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**POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

# Organizing Twenty-First-Century Activism: From Structure to Strategy in Latin American Social Movements

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This article examines how the organizational structure of a social movement affects the tactics it is likely to adopt. Hybrid movements gained prominence at the start of the twenty-first century. Like movements of the past, they protested on the streets; but unlike the movements of the past, they also acted like interest groups by lobbying government over policy. Considered through the lens of traditional scholarship, this phenomenon presents a puzzle. Loose networks of activists are thought to be good at contentious politics but incapable of negotiating with government. By contrast, federations of interest groups are seen to be good at insider lobbying but subject to co-optation. This article theorizes the middle ground between social movements and interest groups by proposing a third structure for social movement organizing, the federative coalition, which incorporates some of the advantages of hierarchy while avoiding some of its pitfalls. The article illustrates this argument through a case study of Brazil's AIDS movement.

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Este artigo analisa o papel da estrutura organizacional de um movimento social em determinar as táticas que ele adota. Movimentos "híbridos" surgiram na América Latina na virada do século XXI. Parecidos aos movimentos do passado, eles protestavam na rua; mas diferente dos movimentos do passado, eles também se portavam como grupos de interesse por negociar com oficiais do governo acerca de políticas. No olhar das teorias tradicionais de movimentos sociais, este fenômeno apresenta um paradoxo. Redes soltas de ativistas são apresentadas na literatura como movimentos com alta capacidade para fazer protestos, mas têm pouca capacidade de fazer *lobby*. Por contraste, federações de grupos de interesse são vistas como capazes de negociação, mas sujeitas à cooptação. Este artigo teoriza o meio-termo entre movimentos sociais e grupos de interesse, propondo uma terceira estrutura para organizar movimentos sociais—a coalizão federativa—que incorpora algumas das vantagens da hierarquia ao mesmo tempo em que evita algumas das armadilhas. O artigo ilustra o argumento com um estudo de caso do movimento brasileiro de combate à HIV/AIDS.

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The 1990s and first decade of the 2000s witnessed a wave of social movements that used street protest as a central strategy at the same time as they pursued strategies of lobbying and negotiation with government, bridging the traditional outsider-insider divide between social movements and interest groups. While such movements are a cross-regional phenomenon, Latin America was a locus of this trend. Across the Andes, indigenous groups launched mass protests but also lobbied states to grant them decision-making power over development issues (Brysk 2000; Falletti and Riofrancos 2018; Lucero 2008; Silva 2009; Yashar 2005). In Argentina, unemployed workers simultaneously protested and bargained with government over important welfare benefits (Perez 2018; Rossi 2017). In Brazil, a wide variety of civic movements collaborated with government on policy while continuing to use sit-ins and protests to advance their agendas in areas such as environmental protection, land reform, education, women's rights, black rights, LGBTQ rights, and health policies (Alvarez 1990; Ewig 1999; Friendly 2016; Gibson 2019; Hochstetler 2000; Hochstetler and Keck 2007; Paschel 2016; Rich 2019; Tarlau 2019; Thayer 2010; Wolford 2010).

Considered through the lens of social movement theory, this phenomenon presents a puzzle. Although it is generally acknowledged that social movements can pursue a variety of strategies (Tarrow 1998), it is also often thought that social movements lose their capacity for public pressure tactics as they professionalize over time, thus developing gradually into interest groups. Yet the movements listed above remained in the middle ground between social movements and interest groups as they developed over time. What, then, explains the sustained use of such hybrid strategies among social movements in Latin America?

This question is important for both substantive and theoretical reasons. Substantively, social movements are key actors in Latin American politics. Their organizational structures have implications not only for their internal functioning and life cycle but also for shaping public policy outcomes. There is thus a high substantive payoff for understanding how contemporary movements actually organize. Theoretically, understanding the impact of forces sustaining the use of hybrid strategies adds to one of the most strikingly fragmented literatures in political science and sociology: the debate about the political consequences of social movements. Vibrant social movements have emerged in Latin America in recent years, even in the most unexpected places, such as Chile. To better understand the consequences of recent waves of mobilization for politics and policy, we need to better understand how these movements work.

This article examines the role that a movement's organizing structure plays in shaping the types of strategies it adopts, a factor that has been relatively neglected in recent scholarship on Latin American movements. While the argument that a movement's structure matters is hardly new, traditional dichotomies that contrast horizontal, "networked" social movements with hierarchical labor federations cannot account for such hybrid tactics. Networked structures, associated with social movements, are thought to aid in mass mobilization to the exclusion of capacities to negotiate with government. Federations, associated with labor unions and other interest groups, are thought to facilitate insider lobbying but are subject to co-optation (Michels 1959). This article contributes to theorizing the middle ground between social movements and interest groups by proposing a third structure for civic organizing, the federative coalition, which combines some of the advantages of hierarchy while avoiding some of its pitfalls. I argue that federative coalitions may incorporate insider strategies, such as lobbying and negotiation, into their repertoires through two mechanisms: access to the state and leverage over the state. At the same time, I argue, movements that are organized into federative coalitions also benefit from some of the advantages of activist networks, which help them to simultaneously pursue contentious strategies.

Brazil's Movement to Combat HIV/AIDS, hereafter referred to as the AIDS movement, illustrates how the framework of the federative coalition helps us understand the strategies of contemporary social movements. Brazil's AIDS movement is widely acclaimed across Latin America for its ability to combine street protest and appeals to the media with collaboration and negotiation with the state. Yet Brazil's AIDS movement appears to be a loose network of activist organizations—a structure thought to maximize protest capabilities and undercut lobbying efforts. In this essay, I argue that the AIDS movement "network" was so adept at negotiating with government officials over policy because the core structure of the AIDS movement was not a network at all. Despite the seemingly loose and informal structure of Brazil's AIDS movement, the national AIDS movement coalition effectively functioned as a federation of independent advocacy organizations. This "federative coalition" structure played a key role in facilitating the movement's strategy of collaboration, lobbying, and pursuing contentious tactics.

This argument is in line with scholarship that calls for greater attention to potential variation in the structure of social movements (Clemens and Minkoff 2003; Voss and Sherman 2000) as well as of political parties (Anria 2018; Levitsky 2003). Such efforts have helped us move beyond a simplistic emphasis on the pitfalls of hierarchy and toward a new framework that examines organizational structure as a choice involving trade-offs (Tarrow 2005). Until now, however, most work in this vein has been dedicated to analyzing variation in the internal structures of individual social movement organizations (Wong 2012). This article builds on these new approaches to social movement organizing by analyzing variation in the overarching structures of social movements—in the broader alliance of organizations and individuals—and exploring their impact on social movement strategy.

As a single case study describing an unexpected phenomenon, this article is intended to help us generate new hypotheses about an underexplored phenomenon: the link between social movement structures and their strategies. For data, I draw on a broader study of change over time in Brazil's AIDS movement and its relationship to the state, which I conducted in twelve months of fieldwork between 2008 and 2009 and then in an additional eight months of fieldwork conducted in four shorter follow-up visits between 2010 and 2016. During this time, I conducted over two hundred semi-structured interviews with activist leaders, bureaucrats, and politicians across six Brazilian states and the national capital. I also observed over

sixty meetings and rallies organized by the AIDS movement. I complemented my qualitative interviews and observations with an Internet-based survey of the directors of 123 nongovernmental AIDS organizations in two states: Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

### **Varieties of Social Movement Structures**

For members of society who want to effect change, banding together into a social movement is crucial to be able to pool resources, resist threats, and thus increase power against the state (Silva 2009; Tarrow 2005). At the same time, the particular type of leverage that societal groups gain by banding together depends on the structure of the movement. A movement's organizing structure determines in large part how resources (such as people, money, knowledge, frames, skills, and technical tools) are collected and distributed among the organizational and individual members of a movement (Diani 2003; Rucht 1996). Analyzing the structure of a social movement thus helps us to understand its ability to bargain with government, to mobilize protests, and, ultimately, to influence policy.

The activist networks highlighted in the literature on twenty-first-century social movements are generally defined as flat, decentralized, and uninstitutionalized movement structures (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Diani 2003; Jelin 1997; Kahler 2009; Keck and Sikkink 1998). Networks are flat in that no individual or organization has authority over any other member of the movement. The central leaders of a network cannot negotiate on behalf of their members or regulate membership. Rather, they favor individual autonomy and consensus-based decision-making. Some even operate without a clearly defined leadership. Networks are decentralized in that they privilege communication and coordination at the local level over achieving national uniformity. Finally, networks are uninstitutionalized in that they are commonly ad hoc and temporary. Typically, activist networks emerge on the basis of a specific political campaign only to dissolve once the campaign ends.

While activist networks are by no means a new phenomenon, they have taken on a heightened salience in scholarship on social movements as a result of twenty-first-century advances in technology. Much of this recent scholarship has focused on analyzing how the Internet has changed the playing field of social movement organizing (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Castells 1996 and 2012; Juris 2008; Juris and Khasnabish 2013). According to the scholarship in this vein, activists in faraway places no longer need a centralized bureaucracy to link with each other or to get people out onto the streets (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Della Porta et al. 2006; Smith 2008; Tarrow 2005). Instead, activists can use Internet list-servers to exchange information and perspectives, to debate ideas, and to coordinate campaigns (Castells 2012; Della Porta et al. 2006; Juris 2008). Similarly, they can use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, or Snapchat to inspire large numbers of people to join protests (Castells 2012; Juris and Khasnabish 2013). As a result, according to this literature, new social movements have emerged that are viral and leaderless.

In Latin America, this type of social movement coalition, looser and more decentralized, appeared to thrive on the very same political and economic conditions that had broken down the old, corporatist model of civic organizing: the spread of democratic institutions, the decentralization of political authority, and neoliberal economic reforms. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the process of democratization produced a surge in social movement activism and civic organization in many countries of the region (Alvarez 1990; Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998; Eckstein 1989). In the first decade of the 2000s, a new wave of leftist political leadership heightened the political salience of grassroots groups (Levitsky and Roberts 2011). At the same time, the neoliberal economic paradigm dramatically increased the flow of national and international financial support to nongovernmental organizations for service provision (Alvarez 1999; Brysk 2000; Chalmers et al. 1997; Collier and Handlin 2009b, 53–57; Friedman and Hochstetler 2002, 21–42; Grindle 2004). Service-providing civic organizations also emerged spontaneously to meet the basic needs of poor communities, which were no longer being adequately served by the neoliberal state (Oxhorn and Ducatzenzeiler 1998). Together, these three developments produced a surge not only in the number of local civic organizations across the developing world but also in the variety of organizations (Chalmers et al. 1997; Collier and Handlin 2009b, 53–57; Friedman and Hochstetler 2002). Advocacy networks allowed this diverse array of grassroots groups to band together temporarily over single-issue campaigns.

This new ease of building activist networks has facilitated the use of protest-based strategies for advocacy. Because of the absence of long-term commitment requirements or centralized authority, activists can use networks to quickly attract a wide array of participants to cooperate on a particular political campaign, even if they differ greatly in their goals and philosophies (Bennett and Segerberg 2013). The scope of these temporary coalitions can now be quite broad, sometimes spanning continents (Della Porta et al. 2006; Rossi and Von Bülow 2015; Silva 2013; Smith 2008; Tarrow 2005). Recent scholarship on advocacy networks thus

helps to explain recent anti-globalization and anti-corruption movements in Latin America (Silva 2009; Roberts 2008; Rossi 2015, 2017).

However, social movements using only contentious strategies are clearly limited in their ability to shape government policies. For a social movement to achieve ongoing influence over government decisions, activists must be capable of not only protesting but also lobbying and negotiating with officials. Scholars such as Sidney Tarrow (2005) have shown that activists in networked movements often have a difficult time lobbying and negotiating with government because they have trouble developing concrete programs and lack leaders who are empowered to negotiate on behalf of their broader membership. This is not only because networks tend to reject hierarchy in principle but also because the composition of their membership is diverse and ever changing. In other words, the framework of network-based advocacy suggests that new movements in Latin America (and beyond) maximize their mobilizational capacity to the exclusion of capacities to work with the state.

By contrast, a well-established body of scholarship—based primarily in the context of twentieth-century labor movements—has argued that movements organized into federations are better able to adopt routine strategies for influencing government, but that such strategies come at the expense of contentious strategies. Federations are hierarchical, centralized, and institutionalized organizing structures that concentrate decision-making authority among a small group of national leaders. When constituencies of societal interests professionalize by adopting centralized leadership structures and hierarchical mechanisms for delegating authority, they can build relationships with government insiders (Hansen 1991). In turn, however, formal organizations and movements are subject to the iron law of oligarchy: activist leaders who enjoy privileged relationships with government insiders or foreign donors tend over time to adopt more conservative goals and strategies (Collier and Handlin 2009a, 82–91; Michels 1959).<sup>1</sup> From a mainstream social movements perspective, activist leaders are often seen to pursue more conservative goals and strategies solely to preserve their access to government (or foreign) resources (Bano 2008; Jalali 2013; Piven and Cloward 1979; Schuller 2012; Thayer 2010). In the context of the twentieth century, a period of frequent military rule in much of Latin America, the trade-off for such privileged relationships with the state was de-radicalization and explicit subservience to government demands (Collier and Collier 1979 and 1991).

Movements that develop this type of organizing structure are generally thought of as interest groups rather than as social movements because they rely primarily on institutional strategies for political reform (Della Porta et al. 2006; Tarrow 1998). According to much of the mainstream scholarship on social movements, then, protest and lobbying are tactics that sit in tension with each other; this suggests that a focus on one necessitates a de-emphasis on the other. What, then, explains why such a wide variety of twenty-first-century Latin American movements have adopted routine strategies for influencing government while continuing to utilize contentious behavior as a central strategy for encouraging government reform?

### ***Federative Coalitions and Hybrid Social Movement Tactics***

This article helps to explain such hybrid tactics by identifying a third type of organizing structure—the federative coalition. Like traditional federations, federative coalitions are relatively hierarchical, centralized, and institutionalized structures for organizing social movements. Yet, more like networks, federative coalitions place a greater emphasis on organizational independence than do traditional federations, and their national leadership has no sanctioning power over individual member associations. By combining elements of federations and networks, the structure of the federative coalition allows movements to leverage the advantages of both forms of organization.

Federative coalitions are hierarchical in that they involve a many-to-one relationship, linking many subordinates to only one superordinate (Ansell 2008). For example, many local associations delegate authority to a small group of organizations to represent them at the regional level; in turn, regional representatives delegate authority to a single national committee. Federative coalitions are centralized in that they take the shape of a pyramid, concentrating authority at the top. In a federative coalition, the nationally elected representatives of the movement have the authority to do things such as organize and set the rules for national meetings and conferences, and they represent their members' point of view to national and international audiences. Federative coalitions are institutionalized in that they are relatively stable and permanent structures, based on fixed rules and procedures (whether formal, such as bylaws and contracts, or informal).

<sup>1</sup> Federations can certainly avoid the iron law of oligarchy under some conditions, such as when there are enough opposing factions within a movement to check the power of one leader (Lipset, Trow, and Coleman 1956), or when federations elect radical leaders (Voss and Sherman 2000). However, scholars tend to frame these instances of more radical federations as exceptions to the rule.



But federative coalitions are not the same as the traditional federations that organized much of civil society in the twentieth century. In traditional federations, the national organization is often created first; only later does it branch out into smaller local associations. National leaders would travel from place to place, organizing new local chapters according to a single blueprint laid out by the national leadership (Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson 2000). Traditional federations such as the United Automobile Workers or the Sierra Club are thus legally registered national entities—themselves social movement organizations—which encompass many smaller local and regional organizations that all operate according to similar rules and procedures. The leaders of traditional federations thus exercise their authority based on a formal legal contract, which offers them not only some degree of legitimacy but also the power to sanction member organizations that fall out of line.

By contrast, federative coalitions form from the bottom up when different kinds of independent local organizations band together into a national alliance, choosing to delegate authority upward to a central leadership for the purpose of strengthening their capacity to lobby and negotiate with government officials. They start out as loose coalitions of independent organizations that prize their autonomy, and autonomy remains a central value even as these coalitions institutionalize. Federative coalitions may or may not be legally registered national organizations; and the individual member associations that make up the coalition operate according to their own, sometimes highly varied, rules and procedures. As a result, the leaders of federative coalitions exercise authority on the basis of broad legitimacy, without the added power to sanction. In the following section, I describe how the structure of the federative coalition helps movements combine insider lobbying strategies with more combative strategies for shaping policy.

### ***Employing the Advantages of Federations: Access***

The traits of federative coalitions that most conform to those of traditional federations—hierarchy, centralization, and relative institutionalization—help movements pursue strategies of negotiation and lobbying by increasing their access to the state. Access to the state can be formal, such as an invitation to participate on government policy commissions, or it can be informal, such as phone calls and email exchanges with government representatives. Whether formal or informal, channels of state access provide movements with opportunities to lobby.

Federative coalitions help movements gain access to the state in part because their leaders are professionalized and highly trained policy experts. As others have shown, bureaucrats are more likely to see activist leaders as reliable sources of policymaking information when they exhibit professionalized behavior and are experts in policy (Berry 1984; Hathaway and Meyer 1994). When activist leaders within a federative coalition compete to move up the ranks of movement representatives from the local to the national level, they build increasingly professionalized norms of behavior and achieve increasingly sophisticated levels of professional training. By the time activists make it to the top of the movement's leadership hierarchy, they possess a significant degree of advocacy experience, policy expertise, and a common understanding of the movement's core mission and values. The national leaders of federated social movements are thus often seen by bureaucrats as capable of contributing to better government policymaking, because they not only possess a unique understanding of on-the-ground public service needs and public service failures, but they also have the skills to propose pragmatic solutions to these policy challenges.

Federative coalitions also help movements gain access to the state by making it cheaper and more efficient for bureaucrats to invite them into their policymaking circles. When government officials consider whether to grant or deny a movement access to the state, they make calculations about the amount of time and energy, or potential controversy, involved in determining which activist leaders to invite. The easier and less controversial the selection process is, the more motivated government officials may be to reach out to movement leaders for consultation on government policy commissions. Federative coalitions, by providing a mechanism for movement activists to elect their own representatives to sit on government commissions, reduce the cost for bureaucrats to grant activists access to policymaking discussions.

Moreover, the structure of the federative coalition can help social movements gain access to the state by strengthening the political power that bureaucrats may gain by collaborating with activists. The hierarchy and centralization of federative coalitions makes movement activists more politically useful to bureaucrats by allowing movement leaders to command authority as national spokespeople. When government bureaucrats develop policies in collaboration with activists who clearly represent a broad national activist base, they can make strong claims that their policy recommendations were developed in consensus with civil society and thus represent the public interest. This ability to claim that their policy decisions represent the public interest protects bureaucrats from opposition by national politicians who may not otherwise support their policy goals and strategies. State officials are thus more likely to perceive their collaboration with social

movement activists as supportive of their policy goals when these activist leaders have been elected to their positions through some mechanism that confers legitimacy on them as national spokespeople—such as through the voting procedures involved in federative coalitions.

### ***Employing the Advantages of Networks: Leverage***

The emphasis on organizational independence within federative coalitions—more characteristic of networks than of traditional federations—can help movements pursue contentious tactics for influencing government even as they pursue insider strategies of negotiation and lobbying by strengthening the movement's leverage over state actors. As I described above, one reason movements can move away from combative strategies is if movement leaders have become co-opted by government officials. Movements that are organized into federative coalitions may have more leverage to resist co-optation than traditional federations because their national leaders lack the sanctioning power that leaders of traditional federations have. The leaders of federative coalitions, without sanctioning power, cannot control the internal finances of member organizations. Nor do the national leaders of federative coalitions control the goals, activities, or structures of member organizations. Instead, the leaders of federative coalitions must assert their power on the basis of member organizations viewing them as authorities. This difference limits the potential gains for government officials who bribe national movement leaders and, therefore, may help to mitigate the trade-off between access and autonomy that is at the heart of the iron law of oligarchy.

In fact, the lack of sanctioning power among leaders of federative coalitions may reverse the general effect of hierarchy on a movement's vulnerability to co-optation. As I described above, hierarchy within coalitions can leave movements vulnerable to co-optation because they produce leaders who can be bought in return for controlling the activities of movement members. But hierarchy, when at work in the context of a voluntary alliance of independent associations, may instead give movements added leverage to resist co-optation. When the goals of government bureaucrats oppose the goals of movement activists, government officials may attempt to co-opt the movement by inviting only the most moderate or “friendly” activists to participate on government policy commissions. Federated movements can oppose this tactic by arguing that their internal structure includes its own democratic process for electing national delegates to represent the movement on government committees. In a networked movement, by contrast, no activist is inherently more or less qualified to participate on government policy commissions than any other member. This lack of hierarchy is seen by many as a virtue; without national leaders, the government has no one to target for co-optation. However, this lack of hierarchy may also provide an opening for government officials to grant access to include “civil society representatives” who are least likely to oppose their policy initiatives. In this context, the hierarchy within federative coalitions can increase a movement's leverage to resist co-optation.

At the same time, movements that are organized into federative coalitions may also be better at organizing street protests, because they leave room for different types of organizations to participate as members of the movement. By virtue of their emphasis on organizational independence, federative coalitions can include a variety of different kinds of groups under their umbrella. This means, in some cases, that networks of individuals participate as organizational members of a broader federative coalition. As I discussed above, advocacy networks play an important role in recruiting participants to join street protests. Therefore, social movements organized into federative coalitions may be both prone to and capable of employing contentious public pressure tactics at the same time as they use institutional strategies for influence. In the following section, I illustrate how the structure of the federative coalition can facilitate such hybrid social movement strategies through a brief study of Brazil's AIDS movement, which has stood out as one of the most successful cases of grassroots activism in contemporary Latin America for its sustained influence over national policy development.

### **Evidence from Brazil's AIDS Movement**

Much has been written about the AIDS movement's provocative, performance-art-based street protests in the 1980s, which focused on combatting stigma and criticizing weak governmental investment in combatting the epidemic (Daniel and Parker 1993; Galvão 2000; Parker 1997, 2003, 2009). Much less has been written about the AIDS movement in the first decade of the 2000s, which operated in a context of a strong and responsive governmental response to the epidemic (Berkman et al. 2005; Biehl 2007; Flynn 2014; Lieberman 2009; Nunn 2009; Parker 1997; Rich 2013, 2019; Shadlen 2009). Yet Brazil's AIDS movement continued to influence policy during this later period, this time responding to new opportunities to influence government from the inside by incorporating quieter strategies of behind-the-scenes negotiation and collaboration with government officials on smaller but nonetheless important policy reforms.

The AIDS movement's approach to influencing government policy relied in equal measure on two strategies that much of the literature on social movements suggests are mutually opposing: contentious behavior and institutional interaction with government policymakers. On the one hand, protest remained a key component of the AIDS movement's strategic repertoire. This propensity to use protest was revealed in numerous informant interviews. For example, an activist from the state of Rio Grande do Sul described the following response to a recent decrease in state-level spending on AIDS programs: "We had to [use] social movement intervention: taking to the street, calling the media, using bullhorns, going to the public." One activist leader from the state of Rio de Janeiro reported having organized three protests in the past year. Eighty percent of survey respondents also reported frequent participation in marches and protests.

Similarly, the AIDS movement used the media to influence policymakers. According to an activist from the northeastern state of Pernambuco, "the media is a strategy [that we use] to give visibility to our demands."<sup>2</sup> An AIDS activist from the state of Salvador da Bahia emphasized, "Every time we have problems and the municipality fails to resolve it or creates impasses, we engage the local media; it is a way to win popular support."<sup>3</sup> Seventy percent of survey respondents also reported that they considered the media to be a very important channel for achieving their policy goals.

On the other hand, public pressure was by no means the AIDS movement's dominant strategy for influencing policy. Behind the scenes, the same civic associations that organized these protests also played central roles in the negotiation, development, and implementation of nearly every AIDS policy decision at both the national and the subnational levels. In the executive branch, for example, the AIDS movement collaborated with government officials on nearly all AIDS policy decisions through participatory state policymaking institutions—known typically as "councils," "commissions," or "committees." As a grassroots leader from the state of Pernambuco reflected: "There are a lot of strategies [that we use]. But before anything you have dialogue. Before we do any of these other things that we do, we call in a state representative for a discussion. I believe that dialogue is indispensable."<sup>4</sup> In addition, 60 percent of survey respondents considered taking part in participatory AIDS policy committees and commissions to be an important strategy for achieving their organization's goals.

Another strategy for influencing AIDS policy development was to use the courts. In the year 2004, for example, over three thousand health-related cases—mostly AIDS-related—were brought to court in just four state-level tribunals alone (Hoffmann and Bentes 2008). According to an activist from Pará, "When a situation isn't resolved via council, or with the bureaucrats in the AIDS sector directly, or with the health secretary through that initial dialogue with the bureaucrats, we go to the public prosecutor's office, and from there we enter into judicial action."<sup>5</sup> Nearly half of survey respondents perceived the courts to be a key channel for making claims on government.

The AIDS movement also looked to the legislative branch as an important channel for advancing its policy goals. Most prominently, the AIDS movement developed congressional caucuses to build constituencies of support for their AIDS policy goals among elected representatives at the national, state, and municipal levels of government (Rich 2013, 2019). As of March 2010, eight states and two municipalities had inaugurated AIDS caucuses.

Brazil's AIDS movement thus employed a hybrid set of strategies to achieve its policy objectives. The movement used traditional social movement strategies to influence policy through public pressure, yet it also attempted to influence AIDS policy by working through a variety of government institutions. While public pressure tactics were crucial for the movement's capacity to assert influence in times of crisis or conflict with government, working through government institutions was particularly important to the movement as a way to influence the design and enforcement of the national laws and policies that govern AIDS programs in Brazil.

The AIDS movement's capacity to adopt strategies of negotiation and collaboration with the state in Brazil while sustaining an emphasis on public pressure tactics presents a puzzle because it runs counter to the movement's image as a typical twenty-first-century social movement. Like other grassroots constituencies highlighted in recent literature, Brazil's AIDS movement seems to embody the principles of network-based

<sup>2</sup> Author's interview with Jair Brandão de Moura Filho, staff member of GESTOS, an AIDS NGO in the state of Pernambuco, November 22, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Author's interview with Fábio Ribeiro, member of the NGO Forum of the state of Salvador da Bahia, representing the organization GLICH (Grupo Liberdade Igualdade Cidadania Homossexual), April 29, 2011, via Facebook chat.

<sup>4</sup> Author's interview with Jair Brandão de Moura Filho, staff member of GESTOS, an AIDS NGO in the state of Pernambuco, November 22, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Author's interview with Antonio Ernandes Marques da Costa, coordinator of the AIDS NGO Forum of the state of Pará, April 29, 2011 (via Skype).



activism. In their rhetoric, the movement's leaders rejected the principles of hierarchy and centralization as "undemocratic," and they placed a premium instead on individual autonomy of action and expression. Moreover, they explicitly emphasized the central importance of broad activist networks to the past and future success of the movement. Given our understanding of how advocacy networks privilege protest over negotiation, we now ask how Brazil's AIDS movement was capable of lobbying and collaborating with the state.

As others have described, a variety of factors certainly helped the movement combine lobbying with protest—such as sympathetic bureaucrats, some of whom were once AIDS activists themselves (Nunn 2009; Rich 2013). But the presence of sympathetic bureaucrats, while an important factor, cannot explain how the movement could maintain both strategies over time. In the following section, I argue that the AIDS movement "network" was so adept at negotiating with government officials over policy because the core structure of the AIDS movement was not a network at all. Tracing the link from the AIDS movement's unexpected combination of strategies for influencing national policy to its organizing structure, I find that an institutionalized national alliance of independent advocacy organizations, which I call a federative coalition, played a key role in facilitating the movement's sustained use of demand-making strategies.

### ***The Structure of the AIDS Movement: A Federative Coalition***

Like many social movements across the world, Brazil's AIDS movement consisted of a complex array of individuals and organizations, most of whom differed in their backgrounds and personal philosophies but all of whom are committed to combating AIDS and AIDS-related discrimination. From the National Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (RNP+) to national networks of local AIDS service organizations, activist networks formed a part of the architecture of the movement. Yet, paradoxically, the national AIDS advocacy coalition that encompassed all these various organizations, individuals, and networks flouted the principles of informality and consensual decision-making in its core features. While the national coalition of AIDS advocacy organizations was not a formal entity, without even a label or name to describe it, in practice the national coalition of AIDS NGOs was hierarchical, centralized, and institutionalized.

The national coalition of AIDS NGOs was hierarchically organized into three tiers that delegated authority upward from the state level to the national level. At the state level, advocacy groups were organized into AIDS NGO forums. Forums were located in capital cities and brought together individual NGOs working with AIDS for monthly meetings. State-level forums were aggregated into regional NGO conventions called ERONGs (Encontros Regionais de ONGs), held once every other year, which coordinated state-level priorities and elected delegates to the national convention. The semi-annual national NGO convention called the ENONG (Encontro Nacional de ONGs) was the supreme body of the movement, consisting of 350 voting delegates who developed and oversaw the AIDS movement's political platform (ENONG 2009).

The AIDS movement was centralized in the highest authority, a body called ANAIDS (Articulação Nacional de Luta Contra a AIDS), which was the functional equivalent of a national secretariat. This national secretariat was composed of forty NGOs, which were elected by the different constituencies that form the national convention in a system that attempts to ensure diversity of representation. One representative from each of the twenty-seven state NGO forums sat on the committee. Joining them were representatives from each of the three national networks of people living with HIV/AIDS, and the delegates elected at the national convention to serve as movement representatives in other for a (ANAIDS 2011). Meeting several times per year, ANAIDS was vested with the authority to implement the AIDS movement's agenda that was set by the national convention. ANAIDS was also responsible for setting new agendas in response to political developments and for supervising the activities of the movement's forums, networks, and individual NGOs. In its essence, ANAIDS was the seat of power within the movement.

The national coalition of AIDS NGOs was also a relatively institutionalized structure. At the federal level, ANAIDS was a permanent and elected body, guided by established rules and procedures. At the state level, AIDS NGO forums were permanent entities with their own statutes or bylaws, some of which had their own headquarters and budgets and were formally registered with the state.<sup>6</sup>

Yet the coalition differed from traditional federations in important ways. Unlike the classic federations that are built from a single blueprint, Brazil's national AIDS coalition was built by a diverse group of advocacy organizations. Activist leaders from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro developed the idea to spread

<sup>6</sup> Author's interview with Rubens Duda, 2011; Forum de ONG AIDS do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, "Carta de Princípios do Fórum de ONG/AIDS – R.J. Rio de Janeiro" (1997); Forum de ONGs/AIDS do Estado de São Paulo 2007, "Estatuto do Fórum das ONG AIDS do Estado de São Paulo," <http://www.forumaidssp.org.br/site/modules/news/article.php?storyid=5> (accessed on October 14, 2013).

NGO forums across Brazil, because they recognized that they would be better able to collaborate with government officials if the movement were organized similarly in all states. Activists first implemented this plan by leading training sessions in states where local NGOs had already expressed interest in the idea of building AIDS forums. Activists then spread the idea of NGO forums to the remaining states of Brazil during national AIDS-movement conferences, in which they explained to local leaders the importance of having AIDS forums. Activist leaders from the southeast later developed the regional-level layer of the federative coalition, the ERONGs, in the same way as they had expanded the model of state-level AIDS NGO forums—by pitching the idea of regional-level coordinating structures to activists across Brazil.<sup>7</sup> Because of its bottom-up origins as an alliance forged by preexisting associations, the national AIDS movement coalition prized and preserved the autonomy of its organizational members. Members could operate according to their own, independent rules; and the national organization neither supported nor meddled in the internal finances of member organizations.

Another difference from traditional federations is that Brazil's AIDS movement coalition accommodated diverse forms of organization among its member groups. Networks of individuals participated as members of Brazil's national AIDS movement coalition alongside professionalized NGOs. The National Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (RNP+) and its two offshoots for HIV-positive women and for youth (Cidadãs Positivas and RNJP+) were permanent members of the coalition's national executive committee (ANAIDS 2011). Some of the organizations that belonged to the coalition were even organized into their own national networks, such as the national network of Pela Vidda organizations. AIDS advocacy groups also developed informal networks of communication among themselves, such as email list-servers and Facebook groups.

The core structure of Brazil's national AIDS movement coalition—the framework that brought all the various components of the movement together—is thus what I call a federative coalition. It was relatively hierarchical, centralized, and institutionalized, but it lacked the sanctioning power of the traditional federation that limits the independence and diversity of its members. As I will argue below, the federative structure of the movement helped activists negotiate and collaborate with the state, while simultaneously helping them to resist co-optation and preserve their ability for protest.

### ***Access to the State***

The federative structure of Brazil's AIDS movement helped activists gain access to the state by producing national leaders who were perceived by government bureaucrats as reliable sources of information. From the earliest days of the movement, AIDS NGOs in Brazil had developed cadres of trained researchers to conduct scientific studies in areas such as the effectiveness of prevention strategies, access to AIDS services, and AIDS-based discrimination (Parker and Terto 2001, 98–99). Through their dedication to research, AIDS activists in Brazil became leading national experts on AIDS prevention and treatment.

While these early achievements were the result of factors external to the structure of the movement, the federative structure of the coalition allowed the AIDS movement to maintain its reputation for policy expertise over time and as the movement expanded. Because activists moved up the ranks from local to national leadership, the members of ANAIDS—including those who sat on national and international policy committees—arrived there through a competitive process. First, they had to be elected as a delegate to their regional AIDS-movement convention by the members of their state-level forum. They then had to be elected by their fellow regional delegates to represent them at the national movement convention. If activists wished to sit on a national or international policy committee, they had to first be nominated by their regional delegates, and they then had to run in an election against the delegates from other regions for the nomination at the national movement convention. This process by which AIDS activists climbed the ranks of the movement hierarchy helped qualify national AIDS activists as professionalized policy advocates by filtering out activists who were not seen as capable of effectively articulating the movement's broad goals in government policy circles. At the same time, the process of climbing the movement hierarchy helped activists build technical expertise and political skills.

The federative structure of Brazil's AIDS movement also helped activists gain access to the state by making it less costly for government bureaucrats to interact with them. Because the movement had a structure for democratically determining its leadership through elections, the members of ANAIDS had clear authority to speak to the government and the public on behalf of the movement. This same structure of elections allowed the movement to select its own representatives to specific government policy circles. Several government informants expressed that the presence of clear, singular movement representatives made

<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, the national movement approved the proposal for creating ERONGs by vote.

communication and collaboration with AIDS associations more efficient. In the absence of NGO forums, government officials used to have to invest a significant amount of effort simply to figure out which AIDS movement representative to select for negotiation or collaborative problem-solving. Selecting a single AIDS movement representative would also lead to complaints from other associations left out of the process. By contrast, the organization of the movement into NGO forums made it easy for state actors to involve the movement in policymaking decisions by eliminating the effort and potential controversy involved in choosing which interlocutors to represent the movement.

### ***Leverage over the State***

The more networked elements of the coalition strengthened the movement's political leverage over government and, in so doing, helped activists adopt public pressure tactics for influence even as they used insider tactics. In the context of voluntary coalitions of independent associations, for example, the centralized leadership structure of the coalition gave the movement leverage to resist co-optation by government officials. According to an activist from São Paulo:

Say the government decides to create a working group to discuss an issue that the movement has been demanding the government address. Instead of coming to the movement to ask who we want the AIDS-movement representatives on the working group to be, the government might instead take someone they already know from [another policy commission] and invite him or her to participate in the working group. But perhaps that particular person doesn't have the technical knowledge or expertise to adequately discuss that issue. What's more, the government might sometimes choose that person precisely because they think he or she won't make waves. But we can [combat this by saying] no, the movement has ANAIDS. ANAIDS will let you know who's going to represent the movement in your working group.<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to the iron law of oligarchy, hierarchy within the movement—when combined with the absence of sanctioning power among the movement's leadership—increased the likelihood that movement representatives would maintain more radical and assertive postures in their interactions with government.

This combination of hierarchy and organizational independence also gave leverage to coalition leaders when they used public pressure tactics to make demands on government. According to the same movement leader from the state of São Paulo: "One thing is for the movement to have some of its member institutions criticize the health minister by writing letters or going to the press. Another thing is to have someone criticizing government on behalf of the entire movement. This carries a lot more weight, because of the number of institutions that are behind that official criticism.... [Having a formal national secretariat is] important, because without it you don't have any [credible] way of saying that you represent the national AIDS movement."<sup>9</sup> The hierarchy within the coalition made it clear who the movement's leaders were. Their lack of coercive power allowed movement leaders to credibly claim that their criticisms represented the sentiments of the movement's entire national constituent base.

Finally, the structure of the federative coalition may have helped the AIDS movement organize protests by leaving room for diverse kinds of groups to participate as members. Because of the coalition's emphasis on organizational independence, a wide variety of groups were part of the alliance, from highly centralized NGOs to very loosely structured associations. In particular, the networks of individuals that participated in the coalition, such as the national network of people living with HIV and its offshoots for women and youth, helped to maintain commitment among adherents to the movement by fostering sustained friendships among activists. These three networks played key roles in mobilizing individuals to participate in street marches and protests. The coalition's ability to incorporate networks into its fold thus helped the AIDS movement maintain the capacity to utilize public pressure tactics at the same time as it maximized the movement's capacity for collective negotiation with the state.

### **Conclusion**

This article has suggested that hierarchical, centralized elements of contemporary social movement coalitions are obscured when we focus solely on traditional dichotomies between networks and federations. Using the case of Brazil's AIDS movement to call attention to social movement structures that do not conform neatly to traditional divides, I described a structure that I call the federative coalition, a hierarchical

<sup>8</sup> Author's interview with Claudio Pereira, president of Grupo de Incentivo à Vida, São Paulo, May 8, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Claudio Pereira, interview.

and centralized coalition of independent advocacy organizations. By combining elements of federations and networks, I argued, the structure of a federative coalition helps to sustain hybrid movements that bridge the traditional insider-outsider divide between interest groups and social movements by using street protest as a central strategy at the same time as they also pursue strategies of negotiation with government.

An observable implication of this argument is that where we see hybrid movements we should expect to find elements of hierarchy in their social movement structures. Looking to movements in other Latin American countries from the same time period, preliminary evidence supports this hypothesis. In Argentina, traditional labor federations led the effort when workers used a combination of protest and collective bargaining to seek wage increases (Etchemendy and Collier 2007). Across the Andes, where indigenous groups built national federations, they advocated for policy reform not only through protest but also by collaborating closely with state officials (Anria 2018; Brysk 2000; Chartock 2011; Chartock 2013; Lucero 2013; Van Cott 2007; Yashar 2005).

By extension, this argument has implications for how we understand recent waves of mass mobilization in Latin America. In 2019, mass protests swept countries as diverse as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela, on the heels of protests in Brazil. At the outset, these movements were seemingly similar episodes of spontaneous mobilization in response to citizen outrage around a diverse array of policy issues. Over time, however, we should expect variation in how these social movements ultimately affect politics and policy. By expanding beyond the current dichotomy between networks and federations and examining broader variation in the types of coalitions that organize social movements, scholars may be better equipped to explain why some of these movements fizzle out while others sustain themselves, why they adopt different types of strategies for influencing policy, and, ultimately, why some succeed while others fail.

At the same time, new avenues for future research emerge from these findings. Most broadly, the analysis suggests that we should think more systematically about coalition structure as a choice. Under what conditions are federative coalitions likely to emerge? What conditions might inhibit the formation of federative coalitions? Relatedly, what resources make such coalitions possible? As the case of Brazil's AIDS movement suggests, resources are required to cover the costs of regular meetings and conventions across a geographically dispersed set of organizations, yet most nonprofit organizations have few resources to divert to such activities. This discussion therefore calls for more attention to resource flows, not only between donors and organizations but also between donors and movements as a whole.

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