Legitimacy, Strategy, and Resources in the Survival of Community-Based Organizations

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Organizations active in mobilizing low- and moderate-income communities make considerable efforts to combat inequalities and build voice for citizens, despite inherent challenges of obtaining resources, maintaining member interest, and retaining staff. How, then, do such groups remain viable—even thriving—organizations? Building upon research on organizational theory and social movements, we examine patterns of survival among a sample of community-based organizations (CBOs) between 1990 and 2004, thus providing the first systematic study of their long-term mortality processes. More specifically, we test how organizations' sociopolitical legitimacy and resources (and strategies for cultivating both) influence survival, finding that the legitimacy of organizations in low-income areas is a double-edged sword, as embeddedness in resource-deprived local environments confers both benefits and disadvantages. In particular, we find the strongest support for the notion that, beyond the considerable effects of externally obtained resources, CBOs also benefit considerably by engaging in even a small amount of grassroots fundraising. Further, although we find significant effects of extra-local legitimacy in the baseline models—through organizations' affiliation with national or regional organizing networks—we find evidence in additional analyses that the survival benefits of network affiliation are largely mediated by resources. We also find sizable but marginally significant effects of local legitimacy, and significant positive effects of organizational age and urban location. Overall, our findings suggest that although cultivating resources is the surest path to survival, organizations that build their legitimacy will be in a better position to compensate for structural resource deficits. Keywords: community organizing, social movements, organizations, social capital, interfaith networks.

Community organizations active throughout the United States represent a significant countertrend against declines in social capital and civic engagement; scholars are devoting increasing amounts of their attention to documenting the prevalence and broader potentials of such community groups (Marwell 2004; Orr 2007; Warren 2001b; Wood 2002;). While analysts of social movements have, in large part, overlooked this vital arena of citizen mobilization, community organizers and certain attentive observers of the third sector have documented these groups' influence in shaping the conditions of local communities, from the quality of urban schools (Shirley 1997), to local and state political representation (Marwell 2004), to job training and employment opportunities (Gittell and Vidal 1998).

There is an increasing but uneven scholarly interest in organizational demise (Carroll and Hannan 1994; Hannan and Carroll 1992; Haveman 1993; Haveman and Khaire 2004), and

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a number of studies have examined the demise of nonprofit organizations (Baum and Oliver 1991; Bielefeld 1994; Fernandez 2008; Hager et. al. 1996; Hager, Galaskiewicz, and Larson 2004; Singh, Tucker, and House 1986). On the other hand, the existing research does not include a systematic study of the antecedents of decline among low-income community-based organizations (CBOs) (but see Milofsky and Romo 1988; Reitzes and Reitzes 1987).

In order to maintain their effectiveness in bringing about changes in their communities, we maintain that community organizations must, first of all, *survive*. Although it is true that organizational survival is not identical to organizational *success*—indeed, many groups fade away shortly after achieving their goals (Fernandez 2008)—we contend that the absence of community organizations in low-income areas is likely to leave in its wake a vacuum of political representation and a more limited supply of opportunities for civic engagement. With this argument in mind, how can we come to understand the process by which some organizations survive over the long term, maintaining a voice for citizens in low-income areas, while others disband?

Building upon explanations of organizational legitimacy, strategy, and resource dependency, we contribute to the sociological understanding of nonprofit and voluntary organizations by examining which factors are most influential in bringing about the demise of community-based organizations. We employ a unique data source of groups active in local communities throughout the United States that is based upon the successful grant applications of such groups to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) in the early 1990s. CCHD was one of the most prominent funders of such groups at that time; the applications represent a diverse cross-section of groups in the community-organizing field. We tracked down each of these groups for evidence that they had survived to 2004, finding a survival rate of almost 60 percent. Using the detailed data from the group's grant application files that described each group's resources, tactics, funding sources, issue focus, organizational structure, and more, we seek to determine which factors are most consequential in shaping a group's chances of survival, in what is the first systematic study of long-term mortality among CBOs. *Importantly, we find reason to support the argument that, beyond access to resources, organizations' extra-local network ties are most influential in shaping an organization's chances of survival, although these too are mediated by resources.* This research, then, supports the notion that when organizations actively try to enhance their legitimacy (cf. Human and Provan 2000), or take strategic action in response to external challenges (Oliver 1991), doing so may be effective in decreasing their risk of failure indirectly.

Despite the expectations of social disorganization theories, scholars have called attention to the ways in which low-income communities often exhibit forms of social capital created through participation in local institutions such as churches (Warren 2001b), child-care centers (Small 2006), schools (Shirley 1997), and other local community centers. While local institutions are critical in helping to compensate for the structural disadvantages inherent in low-income areas, our analyses call attention to the partial benefits that accrue to low-income community organizations from developing local legitimacy. The relationship is, therefore, somewhat reciprocal: disadvantaged communities benefit from the organizational infrastructure that community organizations provide, but such organizations may not survive without the support of local citizens and institutional ties, particularly through the grassroots funds those citizens may provide.

This analysis contributes to organizational theory in developing a deeper understanding of the ambivalent meaning of sociopolitical legitimacy for organizations that exist in resource-poor environments; while a common expectation is that legitimacy assists survival, our study shows that it may also impose new costs. As argued by Heather Haveman, Hayagreeva Rao, and Srikanth Paruchuri (2007), sociopolitical legitimacy "implies approval by authorities such as the state and renowned activists" (p. 120). It can be said to be present when an organization "conforms to legal rules and gains endorsement from other powerful actors" (Rao, Morrill, and Zald 2000:242). Although sociopolitical legitimacy may seem to provide an unalloyed benefit to organizations in their efforts to sustain themselves over the long term, it is

possible that organizations in resource-poor environments may, in fact, be disadvantaged by possessing certain types of sociopolitical legitimacy, especially when those legitimating ties impose additional administrative burdens. As we explain in greater detail in what follows, tight integration into the local community can pose risks associated with a lack of organizational boundaries (Milofsky 1988) and receipt of financial support from government can lead to concerns of mission drift (Minkoff and Powell 2006). Our analyses help to identify which sources of organizational legitimacy are most beneficial to organizations, and which constrain organizations and limit their likelihood of survival. We further note that certain types of fundraising strategies, especially those that thicken organizations' ties to local communities, are often highly effective in combating resource and social infrastructure deficits.

Our analyses also contribute to scholarship on social movements by drawing attention to the ambivalent role of elite sponsorship of social movement organizations. While outside patronage is often found to be crucial to the maintenance of such organizations (Cress and Snow 1996; Jenkins 2006; McCarthy and Zald 1977), this may come as a challenge to the autonomy of movement groups, and the loss of such autonomy may lead to a decline in indigenous support. We take up this question by examining the roles of both external and locally rooted resources in shaping organizations' long-term survival. Local community organizations, importantly, mobilize such resources in their campaigns for change not only in institutions of the state, but also in campaigns targeted at multiple institutions including local employers, nongovernmental institutions, and educational institutions (cf. Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Walker, Martin, and McCarthy 2008).

We begin by reviewing the literature on organizational demise, with particular attention paid to studies of nonprofit and community organizations. We then provide additional background on low-income community organizations and outline our research expectations about the most important factors in their mortality. Next, we review the unique data source we employ in order to make our arguments. After reviewing our variables and their descriptive statistics, we provide estimates of a logit model of organizational survival. We conclude by drawing out the implications of our research for understanding the influence of legitimacy, resources, and organizational strategies on the longevity of community-based organizations and, more generally, on nonprofits in resource-poor contexts.

Why Organizations Disband

Despite its significance in organizational populations and for the broader communities organizations serve, processes of disbanding have been an area of variable scholarly attention in the sociological and management literature on organizations. However, existing analyses do provide a number of paths forward for understanding the disbanding of organizations.

First and foremost, organizations need *resources* in order to survive, both internally and in the broader community (Edwards and Marullo 1995; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Thornhill and Amit 2003); organizations tend to find significant increases in the likelihood of survival also by having a *diverse set of funding sources* (Alexander 1998), as having such diverse sources tends to reduce an organization's liability on any single source of funding. In addition, many foundations and other funders prefer not to support nonprofits that do not already have a diversified array of outside patrons (see Alexander 1998; Gronbjerg 1993; see also Bielefeld 1994; Greenlee and Trussel 2000; Hager 2001 on nonprofit vulnerability in general). Resource dependency theories posit that organizations are strategic agents that are strongly influenced by their outside environment, in one type of what Richard Scott (2003:118) refers to as an "open system" model of organizations.

Second, a common finding in studies of organizational disbanding is that groups that do not conform to the expectations and social norms of the institutional environment should be much more likely to fail (Hamilton 2006; Scott and Meyer 1991; Singh, Tucker, and House

1986). By "institutional environments," we contend that, despite their social fact-like quality, these are observable in the form of "government or community constituents in the organization's task environment that possess either communitywide and uncontested social acceptance (e.g., public schools, churches) or legislative and administrative authority in the organization's domain (e.g., government agencies, regulatory commissions)" (Baum and Oliver 1991:187). Generally, it pays for an organization to abide by institutional norms because doing so enhances an organization's *legitimacy* and their position in both the organizational population and among relevant others: states, potential corporate partners, and, perhaps most importantly, community participants and patrons. We follow Mark Suchman's (1995) influential definition of legitimacy as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (p. 574).[1] In the following analyses, we highlight the particular role of organizations' *sociopolitical legitimacy* in shaping their likelihood of survival, as we emphasize the importance of judgments of the organization by outside institutions and authorities within an already-established organizational population.[2]

Organizations that are taken as legitimate tend to be rewarded with resources (Aldrich and Auster 1986; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978), which, in turn, also promote survival. Thus, it is very much in the interest of CBOs to seek external legitimation, which they can do by establishing ties to community institutions. Doing so indicates that an organization adheres to institutional norms (Baum and Oliver 1991, 1992), and such endorsements generally help to protect organizations from instability and competition in the external environment, especially in resource-deprived settings (Baum and Oliver 1991; Singh et al. 1986). Those groups that are associated with established community institutions (e.g., churches, educational institutions, local businesses) should find that they have enhanced legitimacy and survival rates (Baum and Oliver 1992) due to their degree of embeddedness in the local institutional environment; indeed, it is possible that organizational populations that are more closely linked together will be less competitive (Gronbjerg 1993). Following established tradition in organizational theory, then, the present study considers organizations' institutional links as one aspect of their organizational legitimacy.

Beyond resources and legitimacy, organizations often need to stand out from others in the population in order to survive. Ecological perspectives on organizations emphasize that population density tends to have a nonmonotonic effect on both the founding and failure rates of organizations (Hannan and Carroll 1992; Hannan and Freeman 1989). Ecologists call attention to both legitimation and competition as central processes of interest, although they tend to emphasize constitutive rather than sociopolitical legitimacy (Baum and Powell 1995; Galaskiewicz and Bielefeld 1998). Under conditions in which there are only a few organizations in the population, each new organization founded further legitimates the population, thereby both increasing the founding rate and depressing the failure rate. Eventually, however, a population reaches a point at which the environment lacks sufficient resources to support all organizations in the field, and dynamics of competition begin to dominate the field (Hannan and Freeman 1989). In response to such competition in established organizational populations, groups often engage in strategic *differentiation* in order to stand out from other organizations in the field, and to carve out a unique niche in order to make themselves

1. Suchman (1995), building from both strategic and institutional theories, further distinguishes between three major types of legitimacy for organizations: pragmatic (based upon self-interested evaluations by an organization's audiences), moral (normative judgments), and cognitive (the extent to which the organization is considered comprehensible or even "taken for granted").

2. Institutional theorists and organizational ecologists differentiate between sociopolitical legitimacy (defined above) and constitutive legitimacy (Baum and Powell 1995; Rao, Morrill, and Zald 2000), the latter of which refers to how organizational forms come to be recognized as "taken for granted" by relevant publics. The latter, therefore, is similar to what Suchman (1995) refers to as cognitive legitimacy, and plays more of a role in the establishment of a new field or industry than it does within one that is already well established.

appear more deserving of resources than their competitors (Barman 2002; Zald and McCarthy 1980). It has been found that when nonprofit organizations do not face substantial competition over resources, they will favor strategies that conform to the external environment, whereas competition and field concentration promotes strategies of differentiation (Barman 2002); however, others note that even in relatively noncompetitive environments, differentiation helps organizations to establish clear goals and benchmarks for achieving them (Milofsky 1988:186). Further, any competition that takes place between nonprofit organizations is likely to take a considerably different form than competition between for-profit corporations (Abzug and Webb 1999).

We now consider the specific circumstances that shape the survival chances of poor people's community-based organizations.

The Survival of CBOs in Low-Income Areas

Why should the poor organize, when other means of effecting social change—such as disruptive protest—may be more desirable and effective? The terms of this often contentious debate were laid out long ago by Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward in their book *Poor People's Movements* (1977); there they make the somewhat unconventional argument that building poor people's social movement organizations[3] is often a less effective strategy than is political disruption. Elites, for their part, often prefer that those in poverty build organizations instead of disrupting institutional processes, and therefore Piven and Cloward (1977) argue that elites will respond more to insurgent actions than to even successful efforts to build formal organizations. Further, they maintain, following Robert Michels ([1915] 1962), that organization building encourages tactical and political conservatism, in that organizational maintenance tends, over time, to push aside truly contentious claims making.

On the other hand, there is strong evidence to suggest that the very survival of movements of the poor require organizations (Gamson and Schmeidler 1984; Hobsbawm 1979), as the survival of movement organizations helps to sustain the broader movement by helping to diffuse information and strategy, providing weak ties and structures for movement support (Meyer and Whittier 1994), and a ready-made model for activating the otherwise unorganized. Further, even the most formalized organizations active in a movement may be helpful in sustaining it during periods of waning activism or even decline (Rupp and Taylor 1987; Taylor 1989). The survival of any broader *movement*, we therefore contend, is dependent upon organizational survival. This motivates investigation into determining the key factors affecting organizational survival with an eye to strengthening the longevity of organizations of the poor.

What do we know, then, about the survival of small movement organizations? The results in this area have been equivocal. Cress and Snow (1996) found, in a systematic analysis of possible resources available to organizations, that the viability of homeless organizations was enhanced for those groups that had a patron that provided financial, leadership, moral, or office support. It is likely, others have noted (Aldrich 1999), that the presence of a patron matters more for organizational survival than the amount of their financial support. In contrast to the arguments of Piven and Cloward, Cress and Snow (1996:1103) find that outside patronage encouraged both contentious claims making *and* organizational persistence. However, despite the challenge this finding presents to such Michelsian expectations, a consistent finding among social movement scholars is that outside patrons tend to encourage routinization and professionalization (Cress 1997; Jenkins and Eckert 1986).

Beyond patronage, there is evidence to suggest that organizations' legitimacy, which is reflected in their degree of embeddedness in their institutional environments, is crucial for

3. We use the terms "poor people's social movement organizations" and "community-based organizations" interchangeably.

survival. For example, Bob Edwards and John McCarthy's (2004) study of organizational longevity among Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) chapters illustrates that survival is shaped by both financial patronage at the time of founding and having a diverse set of weak ties in the community. These findings support the claims made by organizational scholars more broadly (e.g., Baum and Oliver 1991), and indicate that organizations' network ties are crucial in providing protection against the threat of mortality. However, their findings also indicate that certain forms of organizational embeddedness pose a risk, in that those MADD chapters that arose out of another organization were less likely to remain in existence; Edwards and McCarthy (2004) therefore maintain that group social capital is contingent upon its selective utilization of both strong and weak ties.

The grassroots organizations involved in organizing in low-income communities face particular challenges that set them apart from many other populations of nonprofit and social movement organizations. First and foremost, although these organizations often employ a paid staff, the role of that staff is often to cultivate an indigenous, local leadership for the organization (Delgado 1986; Warren 2001b). Many CBOs are cadre organizations in which the role of paid organizers is designed to take direction from the needs and interests of the community, and not to do for community members what they could do for themselves. Thus, the legitimacy of such organizations rests, in part, on the extent to which the organization accurately represents the interests of low-income communities, as local nonprofit organizations need to balance expertise and local representation (Abzug and Galaskiewicz 2001). However, community-based organizations that involve a large number local community members in the leadership of the organization may find that they are more effective in raising grassroots funds, which tend to be effective in promoting survival (Walker and McCarthy 2007). Second, as organizations that exist in an environment lacking in resources, CBOs often need to rely upon their extra-local sociopolitical legitimacy through creating coalitions with outside institutions. Third, CBOs, like other SMO (Andrews and Edwards 2005) and advocacy populations (Minkoff, Aisenbrey, and Agnone 2008), display wide variation in organizational structures: some are congregation-based organizations that include only organizational members, some are coalitions with varying degrees of formalization, others are economic development organizations, and, of course, many are individual membership groups similar to most social movement organizations (McCarthy and Walker 2004). Congregation-based organizations develop thick community networks and have the added legitimacy of being based around religious organizations (Swarts 2008; Wood 2002).

Indeed, most analyses of advocacy groups in general tend to underestimate the variety of organizational forms in use, and often implicitly assume that individual membership structures are the near-universal form (see Lofland 1996). However, among the more than 6,000 community organizations estimated to be working toward empowering poor communities in the United States (Delgado 1994), there exists quite a diversity of organizational repertoires (Clemens 1993) for meeting these ends.

It is particularly important to differentiate CBOs active in local communities according to organizational structure, as each type of structure carries with it differential sources of legitimacy, capacities for resource cultivation, and means of membership engagement and leadership development. In particular, we expect that *congregation-based* organizations will stand out from other groups in their capacity for organizational survival, both because of the religious sources of their legitimacy and for their capacities in developing autonomous community leaders. The congregation-based organizational form was pioneered by the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) after its realignment following the death of Saul Alinsky, and has been replicated by several other groups in the United States in recent decades (see McCarthy and Walker 2004; Rooney 1995; Shirley 1997). Some of the most successful of these groups are the affiliates of the IAF network in Texas, including Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS), Allied Communities of Tarrant (ACT), and the El Paso Inter-Religious Sponsoring Committee (EPISO), all of which have been described in detail by Mark Warren (2001b).

Congregation-based groups emphasize organizing across a broad base (Rogers 1990; Rooney 1995) and must balance the interests of diverse faith traditions among organizational constituents. On the other hand, congregations try to maintain the boundary between religious and organizing activities, through what Richard Wood (2002) calls "buffering the sacred core." Communities Organized for Public Service in San Antonio, for instance, is comprised of an interfaith coalition including Catholic Hispanic churches, African American and white Protestants, and Jewish synagogues (Warren 2001a), and places heavy emphasis on indigenous leadership development. Many such organizations get off the ground through the work of a professional cadre of organizers from national networks like the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (Wood 2002) or the Industrial Areas Foundation (Warren 2001b), although the congregation-based organizing model stresses that professional organizers should limit their engagement to a secondary role vis-à-vis local community members. The thick ties that congregation-based CBOs create hold multiple advantages, although some have raised the concern that they do not empower the poorest of the poor (Delgado 1994; see also Robinson and Hanna 1994).

Individual membership organizations, by contrast, do not build upon the constitutive legitimacy of churches, and must instead devote considerable effort to membership recruitment and retention. Often, individual membership groups have very high rates of membership turnover, which can destabilize such local organizations that lack the option of recruiting en bloc out of local religious congregations. Such CBOs, therefore, must be attuned both to their membership and to the necessity of cultivating other stable sources of outside patronage. While individual membership CBOs may struggle with concerns related to membership and resources, they are often willing to take on a broader range of issues of concern to communities (McCarthy and Walker 2004), which may in turn help to build their institutional linkages and legitimacy.

Examples of the individual membership organizations in question include So Others Might Eat (Washington, DC), People United for a Better Oakland (Oakland, CA; see Wood 2002), and local chapters of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) across the country. As we argued in earlier work (McCarthy and Walker 2004), there is considerably greater heterogeneity among individual membership organizations than among congregation-based groups, as membership in groups of the former type ranges from merely paying a small amount of annual dues to thick, engaged, and daily participation. These organizations also display a greater degree of diversity in operating procedures, internal structures, and issue foci.

Research Expectations

To our knowledge, only one other study of the survival of nonprofit organizations has engaged in a thorough and systematic examination of the role of legitimacy and resources in determining long-term organizational survival (Hager, Galaskiewicz, and Larson 2004).[4] While CBOs share many characteristics with other types of nonprofits, the organizational structures, strategies, and resource constraints they face set them apart, and bear further examination. Consider, for instance, that the legitimacy of CBOs is dependent upon being rooted in a disadvantaged and resource-deprived context. Our rich data source allows us to examine these conditional legitimation effects in a way that no study to date has been able to capture.

Following from the research and theoretical directions we have reviewed, we expect to uncover several distinct patterns in the present analysis. First, (H1) *we expect that groups having a congregation-based form will be more likely to survive than those having one based on an individual*

4. Hager, Galaskiewicz, and Larson (2004) studied a panel of nonprofit organizations in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, finding that organizations that are larger and more dependent on private donations were less likely to meet their demise. They also found that older organizations with government funding were *less* likely to survive. Our study goes beyond this study not only in that it relies on longitudinal data for organizations across the entire United States (rather than only one region), but also in that it includes a number of additional controls for organizational legitimacy and grassroots fundraising efforts.

membership or another organizational form. Although the causal relationship between organizational structure and organizing strategies is debatable (McCarthy and Walker 2004), for present purposes we conceptualize the process as reciprocal: the choice of an organizational structure is shaped by the context and specific needs of the local community (Alinsky 1971; Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven 1990), but once chosen, should be tremendously influential in determining an organization's future strategy and opportunities (McCarthy and Walker 2004) as well as its innovativeness (Damanpour 1991; Ganz 2000). We suspect that, as a result of the consistent employment of both "strong" and "weak" ties as well as the broad-based focus of the religious coalitions represented in our sample, we will find that they are more likely to survive than the other two organizational forms. In addition, as we noted in previous work (McCarthy and Walker 2004; see also Swarts 2008; Warren 2001b), congregation-based organizations utilize thick community networks in order to develop consensus on issues that find widespread community support and help to buttress their legitimacy. Individual-membership organizations tend to take on more contentious issues that are potentially divisive among community members, rather than ones characterized by relatively greater community consensus. Secular coalitions, by their very nature, are often temporary and created for strategic short-term purposes, and are therefore expected to be the most likely to disband during the period under observation.

Groups with institutional linkages, particularly in their local communities, have been found to have dramatically higher rates of survival (Baum and Oliver 1991). Therefore, beyond the indirect legitimation organizations derive from adopting a more deeply embedded structure, we also expect that groups that have higher levels of community sociopolitical legitimacy will be more likely to survive. Thus, organizations that (H2a) *have ties to local officials*, (H2b) *have greater representation of individuals in poverty in their membership* and (H2c) *on their board of directors*, and (H2d) *those that received a local government grant* should be much more likely to survive than those without such characteristics. As organizations that are active in mobilizing the poor, those that have few poor members or few poor members on boards of directors should be considered less legitimate representatives of those local communities. However, we note that because conditions of poverty tend to inhibit civic participation due to constraints on time, energy, and individual participants' income, it is possible that being a more legitimate organization of the poor also represents a liability. Local government grants should provide a significant boost to CBOs because their local grants rarely require such formal application and reporting processes as federal grants, and indicate also that a group has noteworthy ties to the local political regime (Milofsky and Romo 1988:221).

Although accounts of organizational embeddedness more often emphasize the importance of local community ties in enhancing legitimacy, organizations' recognition by regional and national political institutions, elites, and support networks can also be an influential source of legitimacy. Thus, we hypothesize that groups that (H3a) *are affiliated with a regional or national organizing network*, as well as (H3b) *those that have relied upon a greater number of sources for technical assistance* will be significantly more likely to survive in the long run. Local community organizations are often affiliated with one of the many regional and national networks, such as PICO, IAF, or ACORN, all of which provide support, technical assistance, and moral support to local affiliates. In addition, these organizations provide a type of support that encourages CBOs' independence, thus making it less likely that dependency on a national-level office would develop or confer a survival disadvantage, as Frank Weed (1991) found among chapters of Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Similarly, many organizations draw upon the institutional legitimacy and social capital of technical assistance providers such as the aforementioned organizing networks as well as centers like the Institute for Social Justice and the Center for Community Change, which help organizations in resolving staff matters and supporting member recruitment, and also with professional fundraising and providing informational services. Perhaps most importantly from an institutional perspective, the technical assistance providers that worked with the organizations we study here were active in supporting the formalization and rationalization of CBO processes.

We also expect that (H3c) *organizations that have greater legitimacy before state and national government agencies will also hold enhanced rates of survival*. Thus, we expect that those organizations that receive state- and federal-level government grants, as well as those organizations that received their federal charitable exemption under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code will be more likely to survive, as governmental grants are a prime source of support for CBOs; nonprofit populations tend to thrive at times when government programs expand (Salamon 1995). Similarly, having a charitable exemption provides organizations with additional sources of support (though allowing tax-exempt contributions and other privileges such as discounted postage rates, revenue tax exemptions, and, in certain cases, exemptions from municipal property taxes), which should also decrease the risk of failure (Cress 1997; McCarthy, Britt, and Wolfson 1991).

Fourth, following from the ecological perspectives outlined earlier, we hypothesize that (H4) *specialist organizations—groups that actively seek to differentiate themselves from other organizations by having a narrower issue focus—will be more likely to experience mortality*.[5] Resource partitioning perspectives maintain that generalists are, under normal conditions, more likely to survive than specialists due to economies of scale, as conditions of high concentration within an organizational population encourage increased specialization (Carroll 1985). Concentrated environments allow even single-purpose specialty organizations to survive at the margins. Although national-level competitions for scarce government, foundation, and corporate funding may encourage a competitive orientation among organizations, the field of CBOs is not, strictly speaking, highly concentrated. Further, CBOs in the early 1990s faced a quite unstable environment (Delgado 1994). During periods of more rapid change, organizational theorists contend (e.g., Aldrich 1979), generalists should have a survival advantage over specialists. While being a generalist organization that engages in a variety of issue domains may present a survival advantage for these reasons, it may also come with the difficulties associated with monitoring and benchmarking a diffuse goal set (Milofsky 1988).

Fifth, building from resource-based approaches, we anticipate that (H5a) *groups with higher incomes* and (H5b) *greater levels of grassroots fundraising will be more likely to survive*. Additionally, (H5c) *organizations that have a more diverse set of funding sources will be more likely to survive than those relying on one or only a few benefactors*, as will those that (H5d) *are located in communities with higher median incomes*. Others have found that it benefits organizations to have a diverse set of resource streams (Hager 2001; Tuckman and Chang 1991). Groups with diverse funding sources should be more likely to survive because they tend to be less reliant on any given funding source and therefore can be more autonomous, since, as we have noted, patronage is likely to "channel" a CBO's activities (Jenkins and Eckert 1986). A more diverse set of resource providers allows a group to be not only more autonomous but also more open to the use of new strategies (Alexander 1988; Ganz 2000:1017), which should make it more adaptable to the challenges and therefore more likely to survive. Grassroots fundraising should be effective because it not only builds resources but also establishes new ties between the organization and the local community.

Next, consistent with the findings of a large literature on organizations of all kinds, we expect that formalization assists in survival, particularly in that (H6) *organizations with a larger staff have enhanced capacities for survival* (in their ability to mobilize members, secure external funding, maintain accounting and record keeping, and help to sustain organizational infrastructure).

We also expect an effect of organizational age on survival (Stinchcombe 1965). Organizational researchers have found mixed results regarding the relationship between organizational age and the likelihood of mortality. Scholars working within an organizational ecology

5. Due to data limitations, we unfortunately cannot assess density dependence effects directly. However, our analyses of organizational differentiation do help us to assess the extent to which specialization affects individual organizations in the population.

Table 1 • *Summary of Hypotheses on Organizational Survival*

Hyp.	*Substantive Area*	*Hypothesis*	*Expected Direction*
H1	Org. structure	Have a congregation-based structure	+
H2a	Local legitimacy	Ties to local officials	+
H2b	Local legitimacy	More local poverty members	+
H2c	Local legitimacy	More local poverty board members	+
H2d	Local legitimacy	Received a local government grant	+
H3a	Extra-local legitimacy	Affiliated with an organizing network	+
H3b	Extra-local legitimacy	More sources of technical assistance	+
H3c	Extra-local legitimacy	State or federal grants; charitable status	+
H4	Strategic differentiation	Organizational specialization	–
H5a	Resources	Income	+
H5b	Resources	Grassroots fundraising	+
H5c	Resources	Diversity of funding sources	+
H5d	Resources	Higher median community income	+
H6	Formalization	Staff size	+
H7a	Controls	Organizational age (older)	+
H7b	Controls	Urban	+
H7c	Controls	Membership size	+

framework (e.g., Hannan and Freeman 1989; Minkoff 1997) often find that older organizations tend toward inertia and are less able to adapt to their changing environment, thereby facing an increased likelihood of mortality, or a "liability of senescence" (Aldrich and Auster 1986). However, what is perhaps an even more common finding is that younger organizations face the "liability of newness" (Carroll 1983; Hager et al. 2004; Stinchcombe 1965). Even though groups tend to experience heightened levels of energy and enthusiasm at their founding, which helps them to overcome stresses associated with heavy workloads (Wicker 1979), channels for resource acquisition and membership retention are less likely to have adequately developed (Aldrich 1999). Still others find that organizational adolescents are at highest risk of mortality, finding that it is during this point that initial enthusiasm wanes while the more banal aspects of organizational maintenance become central (Edwards and Marullo 1995). We expect (H7a) *that the second of these explanations is correct: that younger organizations will be the least likely to survive*.

Finally, we expect, ceteris paribus, (H7b) *urban organizations will survive at higher rates than rural or mixed urban/rural organizations* because groups that exist in dense urban areas will have greater opportunities to develop thick ties to local citizens and institutions; in related fashion, we expect that (H7c) *the smaller organizations in our sample to be at a higher risk of mortality than those with a larger membership base*, as larger groups are typically found to have much higher rates of survival (Minkoff 1993), and membership size may be one of its best overall indicators (Edwards and Marullo 1995).

Table 1 summarizes our hypotheses as a reference to readers.

Data and Methods

Our analysis is based on a sample of poor-people's CBOs (see McCarthy and Castelli 1994) for more detailed information), drawn from the successful grant applications of poor people's organizations to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). CCHD was formed in the late 1960s by the U.S. Catholic Bishops to serve as a mechanism for attacking the structural sources of poverty. But rather than supporting services to the poor (which was the traditional role of U.S. Catholic Social Services), CCHD was conceived as an agency that

would instead provide support for groups that seek to empower the poor through community organizing. CCHD's criteria for local groups who are eligible for funding specify that they aim to "eliminate the root causes of poverty and to enact institutional change." It is expected that grantees will do so through "modification of existing laws and/or policies" as well as through "establishing participatory structures." Funded projects must also benefit mostly poor people, and low-income residents must have a "dominant voice in the organization." Finally, groups must be committed to political nonpartisanship.[6] For more than 30 years CCHD has made annual grants to a diverse set of local community organizing projects, including individual membership groups, and religious and secular coalitions.

Before we discuss the structure of our data, we should make note of the fact that the original sample of grant applications represents only those organizations that were viable enough not only to make application to CCHD, but also to have that application accepted as worthy of funding. Because only those groups organized well enough to be capable of applying are included in the sample, one might be reasonably concerned about bias in the selection of cases in the direction of a high degree of survival. Thus, two concerns arise: one regarding selection at the level of *whether or not a group applies to CCHD in the first place*, and another with respect to *which groups CCHD selects for funding*. Although the former concern is more significant, we note that because CCHD is one of the few funders of poor people's organizations in the United States and is well known as such, a wide and diverse array of groups apply for funding, thus mitigating the selection effects of which groups apply in the first place (McCarthy and Walker 2004). As for the CCHD selection process, when the groups that were offered grants in the 1988–89 funding cycle were compared with those not funded, very few differences were found between them in size, structure, or substantive focus (McCarthy and Shields 1990). Thus, concerns over the selection of cases are mitigated both by CCHD's prominent position in the nonprofit and voluntary sector and also by funding criteria, which do not appear to discriminate significantly according to the viability of the recipient (McCarthy and Shields 1990).

Our first wave of data is based upon the groups that were granted support by CCHD in the years 1991, 1992, or 1993.[7] During those years more than 600 groups applied for funds

6. These criteria were in place in the early 1990s, and since that time an additional criterion has been added specifying that groups must conform to the moral and social teachings of the Catholic Church. The current CCHD community organization grant guidelines for eligibility are available at: www.usccb.org/cchd/grants/criteria.shtml.

7. During the period when this data was assembled and up to the present, CCHD required applicants to submit an elaborate application form soliciting support; this form was to be accompanied by extensive back-up information, especially regarding the sources and amounts of funds the organization was currently receiving (or had applied for). Groups were encouraged to submit additional information about their activities, including press clippings about themselves and any other supporting materials they thought relevant. As well, local Diocesan representatives of CCHD most of the time included more or less detailed assessments of the proposed project, the organization, and its reputation in the community; local Bishops needed to sign off on funded projects, so, for the most part, they monitored applications from groups in their own Diocese. Once a group was approved for funding, it was required to submit additional information, and then to file three quarterly reports during the year of funding, followed by a more extensive final report. These reports included requests for information about activities as well as detailed financial reports. Consequently, at the end of a year's funding, a file existed for each project that was typically between four and six inches thick, and sometimes even larger. Data was assembled out of these files by research assistants, who combed all of the material in them with the aim of answering a number of written questions that had been constructed to generate a variety of diverse measures. These measures capture the group's activities, ties with the community, ties with other organizations, and the group's finances, including those measures included in the present analyses. Many of the questions were included on the application or quarterly report forms, including the proportion of poverty representation among the membership and the board of directors and the group's 501(c)(3) status. (CCHD required a group to have such a status, and if it did not, to have its CCHD grant administered by another entity that did possess the status.) The issue and activity measures consisted of checklists that RAs used to note any presence of an activity (e.g., met with a government official or held a public accountability session) or issue claim during the year of the grant. Finally, the amount and source of each current grant listed in any of the documents (application and reports) was captured on an exhaustive list of all the group's funding sources, allowing an estimate of receipt of government grants and those from other sources. Two RAs were trained to examine each file, the second double-checking the data entries of the first for errors, and the second author of this study adjudicated any disagreements between coders with another pass through the case in question.

annually, and in each annual funding cycle approximately 200 groups received grants that ranged between $35,000 and $50,000. Many of the groups that received support from CCHD did so for several consecutive years. All groups funded in 1991 were included in the sample, and each group that was newly funded in either 1992 or 1993 was added to the sample. This procedure yielded a total of 315 groups that were funded in at least one of the study years, although we do not consider 11 of them for the purposes of the present analysis, either because they are not member-based community organizations (e.g., Native American tribal groups, radio stations, or magazines) or because their case was included more than once in the wave one data file.

The second wave of data collection employs information from a variety of data sources, all of which combine to provide an accurate estimation of each organization's survival. Our analysis of the mortality of community organizations followed a multistep approach. First, we sought to locate each organization's publicly available IRS Form 990 from the Web site of the Foundation Center.[8] All organizations that filed an IRS return in the year 2004 or later were considered to have "survived," with some exceptions described below. For those groups that did not have an IRS Form 990 available (or those that were available were only for earlier than 2004), we searched the Web for evidence of an organizational Web site; those that had up to date Web sites were considered cases of survival. If no Web site was found, we relied upon the professional judgments of the staff of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, which provided the authors with judgments of each organization's mortality as of March 2006 after consulting recent Campaign files. *All organizations that were not judged to be surviving at any of the previous stages were considered cases of mortality*. As mentioned above, there were exceptions to this: (1) groups that reported a name change or merger with another organization were considered effectively "dead" as well, following the standard convention in organizational research; (2) cases in which the group changed its name significantly were also considered organizational deaths.[9]

Measures and Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 includes descriptive statistics for the dependent variable and all of independent variables. We now turn to a discussion of these variables.

Organizational Survival.[10] Our examination of the survival of membership-based organizations of the poor yielded a number of possibilities concerning the present-day state of these groups. These were: mortality, survival, merger, organizational name change, and unable to be contacted. For purposes of the present analyses, any organization that changed its name, merged with another, or was unable to be contacted was grouped with "dead" organizations. This variable is coded such that 1 = survival and 0 = mortality. We found that overall, 57.5 percent of organizations survived (see Table 2).[11]

8. See www.foundationcenter.org.

9. Groups that changed their name in only a minor way—for example, the Northeast Citizen Action Research Center, which renamed itself Northeast Citizen Action, Inc.—are considered cases of survival if the aforementioned criteria are otherwise met by the organization.

10. Our research design asks how the organizational features of the groups in our sample measured at time one affect their likelihood of survival at time two, a little over a decade later. It is entirely possible, of course, that dynamic changes in some important features of particular organizations could have occurred during the intervening period and have also influenced chances of survival, but our design does not allow us to measure such changes. We have access only to evidence from the early 1990s about them, and whether or not they survived to 2004. Without such knowledge about an organization's features in the interim we make the strong assumption of lethargy for many important organizational features such as organizational form, goals, and tactics that is common among organizational analysts of organizational trajectories (Stinchcombe, 1965; Hannan and Freeman, 1989). As well, previous studies of nonprofit organizational mortality employing similar designs show patterns consistent with our results for the importance of time one measures of organization resources on the likelihood of survival, both in the short run of three years (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004) and in the long run of four to five decades (Dougherty et al., 2008).

11. This rate of survival is lower than that presented in Walker and McCarthy (2007), which used a slightly different methodology for determining survival. The present survival measures, which, as mentioned, include both IRS data and the informed judgments of CCHD staff, represent a more conservative estimate of organizational survival.

Table 2 • *Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	*Mean*	*S.D.*	*Valid* N
Organizational survival	.575	.029	287
Organizational structure			
Membership type			
Individual membership	.415	.029	287
Congregation based	.286	.027	287
Coalition	.094	.017	287
Mix: congregation and other institution	.066	.015	287
Mix: coalition and individual members	.108	.018	287
Economic development org.	.024	.009	287
Local sociopolitical legitimacy			
Ties to local officials			
Held a public accountability session (1 = yes)	.045	.012	287
Held a meeting with a public official (1 = yes)	.369	.029	287
Local community representation			
% poverty members	59.699	1.752	287
% poverty board	58.413	1.580	287
Grants			
Received local gov't grant (1 = yes)	.073	.015	287
Extralocal sociopolitical legitimacy			
Network affiliation			
Part of an organizing network (1 = yes)	.523	.030	287
Technical assistance			
Number of technical assistance sources	1.854	.095	287
Nonprofit status			
Org. is registered 501(c)(3) (1 = yes)	.742	.026	287
Government grants			
Received federal gov't grant (1 = yes)	.052	.013	287
Received state gov't grant (1 = yes)	.108	.018	287
Strategic differentiation			
Issue focus			
Narrow issue focus (1 to 2 issues)	.077	.016	287
Mid-range issue focus (3 to 4 issues)	.422	.029	287
Broad issue focus (5+ issues)	.502	.030	287
Organizational resources			
Income and fundraising			
1990 total income (in tens of thousands)	16.070	1.167	286
Diversity of grant sources	2.045	.083	287
Grassroots funds (in thousands)	22.750	2.600	287
Diversity of grassroots fundraising sources	2.049	.091	287
Community resource environment			
Income			
County median income in 1989 (thousands)	27.996	.368	282
Organizational formalization			
Staff size			
Number of staff members	5.011	.404	279
Control measures			
Organizational age			
Organization 1 to 4 years old	.386	.030	259
Organization 5 to 9 years old	.286	.028	259
Organization 10+ years old	.328	.029	259
Rural-urban			
Urban	.498	.030	287
Rural	.178	.023	287
Mix of urban and rural	.324	.028	287
Membership size			
Total members (thousands)	10.003	1.736	285
Listwise *N*			246

Organizational Structure. In earlier research, we found that the structure an organization assumes is consequential for its membership size, issue focus, and ability to garner resources (McCarthy and Walker 2004). Dummy variables were created for each organizational type under consideration: individual membership, primarily religious coalition, primarily secular coalition, groups that are a mix of congregations and other institutions, groups that are a mix of coalition groups and individual members, and economic development organizations, each coded such that a 1 is assigned if the group is of that type and 0 otherwise. Individual membership organizations are the modal category, at 41.5 percent of organizations; congregation-based groups are 28.6 percent, the three other types of coalition-based groups combine to 26.8 percent, and economic development organizations are the remaining 2.4 percent.

Local Sociopolitical Legitimacy. Our three sets of measures of local sociopolitical legitimacy regard the organization's ties to local officials, the local community, and the local government. Two measures are included of ties to local officials: whether the organization has held a "public accountability session," and whether the organization has held a meeting with a public official. Public accountability sessions are public forums in which CBO leaders seek to wrest verbal concessions from political, corporate, and civic leaders in front of an audience including the CBO's constituency and members of the broader community.[12] Coders were instructed to note up to 18 methods the group used in order to meet its objectives, out of list of 35 options.[13] If the organization was found to have engaged in either of these two activities, they were coded "1" and "0" otherwise. While 36.9 percent of groups met with public officials, only 4.5 percent held an "accountability session."

Ties to the community are also important measure of local legitimacy. We include two measures of local legitimacy: (1) poverty representation in the membership, and (2) poverty representation on the board of directors. In our statistical models, we also include a quadratic term of poverty representation on the board, in order to estimate, following insights from Rikki Abzug and Joseph Galaskiewicz (2001), how CBOs' balance of local representation and professionalism shapes survival. Each organization's CCHD grant application included a statement indicating both the number of poor members/board representatives and the total size of the membership and board. Each of these figures uses the proportion of poor individuals, by dividing the total membership/board members by the number of poor individuals included. On average, organizations have a poverty membership of 59.7 percent, and a board comprised of 58.4 percent living in poverty.

We also include measures of local grants received by the organization as evidence of local legitimacy; 7.3 percent of organizations reported receiving at least one local government grant.

Extra-Local Sociopolitical Legitimacy. We include five indicators of an organization's legitimacy beyond its local community: whether the organization is part of an organizing network for CBOs (e.g., IAF, ACORN, PICO), the number of sources of technical assistance received by the organization at the time of its grant application in the early 1990s, a dummy measure for nonprofit incorporation, and whether the organization has received any state or federal grants in the fiscal year prior to their application to CCHD. All of these measures provide indications of an organization's linkages to institutions, which may provide access to resources

12. An excellent example of this is depicted vividly in Bob Hercules's and Bruce Orenstein's documentary film *The Democratic Promise* (1999), which captures how members of the IAF-affiliated East Brooklyn Congregations won Rudolph Giuliani's public support for new development of affordable single-family homes.

13. Although we do not provide the full list of 35 tactics here, the following is a list of the broad areas in which tactical information was collected, along with the number of specific types within each area: leadership identification and development (3), membership recruitment and training (7), staff and board training (3), public relations (1), fundraising (1), outreach and community education (5), direct political engagement—lobbying, protest, etc. (7), planning, research, and organizational development (4), service provision to members (3), and other (1).

and help to build capacity (Baum and Oliver 1992). Approximately 52 percent of organizations reported affiliation with an organizing network. As for technical assistance, coders of the grant applications were instructed to record up to six types of technical assistance received by each group;[14] on average, a group received 1.85 forms of assistance. Further, 74.2 percent were officially recognized nonprofits (registered under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code), 5.2 percent received a federal government grant, and 10.8 percent received a state-level grant.[15]

Differentiation. Because generalist organizations may have a survival advantage in unstable environments, we also control for the breadth of an organization's issue focus. We build upon a measure of issue breadth, in which research assistants combed through the grant applications seeking indication that an organization was involved in any of 22 issue areas,[16] and coded up to ten issues on which the organization engaged. The measure of issue breadth represents the total count of issues on which the organization was active (mean = 3.8, median = 3 issues). The issue count was converted into discrete categories for narrow organizations (1 to 2 issues, 7.7 percent), mid-range organizations (3 to 4 issues, 42.2 percent), and broad organizations (5+ issues, 50.2 percent).

Organizational Resources. Scholars have found that a social movement organization's ability to sustain itself is often tied to its amount and diversity of resources (e.g., Cress and Snow 1996). As for resource *amounts*, we include measures of the organization's reported income in 1990,[17] in tens of thousands of dollars (with an average of $160,700 and median of $120,000); and the amount of funds reported to have come from grassroots fundraising by the group in the year prior to application, in thousands of dollars (with an average of $22,750, median of $8,700). We measured resource *diversity* with two measures: (1) the diversity of substantive grant sources listed by the groups in their application file (mean of 2.045),[18] and (2) the number of types of grassroots fundraising activities reported (e.g., canvassing, direct mail, donations, membership dues), with groups reporting no grassroots fundraising coded as 0 (mean of 2.049).

Community Resource Environment. It is possible that organizations that exist in resource-deprived communities may struggle to survive even if they develop sources of external support, especially among organizations heavily dependent upon their membership base. We therefore also control for the community resource environment by including a measure of the median

14. Coders were offered 29 options for types of technical assistance. In the interest of space, we do not reproduce that entire list here. However, the general categories of assistance were human development (e.g., staff, organizer, or leadership training), recruiting, organizational development (e.g., formalization, accountability procedures), professional services (e.g., legal or accounting assistance), informational assistance (e.g., research), advocacy, or outreach.

15. We acknowledge that the receipt of grants, especially those from the federal government, are at least in part a measure of organizational formalization; such grants often require complex applications, detailed accounting, and extensive record keeping on the part of the recipient organization.

16. Accountability of public officials, voter registration/increasing participation of the marginalized, community issues and services, health care, progressivity of taxes, crime/drugs/police, economic development, education reform and local autonomy, housing/homelessness/lending, jobs/training/unemployment, workers' rights, farm and rural issues, racial/ethnic issues, tribal rights, immigration and migrant issues, social justice/social change, community social services for children and the elderly, women's issues, environment/toxics/land use, public services such as trash and utilities, poverty/welfare, and other.

17. Although the first wave of data includes groups that applied in *either* 1991, 1992, or 1993, we have consistent data on each organization's income for the year 1990, regardless of the year of their grant application.

18. Coders of the original grant application files sought information on the types of grants previously received by each organization, and coded up to six such types. Coders were offered the following options for the grant types: local CHD, national CHD, other Catholic, religious non-Catholic, foundation, business foundation, business, nonprofit, community funds (e.g., United Way), national government, state government, local government, grassroots funding, and other sources.

annual household income of families in the county where the organization is located. We use 1989 data from the Annual Social and Economic Supplements of the Current Population Survey, in thousands of dollars. The average of these county-level medians is $27,996.

Formalization. We include one measure of formalization: the number of staff members (mean = 5.01). This measure is included in order to examine the extent to which formalization enhances an organization's chances of survival, as the growth of professionalization and formal procedures within an organization should enhance stability.

Control Measures. We also control for the organization's age, rural/urban location, and membership size. Organizational age is broken down into three categories: 1 to 4 (38.6 percent), 5 to 9 (28.6 percent), and 10+ years old (32.8 percent). Location is included as dummy measures of urban (49.8 percent), rural (17.8 percent), or a mix of the two (32.4 percent).

Results

We present a summary of our complete analysis, which includes the organizational structure, legitimacy, resource, and other variables described in Table 3. The leftmost column shows the zero-order effects of each independent measure, to be used for comparison with later models. Model 1 presents the effects of membership structure and the controls (the latter of which are included in all models hereafter). Model 2 omits membership structure and adds the effects of both blocks of sociopolitical legitimacy measures. Model 3 does the same for the differentiation measures, as does Model 4 for resources and formalization. Model 5 includes the full set of covariates. *Importantly, readers should be aware that all models (other than the bivariate effects) include controls for the issue focus of the organization, although, in the interest of parsimony, we do not present the issue coefficients in the present table.* All coefficients are presented as odds ratios in which a value less than one is a negative effect, whereas a value above one is positive.

First, we note that the overall survival rate for all of the groups is greater than 57 percent over a period of more than a decade, which translates to an estimated 3.6 percent rate of mortality per year.[19] This compares very favorably with the annual mortality rates seen among peace movement groups at 8.75 percent (Edwards and Marullo 1995) and anti-drunk driving groups 7 percent (Edwards and McCarthy 2004).[20]

Which factors shape this survival rate? Examining the main block of organizational measures (Model 1), we find that a group's membership structure, counter to our expectations, has no significant effect on its rate of survival (H1). Even in the bivariate comparisons, we do not find any indication that congregation-based organizations are more likely to survive than individual membership organizations, despite the thick community ties such organizations foster. In fact, in the final model, it appears that such faith-based organizations are slightly *less* likely to survive; however, these results are not statistically significant and should therefore be interpreted with some caution. Overall, then, we find relatively little evidence that a CBO's organizational structure—whether one with the added legitimacy of religious linkages or without—influences long-term survival.

On the other hand, we find partial support for the argument that an organization's embeddedness in the local institutional environment supports survival. In particular, we find a strong but marginally significant ($p < .10$) survival benefit for organizations that hold public accountability sessions (H2a), which are public meetings with local officials that seek to gain

19. Because our data collection includes the years 1991, 1992, and 1993, we estimated the average mortality based on the central category, 1992, for 43 percent overall mortality over a twelve year span.

20. Some of these findings differ from those presented in Walker and McCarthy (2007), in part because we now include a more comprehensive and conservative measure of organizational survival.

Table 3 • *Logistic Regression of Organizational Survival on Selected Organizational Measures*

Variable	*Bivariate Effects*	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*	*Model 5*
Organizational structure						
Membership type[a]						
Congregation based	.994	1.263	—	—	—	.720
Coalition	.654	.656	—	—	—	1.013
Mix: congregation and other institution	.782	.881	—	—	—	.616
Mix: coalition and individual members	1.115	.898	—	—	—	.754
Economic development org.	.939	.682	—	—	—	.068
Local sociopolitical legitimacy						
Ties to local officials						
Held a public accountability session (1 = yes)	4.286*	—	5.373*	—	—	8.239*
Held a meeting with a public official (1 = yes)	1.207	—	.875	—	—	.684
Local community representation						
% poverty members	1.006	—	1.005	—	—	1.007
% poverty board	1.010	—	1.014	—	—	1.023
% poverty board^2	.999	—	.999	—	—	.999
Grants						
Received local gov't grant (1 = yes)	.427*	—	.661	—	—	.242*
Extralocal sociopolitical legitimacy						
Network affiliation						
Part of an organizing network (1 = yes)	1.752**	—	2.179**	—	—	2.007
Technical assistance						
Number of technical assistance sources	1.052	—	1.155	—	—	1.116
Nonprofit status						
Org. is registered 501(c)(3) (1 = yes)	.832	—	1.194	—	—	1.318
Government grants						
Received federal gov't grant (1 = yes)	.631	—	.622	—	—	.493
Received state gov't grant (1 = yes)	1.027	—	.799	—	—	.628
Strategic differentiation						
Issue focus[b]						
Narrow issue focus (1 to 2 issues)	1.156	—	—	1.061	—	3.221
Mid-range issue focus (3 to 4 issues)	1.176	—	—	1.169	—	1.899
Organizational resources						
Income and fundraising						
1990 total income (in tens of thousands)	1.062***	—	—	—	1.057**	1.072***
Diversity of grant sources	1.071	—	—	—	1.092	1.139

(*continued*)

Table 3 • *Logistic Regression of Organizational Survival on Selected Organizational Measures (continued)*

Variable	*Bivariate Effects*	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*	*Model 5*
Grassroots funds (in thousands)	1.026***	—	—	—	1.026**	1.021**
Diversity of grassroots fundraising sources	1.123	—	—	—	.865	.884
Community resource environment						
Income						
County median income in 1989 (thousands)	1.005	—	—	—	.992	.991
Organizational formalization						
Staff size						
Number of staff members	1.081**	—	—	—	1.054	1.058
Control measures						
Organizational age[c]						
Organization 1 to 4 years old	.724	.682	.681	.718	1.312	1.273
Organization 10+ years old	2.434***	2.959***	4.081***	3.011***	2.257*	2.517*
Rural-urban[d]						
Rural	.583	.380**	.313**	.340**	.297**	.242**
Mix of urban and rural	.737	.626	.562	.576	.592	.568
Membership size						
Total members (thousands)	1.001	1.000	1.000	1.001	.997	.997
Constant	—	1.679	.739	1.361	.470	.056
N	—	257	257	257	246	246
Log liklihood	—	−150.95	−139.80	−151.56	−128.58	−117.45
Pseudo-*R* square	—	.138	.202	.135	.233	.299

Notes: Coefficients presented as odds ratios. All models control for the issue focus of the organization in question, except for the bivariate effects.

[a]Individual membership organizations are the reference category.

[b]Groups that are "broad" and take on five or more issues are the reference category.

[c]Groups that are 5 to 9 years old are the reference category.

[d]Groups that are urban are the reference category.

*$p < .10$ **$p < .05$ ***$p < .01$ (two-tailed tests)

their adherence to at least one of a CBO's strategic goals. In fact, the final model shows that those few organizations that took such actions were over eight times more likely to survive,[21] although, as is evident in Table 2, only 4.5 percent of organizations held such sessions (only 2 out of the 13 organizations that held such a session disbanded, which is reflected in the quite large effect size for this measure).[22] Thus, once all relevant measures are accounted, it appears that groups may benefit from holding events that show their effectiveness in a public setting,

21. This large effect size raised concerns that the findings could be disproportionately affected by certain influential observations in the data. We therefore calculated Pregibon's Delta-Beta influence statistic, as suggested by Long and Freese (2006). Plots of this statistic revealed two outlying observations. We re-ran Model 5 from Table 3 with these two cases removed (results available upon request). We found that the effect of holding public accountability sessions dropped slightly below the $p < .10$ significance criterion, but all other significant findings remained. We therefore urge caution in interpreting the effect of holding public accountability sessions.

22. In order to test that multicollinearity was not a factor in this large effect size, we ran the Stata regression diagnostic program *COLLIN*, which is appropriate for evaluating collinearity in a logistic regression framework. We found that no measure in the model produces a VIF estimate of greater than 4. In fact, additional analyses (not shown) make clear that there are, in fact, only two measures that exceed a value of 3: the dummy variable for congregation-based organizations, and the dummy for having a mid-range issue focus. All other measures, including the issue controls, score consistently below 3. These values fall well below established thresholds for model collinearity.

and making evident their capacity to hold local representatives' "feet to the fire" on issues of community concern (Warren 2001b). Holding such sessions seems to provide numerous advantages for groups; groups that do so have higher average incomes ($177,556 compared to $162,215), despite the fact that a younger set of organizations are more likely to take this action. As we highlight in the following section, we believe that such activities are excellent examples of what Suchman (1995) refers to as organizations' pragmatic legitimacy.

Other forms of local legitimacy, importantly, had weak or even negative effects on survival. Local community representation within the organization does not appear to help organizations survive. Having greater representation of poverty members in the organization tends to increase a CBO's chances of survival by approximately 1 percent for each additional percentage point increase in poverty representation, but the effect is nonsignificant (against H2b). Regarding poverty representation on the board (H2c), we find no significant effect, despite our expectation that CBO boards, like other nonprofit boards, must strike a careful balance between local representation and the dominance of professionals (Abzug and Galaskiewicz 2001). Thirdly, we find a significant negative effect of receiving local government grants, as the final model illustrates that local grants were associated with a 76 percent increase in a group's likelihood of disbanding. This finding, which is consistent with other studies of nonprofit disbanding (Hager et al. 2004:183), is reviewed in greater detail below.

Among our measures of extra-local legitimacy, perhaps somewhat expectedly, relatively few measures are significant. However, Model 2 shows that organizations affiliated with a regional or national organizing network were more than twice as likely to survive, but this effect is no longer significant in Model 5 (providing support for H3a). In additional analyses (not shown), we found that two particular measures were most strongly associated with network affiliation becoming nonsignificant in the model: organizations' total income and their level of grassroots fundraising. Thus, it appears that network affiliation assists organizations in cultivating additional resources, which, in turn, support survival. This finding is consistent with the notion that national and regional organizing networks provide a significant source of support for local organizers (McCarthy and Walker 2004), especially given that networks share best practices for raising funds; further, legitimate organizations in general tend to be rewarded with resources (Aldrich and Auster 1986; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). We find no significant effects of technical assistance or nonprofit incorporation.

Among the other measures of extra-local legitimacy, we also find that while government grants may help to bestow the legitimacy of state recognition upon CBOs, they do little to enhance organizations' longevity. Although the direction of the effect would suggest that a grant actually *decrease*s a CBOs' chances of survival, the effects are nonsignificant and do not allow us to reject the null hypothesis of H3c. It is possible, then, that the legitimacy conferred upon organizations by receiving public sector grants may actually channel CBOs away from their original mission (Minkoff and Powell 2006), or at the very least do not confer any notable survival advantages. In short, then, the legitimacy of an organization through its ties to state- or federal-level government agencies appears to have little consequence for a CBO in the long term.

In the resource-poor environment of low-income community organizing, organizations compete for funds in order to sustain themselves, and often face difficult trade-offs between the security of remaining a generalist (which may make it easier to weather hard times) versus the capacity to stand out by specializing. The results for differentiation in Models 3 and 5 show that specialization did not provide a significant survival benefit to these local community organizations (thus not rejecting the null hypothesis of H4). While the effect is not in the expected direction, its lack of statistical significance suggests that strategic differentiation is of less consequence for survival than resource-based and legitimacy factors.

Resources, as expected, are among the strongest and most significant predictors of whether an organization will meet its demise, as evident in both Models 4 and 5. In fact, each additional $10,000 of CBOs' total income increases survival chances by 7 percent in Model 5

(supporting H5a). On the other hand, each additional *$1,000* of funds raised through an organization's grassroots efforts—through, for example, sales of ads in newsletters, bake sales, raffles and the like—raised a group's survival chances by over 2 percent (supporting H5b). Thus, dollar for dollar, funds raised through grassroots sources go much further in contributing to an organization's survival than do funds from other sources, as they both signal local legitimacy and also demonstrate members' commitment to sustaining a CBO. In addition, contrary to the conventional wisdom regarding not having all of one's eggs in the same basket, organizations that have a diverse set of grant sources *or* grassroots fundraising sources are not significantly more likely to survive in the long term (inconsistent with H5c). The community resource environment also has little effect (against H5d), even at the bivariate level; we find that even in highly resource-deprived areas, CBOs can thrive if the other conditions outlined above are met.

A few other findings in Model 5 are worthy of discussion. First, formalization has little independent effect (rejecting H6). Second, we find support for the "liability of newness" hypothesis (H7a) (Hager, Galaskiewicz, and Larson, 2004; Stinchcombe 1965), but, more precisely, we find that the oldest organizations survive at a significantly higher rate than those in the middle age category (5 to 9 years old); this supports Edwards and Marullo's (1995) argument that organizations often face a "liability of adolescence." Third, Model 5 shows that urban organizations survive at an approximately 76 percent higher rate than rural ones (supporting H7b). We expect that this is a result of the difficulty of developing institutional links and building a membership base in sparsely populated rural areas. Lastly, membership size has no significant effect on survival (against H7c).

Discussion

We begin by recalling that, in context, the community-based organizations we have analyzed here exhibit a very robust rate of survival, despite the myriad challenges they face in mobilizing members, resources, and local institutions in their support. That resilience stems, we believe, in large part from the fact that the groups we studied were ones that had already succeeded in achieving some minimal level of organizational structure and community legitimacy in order to be judged qualified to receive institutional financial support from CCHD. Having the time, energy, and information to fill out a grant application tends to filter out organizations with low viability (McCarthy and Walker 2004). And, although we remind readers that these issues of case selection may have influenced our findings in the direction of higher rates of survival, we do not believe that alternative means of sampling would have dramatically influenced our results, as CCHD attracts applications from a wide range of organizations, and the ones selected for funding are relatively similar to ones that were not (McCarthy and Shields 1990).

We began with somewhat strong theoretical claims about the survival advantages of religious (congregation-based) coalitions over individual membership organizations, and the legitimacy and resource advantages such organizations hold. Yet our findings suggest that it is not organizational form that is most consequential in shaping survival; instead, we found that a group's financial resources (particularly those raised through grassroots fundraising), and, indirectly, its ties to regional and national community organizing networks decreased the chances of group failure. Our conclusions support the notion that institutional linkages help to sustain organizations (Baum and Oliver 1991, 1992), especially in resource-poor environments.

We also found that although a CBO's local sociopolitical legitimacy generally helps it to ward off the threat of collapse, certain forms of legitimacy are more effective than others in doing so. In particular, we found that organizations that hold public accountability sessions with local officials were, in the final model, over eight times more likely to survive than those that did not. However, we caution readers that this effect was only marginally significant ($p < .10$). While only 4.5 percent of organizations in our sample interacted with local officials in this

manner, those that did were, it seems, able to display their power and legitimacy in a highly public fashion by gaining commitments from local elites to help improve community conditions, and this helped to enhance their long-term stability. As our findings show, the public display of commitment from officials has a stronger effect on survival than does simply holding meetings with officials. In Suchman's (1995) terms, public accountability sessions highlight a CBO's pragmatic legitimacy; such events make external actors aware that the organization's interests are in line with those of its constituents (cf. Ashforth and Gibbs 1990), and also make clear what benefits the organization can deliver to them (in this case, goods such as new employment opportunities, affordable housing, and improved schools for local children).

While there should be no doubt that the receipt of government grants—whether from local, state, or federal government agencies—reflects an organization's sociopolitical legitimacy, grants impose a number of both expected and unexpected costs on CBOs. Rather than relying on government grants, the findings of this research suggest that it is a wise strategy for CBOs (and perhaps for nonprofits in general) to develop local sources of grassroots funds in addition to other resource streams. While legitimacy can partially compensate for a lack of resources, it cannot, by any means, replace the need to secure the funding needed for long-term sustainability. We found that organizations that raise even quite modest amounts of funding through their own grassroots efforts—by doing such things as holding bake sales, selling advertisements in their newsletters, and hosting community fundraising events—were rewarded for their efforts in the long term, even in communities with low median incomes. Even if the funds raised from such events are not enough to generate significant amounts of revenue, these grassroots efforts help to remind community members not only of the organization's continued presence, but also of the need for their continuing financial, voluntary, and moral support. Those sources of fundraising, then, that help to generate local legitimacy should be seen as especially desirable for local CBOs.

Incorporating members of the local community into the organization has mixed net effects on CBO survival. In the final model, we find no significant effects of either poverty members or local poverty representation on an organization's board of directors, nor do we find a significant effect of poverty representation on the board. We find little support for the suggestions of Abzug and Galaskiewicz (2001), in that we do not find evidence that too few poverty board members may suggest that the organization lacks local roots, nor that organizations with too many may struggle to professionalize.

Beyond local legitimacy, certain sources of extra-local legitimacy benefit organizations. While having achieved federal charitable status had little effect on long-term survival (the 26 percent of organizations in our sample that were not incorporated did not fail at a higher rate as a result), CBOs' ties to regional and national organizing networks like PICO, IAF, Gamaliel, or ACORN were indirectly influential in shaping survival. These networks are generally not headquartered in the same local community as each respective CBO in our sample, but the benefit to organizations is nonetheless powerful, mainly in their assistance in helping organizations to build their fundraising capacities. Although such networks are themselves often structured as nonmembership organizations (Minkoff et al. 2008), their legitimating effects on local organizations are considerable, and help them to grow the resources they need in order to sustain themselves.

Conclusion

Community-based organizations put great effort into combating inequalities in wealth, employment opportunities, education, and representation in influential institutions, all of which disproportionately affect the lives of citizens in low-income communities. Citizens' ties to local institutions are crucial for improving the quality of life in disadvantaged regions (Small 2006). When considering that organizations need resources in order to sustain themselves over

the long term, they appear to confront a vicious cycle: CBOs are often tied closely to their local communities, and benefit by relying upon indigenous support for their advocacy and service provision, but those communities tend to lack the resources needed to provide sustainable support for those organizations. It would seem, therefore, that CBOs should have a very difficult time surviving, especially over the span of more than a decade.

And yet, this research found that over 57 percent of local organizations survived, which suggests that many organizations were able to sustain themselves despite community inequalities. Rather than being a liability to organizations, ties to their local communities appear to benefit CBOs somewhat, especially when the organization engages in an effort to bring together community members with public officials in order to propose policy and governance changes in local institutions, or when they raise funds from local citizens. CBOs also benefit, if indirectly, from the support of organizing networks outside the local community.

Overall, while our core hypothesis on organizational structure—that the thick community ties cultivated by congregation-based organizations will provide them with a survival advantage—was falsified as a direct predictor of survival, we suspect that a process of mediation may also be taking place in which organizational structure shapes an organization's ability to acquire resources, which in turn shapes the likelihood of survival. Elsewhere (McCarthy and Walker 2004) we have argued that congregation-based form of low-income community organizing holds the advantage of a more reliable funding base that can, as a result, free those groups to devote more effort toward social change actions and also release them from some of the pressure to constantly seek external financial resources.

Our study, which is the first systematic analysis of organizational mortality among CBOs, contributes to organizational theory by calling attention to the ambivalent role of sociopolitical legitimacy in shaping organizations' long-term risk of failure. In particular, our study highlights the importance of pragmatic legitimacy (Suchman 1995) in helping to thwart the collapse of organizations, in that groups that deliver demonstrable rewards to their members (e.g., new job opportunities or improved housing) are in a somewhat better position to sustain themselves, even when other sources of legitimacy are available. Further, certain sources of sociopolitical legitimacy, such as the recognition by government agencies of being a worthy recipient of a grant, have little effect on organizations' chances of failure, as they may impose new administrative costs and may divert the organization from its chosen mission (thereby canceling out the expected benefits of enhanced legitimacy). These findings are also applicable to research on social movement organizations, especially in the growing group of studies that raise critical questions about the oligarchic tendencies of organizations (see Clemens and Minkoff 2004 for a review).

Regardless of how much of an organization's total effort is devoted to goal accomplishment, organizational survival is necessary in order to mobilize and institutionalize an autonomous voice for the poor in local and national politics. Even if the short-term goals of insurgency are furthered by disruptive activity (Piven and Cloward 1977), without organization low-income communities are, most of the time, likely to remain disengaged in civic life and underrepresented in political discourse and institutional governance. Strategies to expand the legitimacy of low-income organizations, then, appear to offer a needed, even if indirect, support to citizens in local communities across the nation.

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