaging in collective action. Understanding these nuances could shed light on the varying effectiveness of coalitions in different policy contexts.

ACF scholars have highlighted formal-legal authority as particularly useful for policymaking. One study found that coalition actors recognize the unique value of formal-legal authority and frequently leverage other resources to obtain it, especially during “points of crisis”

when their traditional strategies are unsuccessful (Wiley et al., 2021). This finding suggests that coalitions strategically leverage their available resources to gain the authority needed to influence policy outcomes, particularly in critical moments. The same study also proposes a refinement of the ACF to discuss these points of crisis on the “complex road from policy advocacy to implementation.”

The ability for organizations to leverage shared resources and expertise is one of the main reasons coalitions can be effective in influencing policy outcomes and achieving goals they may not be able to achieve individually. The ability to share resources and knowledge is a *raison d'être* of coalitions. It enables coalitions to translate their shared beliefs into impactful public policy, making it a cornerstone of their success in influencing policy change. However, understanding exactly how coalitions collectively mobilize and utilize these resources remains underexplored.

### Strategies

Within the ACF, strategies are defined as the coordinated actions employed by coalition members to realize their policy-oriented beliefs (Nohrstedt & Heinmiller, 2025). Coordinated strategies are another central aspect to the very existence of advocacy coalitions; as articulated by Zafonte and Sabatier (1998), “If there is no coordinated behavior, there are no advocacy coalitions.” The ACF assumes that coalition members jointly pursue various political strategies aimed at influencing governmental institutions and altering policy outcomes (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). These strategies may include direct action, influencing public opinion, endorsing candidates, and other tactics designed to advance the coalition’s goals. It is important to consider how and when advocacy coalitions select and deploy political strategies. Strategy selection is influenced by coalition opportunity structures - factors that determine the feasibility and timing

of strategic actions. These opportunity structures include the openness and consensus level within a political system, as well as external influences like the political economy and institutional frameworks (Aamodt & Stensdal 2017; Kübler 2001). These structures guide coalitions in choosing whether to adopt confrontational, cooperative, or complementary roles based on the specific political context. Research has shown that coalitions are likely to focus on strategies that offer the greatest benefits while minimizing costs, optimizing their chances of influencing policy effectively (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999). ACF studies have identified several specific types of strategies employed by coalitions, such as the formulation of persuasive testimony to influence budgets, efforts to change the occupants of key political positions, activities to influence public opinion through demonstrations and boycotts, and the gradual shift of perceptions via research and information dissemination. These strategies reflect the dynamic and adaptive nature of coalitions as they navigate the complexities of the policy environment to achieve their objectives.

Advocacy coalitions that involve non-profit organizations often grapple with the tension between insider and outsider tactics, navigating these dichotomies to optimize effectiveness (Fyall & McGuire, 2016). Insider tactics involve working within existing power structures, such as lobbying and participating in decision-making processes, while outsider tactics utilize grassroots mobilization and direct actions to create pressure and challenge the status quo (Mosley, 2012; Onyx et al., 2010). While there is a variable relationship between external institutional funding and non-profit advocacy, the prevailing view suggests that increased government funding prompts nonprofits to adopt more cautious advocacy approaches to avoid “bit[ing] the hand that feeds them” (Onyx et al., 2010, p. 43). On the other hand, outsider tactics, which include grassroots mobilization, direct actions, and public demonstrations, are used to

exert pressure from outside formal political structures. These tactics often engage service recipients and volunteers, emphasizing a bottom-up approach that challenges the status quo (Mosley 2012; Onyx et al. 2010). The dichotomy between insider and outsider tactics is further complicated by the influence of government funding on non-profit advocacy, where increased funding may prompt organizations to adopt more conservative approaches to avoid alienating their benefactors (Onyx et al., 2010). Additionally, insider tactics are typically carried out by professionals or experts, while outsider tactics are more grassroots-oriented, leading to an inherent tension between these approaches (Donaldson, 2008).

Advocacy coalitions employ strategic actions to make demands and/or achieve political goals, and their strategy selection is highly shaped by political context and windows of opportunity. The balance between insider and outsider tactics, especially with the presence of non-profit organizations within the coalition, highlights the challenges coalitions face in navigating power structures while pursuing their goals. In the following section, I provide a deeper exploration of what theorists have coined the “Non-Profit Industrial Complex,” which encapsulates the reliance of social movements on funding from foundations, corporations, and the state, which often comes with strings attached, including limitations on the scope of activism and a focus on measurable, short-term outcomes.

### Neoliberalism and the Non-Profit Industrial Complex

The insider and outsider strategies mentioned above account for one of many examples of how grassroots advocacy coalitions operate within the broader socio-political environment. The ACF is a powerful framework for understanding coalition behavior, yet it falls short in its engagement with critically analyzing the role of neoliberalism, the state, and how institutional systems of oppression impact grassroots policy engagement.

Neoliberalism, a dominant political and economic paradigm, emphasizes market-driven solutions, deregulation, and the reduction of state intervention in favor of privatization. This ideology frames inequities as the result of personal failure rather than systemic injustice, shifting the focus away from collective responsibility and structural change. Neoliberalism, according to scholar and activist Dean Spade, challenges social movements by co-opting their language and goals, reducing radical demands for systemic transformation into individualized solutions that align with market logics (Spade 2015). Under neoliberalism, the state's role in addressing social issues is diminished, and social welfare programs are increasingly outsourced to private entities. This shift undermines the power of social movements to push for structural change, as it places the responsibility for addressing social problems on individuals and nonprofits, rather than holding systems accountable. As a result, social movements face the challenge of navigating a landscape where demands are often diluted or depoliticized by the very structures they seek to change.

One of the most significant outcomes of neoliberalism is the rise of the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC), a term that echoes the prison industrial complex, which was originally coined from the military industrial complex. Spade (2015) argues that the NPIC functions as a key mechanism through which neoliberalism shapes social movements, channeling activism into forms that are less threatening to the status quo. The NPIC creates a scenario where social movements are professionalized and institutionalized, moving away from grassroots, community-based organizing towards models that prioritize stability, funding, and legitimacy within existing power structures. This shift can lead to a depoliticization of movements, as they become more concerned with maintaining funding and less with pursuing structural change. Coalitions must navigate a landscape where funding is increasingly tied to compliance with

market logic, and where bold demands for structural change are marginalized in favor of incremental reforms that often create little to no concrete change. In this context, advocacy coalitions working within or alongside the NPIC face a dilemma. On the one hand, they need the resources that come from aligning with established non-profits and securing institutional funding. On the other hand, these resources often come with strings attached, requiring coalitions to temper their demands and adopt strategies that are palatable to funders, thus diluting their agendas. The NPIC, therefore, not only limits the scope of what coalitions can achieve but also shapes their strategies in ways that align more closely with market-driven "solutions" than with the systemic change many coalitions seek.

The NPIC adds a critical layer of understanding to the ACF by contextualizing the conditions under which coalitions either succeed or struggle to act as effective intermediaries in achieving policy goals. While the ACF provides a useful framework for analyzing coalition behavior and strategy, I argue it does not fully account for the external pressures exerted by neoliberal structures. The literature connecting these concepts is limited. However, Michelle Oyakawa's (2017) dissertation highlights how the NPIC shapes social movement organizations by imposing constraints on grassroots organizations, forcing them to align with the agendas of powerful funders. This power imbalance can dilute the radical potential of coalitions, as they must navigate the competing demands of securing resources while maintaining their grassroots integrity. Consequently, the NPIC influences the strategic decisions of coalitions, often pushing them toward more conservative, market-aligned approaches and limiting their capacity to pursue true bottom-up grassroots organizing. Understanding this relationship between the NPIC and the ACF is essential for a more comprehensive analysis of coalition effectiveness within the contemporary socio-political landscape.

## Conclusion

This literature review has explored the multifaceted nature of community coalitions through the lens of the ACF, focusing on the critical dimensions of influence, resources, and strategies. The ACF provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how coalitions form, operate, and achieve policy change by pooling resources and coordinating strategies among diverse actors. It has been shown that coalitions are dynamic entities that engage in collective action to influence policy outcomes more effectively than individual actors could on their own. When analyzing coalition behavior and effectiveness, it is important to consider the broader socio-political context, particularly the impact of neoliberalism and the non-profit industrial complex on coalition behavior and effective demand-making. While the ACF offers valuable insights into the internal dynamics of coalitions, understanding the external pressures and constraints imposed by the neoliberal political climate and the NPIC is crucial for a deeper understanding of advocacy coalitions, and it is particularly helpful in analyzing the dynamics of the Seattle Solidarity Budget.

## **The Present Study**

This paper examines the Seattle Solidarity Budget (SB) as an example of a prominent local advocacy coalition, exploring how it enhances the political capabilities of different organizations to facilitate policy change. Using a qualitative approach, this study provides an exploratory glimpse into the dynamics and strategies of this coalition. It aims to investigate the SB's grassroots organizing and demand-making strategies, inter-organizational dynamics, and alliance formation, while also shedding light on relevant theoretical frameworks. Through a blend of case description and organizational analysis, the study seeks to offer both theoretical

insights and practical knowledge on facilitating the active participation of community organizations in the policy processes.

### **Case Background & Methodology**

Formed post-2020 Black Lives Matter protests, the SB is a coalition that united over 200 community groups, both formal and informal, representing tens of thousands of Seattle residents. It aimed to address systemic issues like anti-Black racism, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic challenges, and climate concerns. Through their advocacy efforts, the SB successfully advocated for substantial reductions in police funding, a redirection of resources towards community-centric initiatives, and the reversal of cuts to vital public services. These actions align with the community's calls to reallocate funds from the Seattle Police Department towards addressing community needs. The SB's budgetary priorities were shaped by the insights and expertise of the community, grounded in a thorough understanding of local issues, and centered on solutions proposed by those directly impacted. The core vision of transitioning away from traditional policing models towards investments in community well-being and safety continues to drive the ongoing mission of the SB. In 2022 and 2023, the SB continued to champion its core theme of "Budget to Live, Budget to Thrive," which underscores a transformative approach to meeting the needs of marginalized communities in Seattle. Building on its momentum since its 2020 emergence, the SB's strategic focus remains on advocating for significant shifts in budget priorities. The coalition's 2023 proposal outlines two pivotal areas of concern. The "Budget to Live" initiative targets the cessation of deaths associated with incarceration, policing, traffic incidents, and homelessness, emphasizing the urgency of addressing these systemic challenges. Concurrently, the "Budget to Thrive" initiative advocates for participatory budgeting, improved

wages for public workers, prioritization of support services over punitive measures, initiatives for affordable housing, and actions to address climate concerns.

## **Methods**

This study utilizes a qualitative approach focused on the Seattle Solidarity Budget coalition. Focusing on this particular coalition allows for an in-depth and contextual examination of the SB's organizational dynamics and policy impact, aligning with the research objectives of understanding the coalition's strategies and effectiveness. The qualitative methods include semi-structured interviews with members of organizations that have endorsed the SB, providing rich, detailed insights into the coalition's functioning. Potential interviewees were identified from a list of all active organizations on SB's overarching 2022 budget. This list included all 125 original endorsers, though it contained groups no longer active and omitted new members who had recently joined. The SB's Instagram was analyzed to identify prominent, active groups not on the original list. Follow-up emails were sent twice to invite interview participation. The respondents who agreed to participate were assured confidentiality, with no direct quotes attributed to any specific individual or organization.

Six interviews were conducted. All but one interview was virtual and conducted via Zoom during May and June 2024. In the interviews, respondents were asked to describe their organization's role with the SB, and their process for their respective organization's engagement in policy advocacy. Keeping in mind the overarching categories of strategy, influence, and resources, the interview script included three to four open-ended questions about alliance formation and resource sharing, demand-making strategies, and inter-organizational dynamics, including one question that asked them to describe what collective action meant to them. The interviews were exploratory in nature, so probing questions allowed the participant to guide the

conversation. Interviews spanned between 20 and 40 minutes in length. All names were removed and replaced with pseudonyms, except one – Lashanna from A Sacred Passing requested that her identity be kept in this paper and emphasized that she did not want to be separated from her words. Below is background information on each of the participants.

Ava: A member of a prominent environmental organization and one of the main organizers for the SB. She describes her role as “coordinating assistance between communications between organizations and sort of activating people in partner member organizations to take action on behalf of the solidarity budget and support it.”

Lashanna: The Executive Director of a Sacred Passing, a death-care organization that provides care through the dying experience, as well as offers education.

Elizabeth: A member of a public defense organization that worked with various coalitions on the City probation budget.

Sam: An organizer with a national organization against police surveillance technology.

Alex: An individual organizer and volunteer who has been in various roles with the SB, including publishing a newsletter and organizing a book club.

Taylor: A mediator and facilitator who runs a restorative justice practice.

### Thematic Analysis

Interview transcripts were thematically analyzed using Braun & Clarke’s (2006) method to identify patterns, themes, and insights related to coalition dynamics and policy influence. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research tool that emphasizes identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data. The analysis begins with familiarization with the data through

extensive reading to fully grasp its depth and breadth. Initial codes are then generated systematically, organizing the data into meaningful groups. These codes are collated into potential themes, which are reviewed and refined to ensure they form coherent patterns that accurately represent the dataset. The final step involves applying these defined themes to relevant quotations and excerpts from the data.

## Findings

### Theme 1: Alignment & Mutuality - Defunding Police and Reinvesting into Community

Goal alignment refers to the coordination of objectives among coalition members to ensure they are working toward a common purpose. Mutuality involves a reciprocal relationship where members share responsibilities, benefits, and contributions. This alignment ensures that all members are working toward a unified objective and maximizing the impact of their collective efforts. The most central and most important ideology that unifies the SB is the philosophy of divestment and reinvestment – a collective call to divest from policing and invest in community-based solutions that address and prioritize the needs of the most marginalized and vulnerable Seattle residents. This idea is the heart of the SB, and every endorsing group or organization supports and recognizes this overarching demand. All six participants spoke about this alignment of goals, the significance of this particular divestment/reinvestment demand, and the many challenges that arise when there is disagreement in strategy.

On a broad level, there was a common emphasis on “reimagining” what the multi-million dollar police budget could look like if it was funneled back into the community. Many people discussed this vision in language that described a fundamental shift in how money is used by the City. Ava highlighted this transformative vision and illustrated the guiding principle behind the SB’s mission. She stated,

One of the things that I think solidarity budget is interested in is putting forth a positive vision of the future. Not just saying no to things, but saying, hey, what if we said yes to evidence-based public health approaches for public health problems? You know, what would that mean from a fiscal perspective? And not just from a humanistic perspective.

Elizabeth expanded on this idea by emphasizing the importance of unity and shared goals within the coalition. She said,

It's important to think about what unites a coalition together. There has to be a shared demand. And I think it's really powerful when that demand is actually around what should not be funded versus what could be funded, because that opens up infinite possibilities for what can happen instead.

This perspective highlights the coalition's strategic focus on defunding certain areas to unlock resources for a wide range of community-centered initiatives.

Elizabeth explains this unifying principle during the early days of the SB, with an organization called Budget for Justice and their focused efforts on probation reform. She explains that a group of organizations came together to meticulously analyze the Seattle city budget, aiming to be more intentional about what was being funded and what was not. They discussed the probation budget extensively, researching the lengths of time people are on probation. They envisioned divesting from the probation budget and "reimagining what the priorities should look like." She goes on to reflect on a report by the Vera Institute that identified several areas of improvement for Seattle Municipal Court's (SMC) probation system, sharing,

The budget for justice work both paid dividends in raising awareness in council and this philosophy of divestment and investment. While SMC hasn't universally changed the system, people are on probation for shorter periods, which stems from the work done in budget for justice.

Despite the overarching goal of divestment and reinvestment, there is significant variation in how organizations within the coalition prioritize and strategize around these

objectives. Some participants stressed the necessity of maintaining a strict demand to defund the police, recognizing it as a core unifying principle of the coalition. However, this strict adherence also creates potential conflicts, as different organizations have varying degrees of focus on defunding the police, leading to a difference in political strategies regarding the source of funds. Alex highlighted the importance of maintaining the clear demand of defunding police, stating,

I keep coming back to that solidarity piece, and if the Seattle solidarity budget were to hold that line as strictly as possible, it would mean that, or it might look like this, which is solidarity budget says, we want city council to defund the police and to defund these other things.

This unwavering commitment to the principle of defunding the police underscores a possible conflict of objectives within the coalition. While the ultimate aim is clear, the path to achieving it involves navigating different perspectives on how best to implement divestment and reinvestment.

Alex also emphasized the coalition's foundational philosophy, noting,

I think the most powerful part of the solidarity budget coalition is the demand to defund the police. And that is what the solidarity part of solidarity budget refers to, is that the people in the coalition are in solidarity with, or have experienced directly themselves, police violence... in solidarity against police violence, against police funding.

Despite this strong foundation, Alex acknowledged the challenge of maintaining focus, stating, "...the solidarity budget says, no, we are going to take that first step and actually take the money away from the cops so that we can build the solutions. And so I guess the hard part is getting organizations who have really good ideas for ways to spend money to keep that top-level

demand front and center.” This statement underscores the challenge of maintaining a unified demand to defund the police while also promoting various community investment ideas.

He goes on to affirm why the Defund goal is such a central aspect of the unifying sense of solidarity, saying,

And that top-line goal of defunding the police allows every other organization in that coalition to demand that better things be done with that money. So for example, one of the main ways that people die in Seattle is through traffic violence. And one of the main ways that people die from police violence is through traffic stops. So getting police off the streets, so they are not pulling people over for taillights, not pulling people over for speeding.

The coalition's strength lies in its solidarity, but this unity can sometimes be tested by differing strategic priorities. He went on to say, “But the fact that the solidarity is in the name keeps me grounded in terms of the ultimate goal of solidarity against police violence.” This statement reinforces the importance of the coalition’s name and its mission, serving as a reminder of their commitment to unite against police violence.

In essence, while the SB coalition is united by a common goal of divestment from police and prisons and reinvestment into the community, the varying degrees of emphasis on defunding the police create a dynamic tension within the coalition. This tension reflects the broader challenges of maintaining solidarity and coherence in an advocacy coalition while striving to achieve transformative change in policing and community investment.

The lack of consensus among groups regarding the source of funding has presented significant challenges for the SB coalition in achieving their demands—funding communities

and, crucially, divesting from the police in the process. This divergence in focus has created a situation where even if there are certain "wins" in securing funds for community causes, the police budget continues to increase, thereby maintaining the status quo and undermining the concrete changes that the SB strives to achieve. Consequently, this maintains the status quo and hinders the concrete changes the SB strives for. Furthermore, the City's increasingly conservative political agenda exacerbates these challenges, making it even more difficult for the SB to advance their goals of meaningful policy change and resource reallocation.

The coalition's overarching goal of defunding the police allows every member organization to advocate for better use of public funds. However, the political landscape often complicates these efforts. Politicians may offer limited funds for community projects, such as sidewalks, expecting organizations to be content with the token amounts and reinforcing the "fighting over breadcrumbs" analogy. Alex poses a situation where for example, a community organization wants more money for sidewalks, "Politicians can say, oh, we'll give you, here's \$200,000 for sidewalks that'll build, like, two blocks. And you should be happy with that." Accepting such offers is certainly progress for whatever community initiative is at stake, but Alex argues that true progress requires these funds to come directly from the police budget; "The real strength is when we say we want \$200,000, but we don't just want any \$200,000. We want that to come from the police budget directly, and every year the police budget goes up."

The inherent challenge lies in the political maneuvering that diverts attention from the coalition's primary demands. Often, the city council may propose funding for community organizations alongside increased police budgets, diluting the impact of the coalition's advocacy. Alex explains,

Instead, the council says, ‘okay, we're not going to do that first one, but here's some money to make you be quiet.’ The coalition's most powerful stance would be to refuse such funding unless it directly reduces the police budget. It would be such a powerful statement for the council to hear is to say, essentially, we don't want your dirty money. We don't want our second demand unless we also get our first demand.

The 2021 city council bill exemplifies the dilemma faced by the coalition. This bill allocated funds to both community organizations and the police, causing internal conflict about whether to support or oppose it. Alex said, "There was a moment where there was a bill in front of city council that allocated some money to community-based organizations, and in the very same bill, allocated some money to the cops." This situation highlights the ongoing struggle against the "fighting over crumbs" situation, where the police receive the majority of available funds while community organizations are left competing for minimal resources. Alex continued, "None of us are gonna take any of this money unless it also comes with a reduction to the police funding. That is, in my opinion, much more powerful."

Ultimately, the SB’s efforts are constrained by the broader political and financial dynamics at play. People also alluded to the strategic attempt by City politicians to manage and contain demands, offering small concessions while not addressing any demands. Ava spoke of this common occurrence:

We have also seen, actually, which is very interesting, a real attempt to peel off the environmental organizations. ‘Yeah, sure. We'll give you... what should I call it? You know...’ We won cooling centers. And then they were fairly negotiable on the building electrification policy standards. And there were, there were things made where it was

like, look, you need to come out and say that the mayor did a really, really great job. You need to say that the mayor cares about XYZ and we were like, mmm sure, sure.

This quote illustrates the ways in which the City may offer limited concessions to appease specific organizations while simultaneously attempting to divide and weaken the coalition's collective power. By providing incremental wins and demanding public praise, politicians seek to undermine the broader push for systemic reform and co-opt the support of individual groups. This strategy reflects a broader pattern of political engagement where meaningful change is often diluted by concessions that fail to address core demands of the coalition.

The dynamic of non-profit organizations within the SB Coalition highlights a fundamental challenge in pursuing radical social change.-While many non-profits share the coalition's political goals, their operational realities often create conflicts of interest. As Alex noted, "Nonprofits don't necessarily want to come out saying all cops are bastards because they have their own donors and staff members who are concerned that that would drive people away." This reluctance to fully support certain positions, even those that are front and center to the coalition's mission, reflects a broader issue within the nonprofit sector: the pressure to conform to a more palatable, less contentious form of activism.

This tendency towards "no fuss" activism can be seen in the way some organizations approach coalition building and advocacy. "The coalition building that happens is a beautiful thing if people aren't put into conflict," Lashanna observed. "Like, the fact that you get to sit in spaces with people and dream about what is possible, that's where we become healthy." However, this idealistic vision often clashes with the practicalities of securing funding and maintaining donor relationships. In Seattle, this dynamic manifests as a preference for what Lashanna describes "keeping it low" and avoiding conflict to ensure continued financial support.

"Seattle slides on the, let's just keep it low, let's not make a fuss. And I think that that energy also you see in these activist spaces." This inclination towards less confrontational strategies can limit the impact of advocacy efforts and perpetuate the status quo. When non-profits prioritize financial stability over demanding change, they inadvertently contribute to a fragmented approach to social justice that undermines the broader goals of coalitions like the SB. The challenge is to navigate these complexities without compromising the core demands for systemic change.

The goal alignment within the SB centers around the shared objective of defunding the police and reinvesting in community-based solutions. However, despite this common purpose, there are significant variations and clashes in how organizations within the coalition prioritize and approach these goals. This tension arises from differences in how central the defunding of the police is to each organization's mission, compounded by the challenges of navigating small concessions and a tendency toward "no fuss" activism. These dynamics are particularly evident in the interactions with City officials, who often offer limited victories that, while seemingly progressive, ultimately serve to maintain the status quo by diverting attention from the coalition's core demands.

One of the main reasons for this variation in goal focus is the operational realities faced by non-profit organizations within the coalition. Many of these organizations depend on donor funding, which often necessitates a more moderate stance that can conflict with the coalition's radical demands. This dependency creates a reluctance to fully embrace transformative goals like defunding the police, leading to a fragmentation of focus within the coalition. The necessity to maintain financial stability results in a preference for less confrontational strategies, which, while ensuring continued donor support, limits the coalition's ability to advocate for systemic change.

These challenges are further exacerbated by the specific socio-political context of Seattle, where an increasingly conservative political agenda makes it difficult for the SB coalition to advance its goals. The local political landscape often results in the City offering token gestures of support for community initiatives while simultaneously bolstering the police budget, effectively neutralizing the coalition's efforts. The practice of providing incremental wins to appease certain groups within the coalition, coupled with the demand for public praise, reflects a broader strategy of co-opting the coalition's support while diluting its demands. This political maneuvering serves to maintain the status quo, dilute their demands, and undermine the coalition's ability to achieve meaningful policy change. Such tactics are a clear example of the challenges faced by coalitions striving for comprehensive policy shifts. They highlight the need for vigilance and solidarity among coalition members to resist fragmentation and ensure that concessions do not come at the expense of the coalition's overarching goals.

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) provides a useful lens through which to understand these dynamics. ACF posits that coalitions are most effective when they maintain a stable set of shared beliefs and have access to stable resources. However, in the case of the SB coalition, the external pressures of securing funding and navigating political realities lead to internal conflicts that challenge the coalition's stability. The theory also emphasizes the role of external actors—such as City officials—in influencing coalition strategies and effectiveness. In this case, the City's strategy of offering concessions without addressing core demands exemplifies how external forces can fragment a coalition's focus. The ACF helps to explain why these variations occur, emphasizing the importance of strategic coherence and solidarity in

overcoming the obstacles posed by both the internal dynamics of the coalition and the external pressures of the political and economic environment.

## Theme 2: Building the Web - Momentum Through Alliances

Building alliances with other individuals and groups with shared interests is the core of grassroots organizing. While there are challenges among advocacy coalitions with both non-profits and other community organizations due to differences of interests, the ability to form alliances and build a network of groups and individuals fighting for the same cause is one of the main strengths of coalitions. By joining forces with other groups and individuals who share similar goals, organizations and activists can leverage collective resources, knowledge, and expertise. This collaborative approach, as Taylor describes, allows people to "plug into" the network in roles that best suit their skills and capacities, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the movement. She reflected,

I don't know how many people there are like me, but everyone I touch is in some way touched by what I've learned and experienced through the work of all of these activists in Seattle. And of course, I'm a different generation, so my capacity to be out on the streets, protesting and lobbying is just not there at this point. But my ability to plug in where I can and at least have me count as a number. Very much so. And then, of course, there's the gift in return of what I received.

This sentiment underscores the value of diverse contributions within a network, where everyone's involvement, regardless of their role, enriches the collective effort and perpetuates the cycle of knowledge and support. The dynamic nature of such networks resembles a web, with

each person and group occupying a unique position. Lashanna often used the metaphor of a web when discussing the value of this structure of collective action.

I think it depends on who you are and what your super skill is and where you're comfortable. I think it looks like a web. It looks like a web of people doing what they can do. (...) We don't need step by step things. We don't need, we know how to needle things, you know, so everybody has a role. And it looks like people learning together and people fucking up together, but holding people in that saying, you know, are you. Are you willing to grow and learn? Yes? Okay, let's go.

Moreover, the formation of strong networks is crucial for navigating challenges and advancing the movement's goals. "We're at the place where networks need to be built, community needs to form so that the next evolution can happen," as Taylor noted. "So we have to start in that. So we support, like, the mourning and the space and those tools. We wanted to disseminate as much as possible. And we don't know where they're going or what they will blossom." This perspective highlights the importance of building connections and supporting one another as the foundation for future progress. By aligning with others who possess complementary skills and resources, networks can address gaps, adapt to evolving circumstances, and drive meaningful change.

Others discussed specific examples of the benefits of sharing skills and resources to build power and achieve their goals. When mentioning how Budget for Justice mobilized resources to address the probation issue, Elizabeth said,

I think it's really important when people unite together. And I think that our community partners have so much expertise in what and how to better and more effectively resource

the community. And so we really, you know, they absolutely kind of led the work in budget for justice and solidarity budget. We were allies and supporters and partners, but they were the ones leading the effort. And a lot of the people involved are also people that we work with on youth legal system reforms.

She went on to say,

I think when you start to build relationship and work together on shared goals and values with people, you start to, like, build more power as you look at all sort of aspects of the work. So the budget is one part of the work. Then there's, like, legislative work. Right. There's kind of building up diversion. There's, what are the prosecutors going to do in order to, you know, and there's kind of different areas or points of where we try to work on reform. And I think that's when partnerships are really important to achieve.

The SB coalition exemplifies how involvement, even indirect, can significantly inform and empower organizations. Taylor noted,

Solidarity budget informs me in ways that support me in the areas where I am effectively working for policy change. It's not that I'm actively involved in solidarity budget, but when I know that they're showing up for things, I am constantly growing in my awareness and I'm processing through and I'm reaching out and galvanizing my network to show up for things or to be more aware of things that is supporting change even more broadly than policy.

This quote highlights the ripple effect of coalition activities, where the presence and actions of the SB inspire and mobilize other organizations, even those not directly engaged in policy work.

For some organizations, the challenge lies in balancing their core activities with policy advocacy. As Lashanna explained,

I think our organization isn't heavily policy rooted just because of bandwidth. We are a physical, like, we care for people physically, and so managing that is difficult. The ways that we engage in the solidarity budget and the policy that comes from that, or policy that can help shape some of those things, are looking at what supports people to live.

The SB's ability to form alliances and build a network of groups and individuals committed to the same cause is a critical strength in its efforts to achieve policy change. The metaphor of a web, as described by Lashanna, illustrates both the strength and complexity of these networks. Each organization or individual within the coalition occupies a unique position, contributing their "super skill" to the collective effort. This decentralized, web-like structure allows for flexibility and adaptability, enabling the coalition to respond to various challenges and opportunities. In public health coalition literature, this is referred to as "collaborative synergy" – the exchange of resources, skills, and knowledge among different organizations that amplifies coalitions' collective ability to effect change (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2012).

Diani and McAdam (2003) argue that the structure of relationships within a movement significantly impacts its capacity to mobilize resources and coordinate actions effectively. They emphasize the concept of "relational approaches," which explore how the patterns of interaction between organizations within a coalition can either facilitate or hinder collective action. This perspective is important to understand how the SB coalition leverages its network structure to enhance strategic coordination. The ACF also supports this notion by highlighting the importance of resource sharing and coordinated strategies among coalition members. ACF suggests that coalitions with high levels of resource and skill sharing are more likely to achieve

substantial policy changes due to their enhanced adaptive capacity and ability to present unified fronts in advocacy efforts. Beyond the immediate benefits of resource and skill sharing, networks and alliances play a crucial role in fostering intra-organizational development. As Post (2010) suggests, coalitions can act as intermediary organizations, facilitating growth and capacity building within individual member groups. This intra-organizational development is essential for sustaining long-term advocacy efforts and enhancing the overall impact of the coalition. By participating in coalitions, organizations not only contribute to collective goals but also enhance their internal capacities through continuous engagement, learning, and adaptation.

### Theme 3: Sustainability, Collective Care, & Interdependency

For coalitions to thrive and sustain their efforts over the long term, the concepts of collective care and interdependency are essential. These principles not only support the immediate goals of the coalition but also ensure the well-being and longevity of its members. Collective care and interdependency form the backbone of collective action, reinforcing the importance of solidarity in grassroots movements.

The shift from an individualistic mindset to one that embraces collective care is vital for the sustainability of coalitions. This shift challenges the deeply ingrained notion of self-reliance and highlights the importance of mutual support within the coalition. As Lashanna noted,

I bring it back to death care because so many people are trained in this, like, 'I have to be independent. I need to take care of myself.' And really quickly, folks are like, that's pretty fucked up. Cause I know now, I need people to help me. And so, like, the idea of collective activism, collective care, collective just moving forward... That's our fabric.

An essential aspect of sustaining coalitions is the ability to navigate conflict and hold members accountable while fostering genuine relationships. Conflict, while often seen as a barrier, is also viewed as an opportunity for growth within these coalitions. Taylor, who does restorative justice work, said conflict is “the opportunity for growth and change.” Embracing conflict as a catalyst for development allows coalitions to address underlying issues and strengthen their collective action. She had further insights regarding the complexities of conflict:

Most of us have... I mean, that's my wheelhouse, right? Is conflicts. So, those pieces, what gets in the way is we get in our own way when conflict happens, because all it is is information that's being resisted or isn't being metabolized properly. New information

coming into a system and the system not having the capacity to absorb it or be resistant to absorbing it or our lack of awareness is like that. We just don't have a level of awareness to expand yet.

Conflict and disagreement are inevitable in a coalition like the SB with over two hundred members. Working through disagreements and finding common ground is imperative to sustain the network holding this coalition together. Lashanna describes how this process involves patience, active listening, and a willingness to understand different perspectives:

A lot of learning that happens, that is in real time. So I think it looks like patience. It looks like a lot of listening. It looks like really working hard to see where our intersections are and where we can support each other. It's really frustrating. It's often very disorganized, but that's because we're doing 18 things with nothing.

Ava also spoke of the process of accountability in relationship-building:

I think that one of the things that we've also been sort of focusing on is building and growing relationship with each other and relationship across difference ... I think what's been going really well is people seeing each other as fully human beings, as opposed to somebody who needs to be handled with kid gloves or somebody who they're going to say something offensive, and you can't tell them that you're offended.

Effective communication and emotional regulation are fundamental to achieving accountability within coalitions. Without these skills, communication can break down, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts that undermine the coalition's work. As Lashanna says,

I think folks really learning how to manage disappointment and expectation. I think emotional regulation is before accountability because all of the people in these spaces

don't... Not all of the people, so many of the people in power and in control in these spaces don't understand how to emotionally regulate themselves and have never been taught (...) You can't get to accountability when you can't communicate when you're sitting with someone who is stuck on a thought wheel and not listening to anything that anybody is saying.

Moreover, the reality of working with limited resources often leads to intense discussions and conflicts. Lashanna continued,

You got all these people doing really good shit, and we're all like, well, if we have this scrap and this scrap and we put it together and we got this, and so you've got all these people who don't have anything, literally arguing and working and in conflict, trying to make it work.

This quote underscores the frustration that can arise within coalitions, as members strive to make the most of scarce resources while navigating power dynamics and systemic barriers. Lashanna voiced her frustrations of this reality of working within a coalition. It appeared that most participants, as activists themselves, were used to seeing this dynamic play out in organizing spaces. Navigating interpersonal conflict is an inevitable aspect of being part of a coalition, and it is clear that individuals must develop the skills necessary to hold one another accountable and work through disagreement.

Another element of sustainability that most participants mentioned also speaks to the collective care piece – encouraging people to take care of their own needs to continue this work in the long run. This self-care and mutual care within the coalition are crucial for long-term sustainability. Lashanna eloquently brought this idea back to the web metaphor: "That feels like

an important part of that collective action is that care for each other. It's not just doing outward, but also that collective action is caring for the web. Are we a healthy web? Are we hydrated? You know, are we sleeping? A crusty, dusty, crabby hangry activist is not it. It's not giving sustainability."

She also highlighted the importance of pacing oneself and recognizing the cyclical nature of activism:

You take a step back and you take some rest when you can get it. There are seasons to activism, and it doesn't have to be running at full speed all the time. It can't be running at full speed all the time. ... And there's a certain component of waiting until a better season, which we can help precipitate. But really, you know, we can't. As large a coalition as it is, we still are a drop in the bucket in terms of the overall population of Seattle. So there's only so much you can do.

Recognizing the ebbs and flows of activism allows individuals to recharge and come back stronger, ultimately contributing to the movement's sustainability. The strength and resilience of the collective are reliant on the well-being of its individual members. In a coalition, the work cannot fall on the shoulders of a few; it requires a shared commitment where everyone contributes according to their capacity. This dynamic acknowledges that members have different levels of energy, time, and resources to offer at any given moment – this is especially true as the SB involves both volunteers and people for whom the work is part of their paid job.

The concepts of collective care and interdependency are essential for sustaining long-term coalition efforts, particularly in the context of social movements that challenge entrenched systems of power. These principles underpin the ability of coalitions like the SB to thrive by

ensuring that members are supported, resilient, and capable of sustained activism. In a capitalist world that promotes individualism and separation, fostering collective care within a coalition is a necessary strategy for maintaining the health and longevity of the movement.

The internal dynamics of a coalition – such as interpersonal relationships and navigating conflict – have been thoroughly studied. Interpersonal relationships and sustainability planning are two of the main domains of internal coalition functioning, as conceptualized by Brown et al (2011). While the ACF discusses conflict within coalitions in terms of differences in beliefs, literature from public health offers a more relevant focus on interpersonal relationships and dynamics between individuals and organizations.

Adrienne Maree Brown's conceptualization of interdependence is particularly relevant here. In her book *Emergent Strategy*, Brown argues that in a world structured around individualism, cultivating interdependence is a form of resistance that reinforces the connections between people and emphasizes mutual support. In this context, collective care is not merely about providing for others; it's about recognizing that our well-being is intrinsically linked to the well-being of those around us. This interconnectedness forms the "fabric" of the coalition, as noted by Lashanna, who highlights the importance of shifting from an individualistic mindset to one that embraces collective care. Such a shift challenges the dominant narrative of self-reliance and acknowledges that true sustainability in coalition work comes from recognizing and acting upon interdependence.

#### Theme 4: Strategies for Collective Action - Outside over Inside Strategies

The coalition places a strong emphasis on employing an outside strategy, which involves engaging with the community directly and making their demands clear and comprehensible. Ava explained, "We don't endorse candidates. And I don't believe we were heavily involved in the election process. I don't think many of our members were, because to be honest, we're kind of looking at more outside than inside." This approach aims to bypass traditional political processes, focusing instead on grassroots mobilization and public education. She went on to say, "So I think that it's an outside strategy. I think it's taking it to people and making our demands clearer and easier to understand. We did the nine guarantees last year and I think that that worked really, really well. I think pivoting more to an outside strategy, taking it more to people."

An example of the coalition's outside strategy in action is the Stop ShotSpotter campaign. This initiative aims to challenge the implementation of ShotSpotter, a gunshot detection technology, by raising public awareness and scrutinizing its effectiveness. Sam shared,

One thing that took some work that I think we have now, we have momentum. I think we have been effective at complicating and toxifying the name ShotSpotter so that when it's announced, there is an immediate response from a segment of the community that says, I thought that shit didn't work. I think we have been successful with challenging the narrative around the value of the technology, which has helped us then to build with more folks, because there's initial outreach where somebody hears it and they say, oh, we don't want this. And then they get in touch and then we help them build campaigns.

The campaign against ShotSpotter has served as a gateway for broader discussions about police surveillance technology. As Sam continued,

And a lot of our work is to help cut through the veneer of sort of the techno solutionism to really have a more precise interrogation and analysis of what is happening when these technologies are implemented. And so as a result, there is increasingly more awareness now not only on gun shot detection, but more people are like, what the fuck is this license plate reader? A real time crime center. This is... sounds scary. So I think that has been another piece that we've been trying to cultivate and expand.

The SB's emphasis on employing an outside strategy highlights a deliberate shift away from traditional political engagement, focusing instead on grassroots mobilization, public education, and community-driven initiatives. The choice of an outside strategy reflects a tactical decision to bypass conventional political channels; given the challenges expressed in theme 1, these channels are often constrained by institutional barriers and resistant to transformative change. This is consistent with findings from ACF studies that the strategies coalitions choose to employ are influenced by opportunity structures, like the openness and consensus level within a political system, and especially external influences like the political economy and institutional frameworks (Aamodt & Stensdal 2017; Kübler 2001). These findings also align with those of other scholars. Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (2015) have explored the dynamics of contentious politics, arguing that movements often turn to outside strategies when traditional avenues of influence are perceived as ineffective or co-opted by powerful interests. This is evident in the SB coalition's approach, where grassroots campaigns like the Stop ShotSpotter initiative serve not only to challenge specific policies but also to mobilize public opinion and build broader coalitions around shared concerns.

The SB's decision to pursue outside strategies reflects a strategic decision to engage directly with the community, bypass traditional political processes, and challenge dominant

narratives. By focusing on public education and community engagement, the coalition can have better odds at advancing its immediate goals and building a foundation for sustained collective action and long-term social change.

## Discussion

Through a qualitative analysis of the six interviews, four key themes emerged: alignment and mutuality in defunding the police and reinvesting in the community, building momentum through alliances, sustaining efforts through collective care and interdependency, and employing outside strategies for collective action. The findings of this study reveal both parallels and contrasts with the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). The ACF emphasizes the importance of shared beliefs, resource sharing, and coordinated strategies among coalition members. The SB aligns with these components in its strong focus on a unified goal—defunding harmful systems to reinvest in community-centered solutions. This study contributes to ACF literature by affirming that community-based advocacy coalitions do indeed serve as political intermediaries that elevate grassroots engagement in the policy process. The SB coalition exemplifies how an alignment of goals and a shared belief system are crucial for successful demand-making and achieving policy goals.

The ACF provides a strong theoretical backdrop for studying such coalitions, given its emphasis on goal alignment and belief systems. However, any analysis of grassroots community coalitions must also consider the greater political climate. The strategies that coalitions like the SB choose, and their ability to successfully leverage resources, are deeply intertwined with what is possible within the existing governmental and political structures. A thorough analysis of systems of oppression and institutional barriers, such as the non-profit industrial complex, is essential for understanding the full scope of coalition behavior.

For activists, coalition members, and anyone involved in social justice work, several key considerations emerge from this study:

1. **Alignment of Goals:** Maintaining a clear and unified focus on the coalition's core goals is imperative for its functioning. Divergence in priorities can lead to fragmentation and weaken the coalition's effectiveness.
2. **Outside Strategies:** Particularly in restrictive political climates, such as what we saw in Seattle, outside strategies such as grassroots mobilization and public education are often more effective than inside strategies. These approaches help build networks, grow the movement, and leverage the interconnectedness of injustices that impact the community. Outside strategies make the movement more sustainable, adaptable, and resilient in the face of state violence and systemic oppression.
3. **Collective Care and Accountability:** On an interpersonal and interorganizational level, coalitions must prioritize practices that foster accountability and promote collective care. This includes navigating conflict, supporting mutual responsibility, and practicing repair based on principles of interdependency, collective care, and transformative justice. By doing so, coalitions can avoid replicating the power imbalances and dynamics of racism and capitalism, prevent burnout, and aim for long-term sustainability. This allows people to strengthen interpersonal relationships and in turn create a more resilient social movement network. Moreover, prioritizing these practices shifts the focus from merely achieving policy goals to building a community that embodies the justice it seeks to promote.

Further research is needed to explore coalitions with infrastructure like the SB, which are organized around a singular, overarching goal, such as defunding the police, as a necessary mechanism for community reinvestment. There is a need for more studies on this type of coalition, as they offer a unique model of advocacy that targets a specific source of funds to

address diverse community needs. This research could examine variations in strategies, success in achieving goals, and inter-organizational dynamics. Such studies would enhance our understanding of how different organizational goals impact coalition dynamics and advocacy outcomes, contributing to a more nuanced perspective on grassroots engagement in the policy process.

### Limitations

Utilizing a qualitative interview approach offers rich insights into the SB's organizational strategies and members' perceptions of the coalition's efficacy in achieving policy goals—findings that might not be captured through broader, more generalized studies. However, this approach has inherent limitations. First, there is the issue of generalizability. The findings from this study may not be applicable to other coalitions or contexts, as each coalition operates within unique socio-political environments. The strategies and outcomes observed in the SB may differ significantly from those in other settings, limiting the external validity of the results. Future research could conduct comparative studies across multiple coalitions operating in different political or social contexts. This would enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a broader understanding of the factors contributing to coalition success in varying environments.

Second, self-report bias poses a challenge, as the data collected from semi-structured interviews rely on participants' recollections and perceptions. These recollections may be influenced by their personal experiences and perspectives, leading to potential inaccuracies. Additionally, participants may exhibit social desirability bias, providing responses they believe are expected or favorable rather than their true thoughts and experiences. To mitigate these biases in future research, incorporating a mixed-methods approach that includes observational studies,

document analysis, and/or surveys alongside interviews could provide a more objective understanding of participants' perspectives.

Third, selection bias could arise if the sample of interview participants is not fully representative of the broader coalition membership. With only six interviews from a population of 125, this is a significant barrier to accurate representation. This bias may be particularly evident if certain roles within the coalition and organizations influence participants' willingness or availability to participate, potentially skewing the results. Different roles may also shape how participants perceive and report on the coalition's effectiveness, further complicating the interpretation of the findings. Future studies could aim to include a more diverse and representative sample of participants, ensuring that various roles within the coalition are equally represented.

## **Conclusion**

This study set out to explore how community coalitions facilitate effective grassroots engagement in the policy process, with a specific focus on the Seattle Solidarity Budget (SB) as a case study. The research aimed to understand the organizational dynamics, strategies, and effectiveness of the SB coalition in driving community change and achieving policy outcomes. Findings from the interviews revealed the significance and challenges of maintaining goal alignment within a coalition, the importance of building strong alliances to enhance collective influence, the necessity of maintaining practices of collective care and sustainability, and the strategic use of outside strategies to bypass institutional barriers.

In conclusion, the power of collective action lies in its ability to challenge and transform the systems that perpetuate injustice. Coalitions like the SB embody this spirit by envisioning and working towards a future where resources are allocated away from harmful systems and rerouted toward the well-being and thriving of all community members. Collective liberation is not just the end goal, but the process itself—one that is built on interdependence, mutual support, and a relentless commitment to justice for the long haul. Through sustained strategic action, grassroots community coalitions can continue to push the boundaries of what is possible and bring about the transformative change that is so urgently needed.

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