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Mapping the Political Shifts and Impacts of the Climate Movement in the United States

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of the Climate Movement in the United States

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how organizations within the climate change movement accrue political power and impact federal politics in the United States. It uses twelve semi-structured open-ended interviews with national climate activists at eight organizations to map shifts within the movement. These interviews are paired with additional qualitative analysis of legislative, media, and political rhetoric to evaluate the impact of the movement on American politics. The climate movement's impacts (establishing the Green New Deal as a legitimate policy vision, shifting the Democratic Party to the left on climate, and the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act) were made possible by a shift in the movement's identity and strategy. I offer a hybrid model for mapping social movement impacts to both social movement theory and American Political Development by combining concepts from social movement spillover, collective identity, political process, and momentum theory. These theoretical contributions and empirical findings illustrate new understandings of how to generate grassroots political power in a democracy dominated by anti-majoritarian institutions.

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Chapter 1: The Theoretical Journey Begins

A New Generation of Activists, Energy, and Organizing

On Tuesday November 13th, 2018, over 200 hundred activists with the Sunrise Movement, a youth grassroots climate organization that began in 2017, engaged in their most disruptive and powerful action yet: a sit-in at the office of Rep. Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic leader, and soon-to-be Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Flooding Pelosi's office in matching black and yellow, these activists came to deliver a clear message to the Democratic establishment. Sunrise was demanding Democratic leadership take the climate crisis seriously, support a Green New Deal, and establish a Select Committee for a Green New Deal. The youth organizers had spent months getting their generation to vote for Democrats in the 2018 midterms, helping deliver the party control over the House of Representatives. However, these young progressives were not necessarily enthusiastic about a Democratic Party whose establishment had consistently failed to take bold action on climate. Rather they were focused on putting a check on President Trump's anti-climate agenda (Prakash 2020). Speaking to her fellow Sunrisers, the co-founder and Executive Director of the organization, Varshini Prakash warned, "Our generation just helped flip the House with a record turnout. We will no longer tolerate empty promises and words without action from the Democratic establishment. If Pelosi and the leadership don't step up, they need to step aside" (Prakash 2020, xiii). By itself, this sit-in was a historic mobilization effort within the context of the climate movement, but its implications and impact extend far beyond.

The young activists were not alone. Hours before the action, the Sunrise leaders were informed that Representative-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez planned to join them in the

Democratic Leader's Office. Ocasio-Cortez's campaign, along with the Sunrise Movement, popularized the Green New Deal, a progressive legislative vision for tackling the climate crisis while addressing societal problems including racial and economic inequality (Friedman 2019). This is a remarkably bold action for a newly elected member of Congress to take (Lipsitz 2022, 94). But after getting politically inspired by the Standing Rock protests of the Dakota Access pipeline project, Ocasio-Cortez demonstrated she is no ordinary party politician, but rather a movement politician (Murphy 2018, Lipsitz 2022, 140). Speaking to the activists, Ocasio-Cortez acknowledged the complex relationship between the climate movement and the Democratic Party. Referring to the climate crisis, she said, "As a member, I want to thank you all because you are giving us as a party the strength to push" (Sunrise Movement Facebook). As she concluded her speech, the activists erupted in applause.

This bold action by the Sunrise Movement, amplified by Ocasio-Cortez, and disseminated by the press, illustrates a clarifying event in the development of Sunrise as an organization, and the transformation of the climate movement broadly. For years prior to this moment, it seemed the climate movement fit comfortably within the Democratic party coalition. While the movement was not shifting away from the Democratic party, this action was one of many that signaled it would no longer be taken for granted within the confines of the party platform. In the late 2010s, the center of gravity of the climate movement had shifted. Young people propelled the movement towards a near-full embrace of progressive politics, emboldening the left flank of the Democratic party to challenge the establishment more aggressively. A Green New Deal became a rallying cry within both the climate movement and progressive politics. In the 2020 election cycle, 16 Democratic candidates embraced the Green New Deal and over 100 lawmakers now co-sponsor the resolution in Congress (Arietta-Kenna 2019, Library of Congress

n.d.). Perhaps emblematic of the impact of these developments, a 2021 poll run by Data for Progress, a thinktank that focuses on progressive policy and movements, found 60% of voters support a Green New Deal (Deiseroth 2021). Through diligent and effective social movement organizing, the Sunrise Movement, with help from the climate movement at-large, successfully made the Green New Deal a legitimate possibility in the American response to the climate crisis. Given the prominent role political parties play in American politics, the climate movement's relatively new orientation towards the Democratic party is critical to understanding its political impacts (Amenta et al. 2010, 292).

These developments also speak to advances in social movement theory, challenging us to reevaluate our understanding of how social movements impact politics and policy in the United States. Social movements are one of the most powerful and yet frequently undervalued mechanisms for socio-political change. Movements have a complex relationship with the media, which has been transforming in the 21st century. This relationship is particularly important as the media plays a prominent role in the public's understanding of the movements and their impacts (Amenta 2022). In recent decades, social movement scholars have increased their efforts to both understand their impacts and how to measure them. Nevertheless, there is limited consensus on whether social movements are influential or not. (Amenta et al. 2010, 292). This research contributes to these conversations by telling the story of how the climate movement became highly influential in American politics, despite operating in a context dominated by anti-majoritarian institutions and entrenched political parties. This study provides an example of the potential power of social movements in American politics. Additionally, this research encourages the subfield of American Political Development to reevaluate the importance of social movements in generating political change. It introduces the concept of social movement

spillover as a key mechanism shaping the actors who go on to alter governing institutions. It also contributes to extant research in American Political Development by emphasizing the significance of ideas, identities, and institutions in understanding the development of political impacts generated by social movements within the American system (Mettler 2016, Lacombe 2019). Finally, this research contributes to political sociology by expanding our knowledge of how groups organize, develop identities, influence one another, and make their voices heard in the political realm.

Research Goals

This thesis develops our knowledge of the political impacts of the climate movement in the United States at the federal level. By studying the impacts of this movement, it generates valuable practical and theoretical insights in the field of social movement studies and American Political Development. Crucially, I develop these insights while staying grounded in the political realities of a democracy that is dominated by anti-majoritarian institutions such as the U.S. Senate and the electoral college, and status quo bias: the tendency for political and economic systems to uphold present conditions and resist change. I argue the United States fits this description, and without accounting for the influence of anti-majoritarian institutions in our analysis of social movement impacts, we fail to understand activist experiences, strategies, and impacts. As other scholars have argued, environmentalism has always been deeply political (O'Neill 2012, 118). Thus, studying the climate movement through a political lens is essential to comprehending the influence, strategy, and tactics of the movement. *This thesis attempts to answer the following three questions:*

- To what extent have actors within the climate movement accrued political power in the context of the United States federal government, and how should we define political power within the context of the climate movement? How has this been accomplished?

- In what ways does this political power impact the overarching climate politics of the United States?

- What lessons can be learned from the building and breaking down of political power within the climate movement and how can they be applied to our understanding of other social movements in the United States?

To answer these questions, I combine insights from literature, semi-structured interviews, media content analysis, and legislative rhetoric analysis to propose and expand upon three major theoretical contributions that resonate with climate movement activists. First, I illustrate how the concept of social movement spillover is essential to understanding the climate movement's shifting identity and its political impacts. Second, I show how organizational identity and movement identity play an integral role in the development and impacts of the climate movement. Lastly, I argue activists must contend with an anti-majoritarian political system that constrains political opportunity. However, by harnessing momentum politics and critical inflection points in American Political Development, including the 2016 election, the climate movement has generated political pressure and action. This has allowed them to overcome the status-quo and anti-majoritarian barriers preventing substantive shifts in political power and policy in the United States. I combine these perspectives on political power cultivation to propose a hybrid theoretical model for understanding social movement impacts. Despite operating at an institutional deficit within the United States, this model suggests how social movements can play an influential role in American political development.

In the remainder of this chapter, I explore the unique context through which American social movements must navigate, establish a definition of social movements, including the climate and environmental movement, provide an overview of the history of each movement, and analyze the relationship with their counterpart justice movements. I also interweave a history of social movement theory, establish gaps in previous literature, and define the scholarly techniques informing this research. Lastly, I conclude Chapter 1 by providing an overview of the remaining chapters in the thesis.

Our Anti-Majoritarian Democracy

It is my hope this synthesis of the political impacts of the climate movement and innovations in social movement studies will provide activists and scholars with a better understanding of how to make transformative change in an undemocratic democracy. Social movements are an integral component of American politics. They allow for people to organize around specific causes and push their political institutions to better reflect their beliefs. Outside of voting and working or donating directly to campaigns, social movements offer one of the few ways for people to influence politics and policy. However, the constraints and hurdles social movements face due to the prevalence of anti-majoritarian institutions in American democracy present a very real threat to their potential impact on politics and policy. These constraints have not been adequately addressed by existing social movement theories. By combining insights from social movement studies and American Political Development, this thesis centers the complex relationship between movements and other institutions in American politics. In the United States, there are a range of anti-majoritarian institutions that social movements must contend with. The climate movement has encountered several of these while attempting to pass legislation. For example, the Presidency is decided by the electoral college rather than the

popular vote. Twice in the 21st century a Republican has won the presidency with a minority of the votes. The second time, the election of President Trump, prevented another window of opportunity for climate legislation from emerging until 2020. Additionally, the Senate represents states, meaning that small states enjoy the same 2 senate seats that large states possess. In 2021, Democrats and Republicans each held 50 senate seats even though Democrats represented over 40 million more people (Liasson 2021). Within the Senate, most legislation can be prevented by a silent filibuster, effectively establishing a 60-vote threshold for legislation to clear first to be debated then to end debate and vote (Fisk 1997; Jentleson 2021). The climate movement was unable to pass legislation during Obama's presidency due to the threat of a filibuster. Collectively, these anti-majoritarian features of our democratic system, along with others, insulate lawmakers from a polity of which large majorities express the desire to address the climate crisis more directly (Nadeem 2021).

Throughout this thesis, I adopt a dynamic, power-focused, interdisciplinary systems lens to develop my understanding of the interaction between our political institutions, including the anti-majoritarian ones, and the climate movement. This research pays particular attention to the political constraints that the movement must operate under and strive to overcome, most notably, the dominant role of anti-majoritarian institutions in our democracy. In the 21st century, many progressive political activists in the United States, across a variety of social movements, have run into the same barrier repeatedly. How does a movement succeed when the political system under which it operates fails to live up to its democratic principles? If the climate crisis is one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century, then this is, perhaps, the greatest question to 21st century climate activists, and progressives more generally. Given the anti-majoritarian tilt of American democracy, the United States political system is not one where a shift to the majority of the

public supporting a cause will inherently result in meaningful political action (Gilens 2014). One could have the support of most Americans and find that your movement is struggling to find political opportunities or shift policy.

People-powered social movement organizing has experienced a resurgence throughout the 2010s, especially in the climate movement. These movements often focus on influencing political discourse, politicians' policy beliefs, and electoral votes. However, not all social movements focus on these popular democratic mechanisms. For example, a social movement could adopt the strategies of the conservative legal movement, as explored by Teles (2007). This multi-decade long movement prioritized the least democratically responsive branch of government, the judiciary, to entrench conservative political beliefs in our politics, often prioritizing the use of vast sums of money and intellectual innovations rather than people power to accomplish their goals. One might wonder whether focusing primarily on the judiciary would be the most effective avenue to address the climate crisis. Given the fact that the conservative movement has largely prioritized these anti-majoritarian power levers, the climate movement, largely aligned with the progressive wing of the Democratic party would struggle to access them. Perhaps more importantly, exploiting these paths to power would not resonate with the movement's identity making it unlikely that activists would even seriously consider attempting to utilize these strategies. Thus, while the success of conservative social movements can clarify the role of identity and the infiltration of ideas through legal institutions in cultivating movement success (Lacombe 2019, Hollis-Brusky 2019), the anti-majoritarian barriers faced by the climate movement are distinct from conservative movements.

While the environmental movement has a history of utilizing the courts, focusing primarily on the courts would be a less effective theory of change in modern American politics

for the climate movement, in large part because of the success of the conservative legal movement. American politics does not occur in a vacuum. Social movements cannot exist in a vacuum. All social movements, regardless of their political orientation, must anticipate, counter, and recognize how their strategies, tactics, and avenues for progress change as other political actors interact with the larger political institutions. Taking this logic one step further, our study of these movements, specifically at the more macro-levels of analysis should not occur in a vacuum either.

Social Movement Theory & the Environmental Movement

Amenta et al. (2010), defines political social movements as, "actors and organizations seeking to alter power deficits and to effect transformations through the state by mobilizing regular citizens for sustained political action" (288). The strength of this definition is that it centers power relations between different actors in the political system. This is crucial as movements, like other political actors, are contesting for power to enact their vision for their world, thus, while difficult to measure, power is inherently deeply enmeshed in politics. Nevertheless, I propose two modifications to make the definition more inclusive. Specifically, I alter "power deficits" to include 'perceived power deficits' and change the word "citizens" to 'people'. One integral characteristic to power is that it is mediated by all the actors involved, in other words, it is to some extent subjective. Thus, some movements might hold onto more levers of power than they realize, but if they perceive they are at a power deficit, then they should still be included in our definition of political social movements. For example, the climate movement is composed of activists that frequently come together through organizations. These groups employ a variety of political strategies and tactics in the hopes of generating political power and achieving their goal of pressuring power structures, typically political actors to take government

action to address the climate crisis. The strategic decisions these activists and organizations make do not appear out of thin air. Integral to this thesis, then, is the argument that social movements, including the activists and organizations within them, are influenced by previous and concurrent social movements, as well as the broader political context. In other words, the decisions made by previous social movements have downstream, spillover effects on the ability of contemporary movements to generate shifts in political power.

Throughout the social movement literature, diffusion is often used to describe how movements influence one another (Snow and Soule 2010, 194). However, Meyer and Whittier (1994) use the term social movement spillover, which I argue more adequately describes movement-movement influence. They describe this phenomenon, arguing because "social movements aspire to change not only specific policies, but also broad cultural and institutional structures, they have effects far beyond their explicitly articulated goals. The ideas, tactics, style, participants, and organizations of one movement often *spill over* its boundaries to effect other social movements" (Meyer 1994, 277). In large part, the climate movement was born out of and shaped by spillover and downstream effects from the environmental movement of the late 20th century (Fisher 2021, 119). Thus, the environmental movement influenced the identity, strategies, tactics, and goals of the early climate movement. These characteristics have shifted, as the movement has actively and passively been influenced by other social movements, political opportunities and constraints, and its own experiences. This research contends American Political Development can be strengthened by embracing the concept of spillover from social movement studies.

In the first phase of social movement spillover, prominent environmental organizations shifted their focus to climate, and brought significant resources to the issue. At the same time,

this phase brought many of the ideas, identities, and strategies that the environmental movement had relied on for decades. In short, to understand the political impact of the climate movement through the lens of social movement spillover, we must first look to the history of the environmental movement in the United States. The environmental movement is made up of a collection of activists and organizations that pressure political actors to address the ecological and anthropological threats that have been caused by pollution and extractive industries since the late 1950s. The rise of this movement is often attributed to the book *Silent Spring* published by Rachel Carson in 1962 (Brinkley 2022, 222). Prior to the rise of the modern environmental movement, the conservation movement had been the primary focus of environmentally conscious activists and organizations. The conservation movement emerged in the second half of the 19th century and was influential throughout the Progressive Era in response to the environmental degradation of the Industrial Revolution. This relatively elite movement prioritized the stewardship of natural spaces due to their intrinsic value and leisurely potential and is historically credited with efforts to establish National Parks in the United States. In the early 1960s, some organizations shifted their focus to environmental issues beyond conservation. Describing this transition Young writes, "one of the first groups to emerge with a new set of organizing principles was the Sierra Club, a long-standing conservation organization that got caught up in one of the pivotal conservation battles of the early 1950s, and, in the process, transformed itself into a modern environmental group" (Young 2008, 184).The rising environmental conscious shifted environmentalism from being a mere political issue to a potent political identity (Brinkley 2022, 521). The late 1960s and 1970s also saw a burst in new organizations including the Environmental Defense Fund was founded in 1967, Friends of the Earth in 1969, Natural Resource Defense Council and League of Conservation Voters both in 1970, and Greenpeace in

1975. The environmental movement of the late 1960s, 1970s, and 80s resulted in numerous high-profile impacts, many of which were passed into law in a bipartisan manner. This was the era of the Environmental Protection Agency, Clean Air Act, and Clean Water Act. Outside of legislative and bureaucratic impacts, the movement also spurred a reimagining of our societal relationship with the environment and its effects spilled over into subsequent social movements, including the modern climate movement.

The theoretical counterpart to social movements – 'social movement theory' – has also developed significantly since the mid-20th century. Pursued by both sociologists and political scientists, the study of social movements rose to prominence with the widespread activism of the 1960s and has expanded and evolved over time. The classical theories dominate until the 1960s had major weaknesses. They saw movements as a simple psychological response to system strain rather than political and subsequently implied that participants were psychologically different from the average person (McAdam 1982, 11-16). As scholars recommitted themselves to the study of movements in the 1970s in response to the 1960s movements, resource mobilization became the dominant school of thought in this field, as it was thought to both exemplify successful strategies for social movements and provide a thorough understanding of their existence. Developed by John McCarthy and Mayer Zald in 1977, this theory posited that if social movement organizations prioritized accruing resources (money, professional staff, time, knowledge, etc.) they would be successful (McCarthy 1977). According to resource mobilization, social movement organizations are more likely to reach policy success if they accrue resources that can be easily deployed through a hierarchical structure (Dalton 1994, 7). Resource mobilization theorists tend to conceptualize social movements as an industry and see organizations within a social movement competing with one another over resources. Resource

mobilization applies economic logic to social movements in their focus on resources translating into political influence (Dalton 1994, 6). The resource mobilization model had a ripple effect throughout the social movement world, including within the environmental movement where 'Big Green' organizations became dominant.

Social movements and their respective organizations are not static, meaning their identities, including their goals, strategies, and tactics change. They are proactively and reactively shifting in response to shifts in the political, movement, and organizational contexts in order to increase their political power and relevance. Scholars have observed a trend of organizations "institutionalizing" as time progresses, meaning they often lose their confrontational edge and become integrated within the political system (Coglianese 2001). At a certain point, they become entrenched in the political order and while they may contribute to incremental change, they are generally moderate in both actions and ideology. The environmental movement is no exception. The once insurgent environmental organizations began to entrench and institutionalize themselves throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, becoming just as entrenched as the predecessors in the conservation movement (Young 2008, 183). This shift could have occurred, in part, as a reaction to the rising conservative movement and growing anti-government sentiment on the right (Teles 2007). By the 2000s, the environmental movement was characterized by large, professionalized organizations that primarily focused on "inside game" tactics including lobbying legislators and defending environmental law in the courts. To connect theory and practice, these major organizations largely adopted the resource mobilization model with a special focus on intellectual and financial resources. They believed that being well-funded expertise-centered institutions would allow them to accomplish their goals of strengthening and defending environmental protections. Grassroots organizing still existed

within the environmental movement, just as a radical environmentalism has always existed. However, both took a backseat to the professionalized organizations that characterized the modern environmental movement.

Despite its shortcomings, resource mobilization does have explanatory power regarding movement activity, including with the rise of the environmental movement (Snow and Soule 2010, 88-89). However, the climate movement, while growing out of the environmental movement, has also been deeply influenced by other social movements and political contexts. As a result, other social movement theories hold more explanatory power for the climate movement than resource mobilization. This, along with other factors, has shifted the center of gravity of the climate movement away from the resource mobilization paradigm. Thus, it is necessary to employ and develop other theories to fully capture the climate movement. While resource mobilization was the dominant paradigm for many years in the late 20th century, it was challenged by theorists suggesting that political and sociological logic were being downplayed by resource mobilization's economic logic (Dalton 1994).

Moving Away from Resource Mobilization

This section explores the growth of several social movement theories that have risen in popularity by proposing alternatives to resource mobilization. Three of the major schools of thought are displayed in Figure 1. I argue the climate movement is better explained by an array of theories including political process, New Social Movement/collective identity, and 21st century social movement theories. Within the context of the climate movement, these tend to hold more explanatory power than resource mobilization. The next major theory to take hold in social movement studies, political process theory, both complexified the resource mobilization model and encouraged the recentering of politics in social movement studies. Douglas McAdam

developed this model in 1982 when he published *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970.* The model is two-fold, to first account for movement emergence and second for movement development and decline (McAdam 1982). This theory emphasizes the role of political opportunities in the development and effects of social movements. Political process theory is similar to elite theory, which argues that political changes are dominated by elites. The main difference between the two has to do with "the extent of elite control over the political system and the insurgent capabilities of excluded groups" (McAdam 1982, 37). Put simply, political process theory has more faith in the ability of excluded groups to exercise political power. McAdam argues that three factors must be in aligned for change to occur: the degree of organizational readiness, insurgent consciousness, and the structure of political opportunities available to the group. This theory emphasizes two things that resource mobilization frequently missed: the need for social movement participants to reach cognitive liberation for the movement to emerge and the ever-changing political opportunities and conditions that social movement activists face (McAdam 1982). For example, the climate movement has experienced its fair share of changing political conditions, some in their control and others not, that both expand and constrain the options available to the activists.

By the early 2000s, political process theory and its associated opportunity structures were conceptually stretched, weakening their theoretical potency (Jasper 2004; Bevington 2005). While political process theory plays a crucial role in our understanding of social movements, it too has noticeable shortcomings, weakening both its theoretical explanatory power and usefulness for activists (Jasper 2004; Bevington 2005). As such, alternative theories for understanding social movements and how they create change are essential for understanding and assessing the political shifts and impacts of the climate movement. One of the most prominent

challenges to the resource mobilization comes from Frances Fox Piven, who argued resource mobilization theorists too often normalize collective action by applying a conventional resource-oriented framework to it, rather than seeing the truly radical power that exists within protest (Piven 1991). Piven writes, "some RM analysts normalize the political impacts of collective protest, as if the processes of influence set in motion by collective protest are no different than those set in motion by conventional political activities" (Piven 1991, 436). Studying poor people's movements, Piven further criticizes the resource mobilization model, finding a lack of evidence that it works in practice or that organizational capacity is predictive of anything, specifically for economically marginalized groups (Piven 1977; 1991, 445, 451). Further, Piven and Cloward proposed an understanding of social movements that still holds significant weight today amongst both activists and scholars. Breaking with resource mobilization theorists and others who advocated for incremental power building, the pair recognize that economic and institutional instability are much more common than previous theorists have been willing to recognize, which increases the ability for low-resourced movements to challenge the system. Yet, they acknowledge that movements will need favorable political conditions to make an

Major Social Movement Theories	Main Tenets	Associated Theorists	Criticisms
Resource Mobilization	• Movement success is based on accruing large quantities of resources • Promotes hierarchical professionalized organizations	Olson (1975) McCarthy and Zald (1977)	Ignores the political context of the movement, misses activist agency
Political Process/Opportunity	• Centers on how the movement interacts with the political structures • Highlights the role of mobilizing structures and framing in organizing	McAdam (1982) McAdam (1996) Tarrow (2011)	Erases activist agency, cultural impacts, and overemphasizes structure.
Collective Identity (New Social Movements)	• Emphasizes the role of identity in motivating and framing organizing • Centers on activist agency	Breines (1982) Gamson (1991) Jasper (1997) Polletta (2001)	Fails to recognize the political context, minimizes the role of resources.

Figure 1: Three of the Major Social Movement Theories Explained

impact, writing "Where action emerges in the factories or the streets may depend on the course of the early phase of protest at the polls" (Piven 1977, 15, 31). Piven supports mass protest as a more effective way of shocking the system into changing. Piven and Cloward's mass protest strategy and emphasis on the disruptive nature of protest has played a pivotal role in our understanding of social movements and the development of subsequent theoretical insights.

As academics explored the explanatory power of each of these major social movement theories, the climate movement was emerging in response to a several environmental and political events. For many years, the climate movement adopted a hierarchical organization and expertise-centric approach that mirrored much of what resource mobilization theorists advocate for. One major catalyst event for the movement's emergence occurred in 1988 when NASA scientist James Hansen testified about global warming in front of a congressional committee (Prakash 2020). At the time, the discussion of the changing climate was largely focused on the warming planet, specifically the greenhouse effect. However, over the decades our understanding of the crisis has deepened and so too has our characterization of the problem. The terms "climate change" and "climate crisis" have grown in popularity throughout society in large part because they more accurately describe the myriad of effects that will be experienced as we alter the Earth's atmosphere. It is more common for the climate movement to use the term "climate crisis" because it accurately describes the gravity of the situation, while "climate change" can be perceived as a natural, benign, and faraway dynamic. One of the many impacts of the climate movement has been its ability to cultivate a sense of urgency and a need to act. They are not ringing the alarm bells alone. Scientists and scientific bodies, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), have played an instrumental role in accurately emphasizing the urgent need for action to avoid irreversible tipping points and climate catastrophe. In 2018,

the IPCC released a special report, warning that transformational action would be necessary within 12 years to keep global average temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius and avoid the worst impacts of climate change (Watts 2018). This report only further strengthened the climate movement's case. In 2019, before UN climate negotiations, millions of young activists around the world, including half a million in the United States, took to the street in the form of climate strikes to build pressure for political action (Neuman 2019; Fisher 2021, 115). These strikes brought attention and even more energy to the domestic climate movement, which has grown and developed significantly since the 1990s. This can be seen as the product of a decadelong shift towards the grassroots, lending credibility towards theoretical approaches that embrace protest. Writing in the early 2010s, O'Neill explored this change, "Even the climate change movement, which began as a relatively elite movement designed to inform policy makers of climate science and convince them of the need for action, has recently become far more populist" (O'Neill 2012, 118). Throughout the 2010s, the modern climate movement continued to gravitate away from its elite roots, becoming a more effective movement as it broadens its appeal.

Given alterations in the strategy of the climate movement, it is useful to explore other social movement theories that can better explain this shift. Another major challenge to resource mobilization and political process models was the rise of 'New Social Movement' (NSM) theory. Emerging in Europe, this theoretical innovation focused much more on the role collective identity plays in social movement participation. The term 'new social movements' is used to define the different social movements that emerged in the second half of the 20th century that were seen as less class-based than previous eras of social movement organizing, including the environmental movement. There has been a lot of disagreement within the field about what exactly counts as a new social movement and if there truly was a shift from class-based

organizing to nonclass-based organizing (Buechler 1995). However, the rise of new social movement theory is less important for its division of old versus new and more important for the role it played in the development of collective identity theory. Sociologists claimed social movement scholars failed to see the important role identity plays within social movements and began to push the discipline to flesh out this relationship. Since movements are made up of people, a failure to recognize the humanity in their actions will result in misinterpretations of their decisions. As such, I turn towards collective identity theorists, arguing the climate movement's identity shifted significantly throughout the 2010s resulting in a stronger movement. Gamson (1991) highlights the powerful role that collective identity plays within movements, writing "The best long-run guarantor of democratic participation in a movement is a collective identity that incorporates the idea of people as collective agents of their own destiny, and adopts a practice that encourages them to be active and collaborative" (40). In line with Gamson, I find activist empowerment to be integral to building and sustaining grassroots momentum in the climate movement.

Unfortunately, definitions of collective identity and identity more generally, have been muddled and often seen as too abstract, thus lacking concrete explanatory power (Polletta 2001). Collective identity is an overarching term that is often used to describe a variety of different types of identities that are cultivated within social movement spaces. In an identity typology that I will explore more in Chapter 2, I break down collective identity into movement, organizational, and activist identities. Central to my argument is that identity, especially organizational identity, plays an integral role in the study of social movements. Organizational identity is the culmination of several variables that influence both how members within the organization and people/groups outside of the organization perceive it. In previous research on the climate

movement, five variables were integral to understanding organizational identity, specifically politics, claims, tactics, structural dynamics, and confidence/clarity of identity (Rissmiller 2021, Unpublished). These variables likely retain their importance when studying other social movements, but that will be discussed further in Chapter 5. Movement identity refers how a movement views itself and is perceived by others based on their values, beliefs, political orientation, interaction with the public, as well as the culmination of the effects of different tactics used within the movement. Movement identity is not inherently the sum of all the organizational identities within the movement. With clear and concrete typologies, we can simultaneously clarify our understanding of collective identity and strengthen its explanatory power as a component of social movement theory. Both organizational and movement identity are integral to how and why activists engage in social movements. While organizational and movement identity can be pivotal to movements succeeding in achieving their political goals, both can also constrain a movement's appeal and influence on American politics and the institutions they must overcome.

The Influential Role of Justice Movements & Social Movement Spillover

Historically, the entrenched environmental movement failed to advocate for people of color, indigenous peoples, the working class, and other marginalized groups. This failure has weighed on the environmental movement for decades and continues to be a barrier to justice and equity. Many marginalized populations organized to form the environmental justice movement, often attributed as spillover from the civil rights movement (Schlosberg 2007, 47). This separate but related social movement emerged in the 1980s to raise awareness to the maldistribution of environmental benefits, hazards, and decision-making power at the expense of communities of color and poor communities. The environmental movement and environmental justice movement

have had a tenuous relationship over the last forty years; however, progress has been made to improve this relationship. Notably, the climate movement and the climate justice movement have emerged from these two movements as well. For years, the climate movement appeared to be making the same mistake as the environmental movement when it came to disregarding justice.

However, I contend much of the modern climate movement has adopted a justice frame, developed by the environmental justice movement. This frame has been integral to the accumulation and utilization of political power within the climate movement. The line between the climate justice movement and the climate movement more difficult to see than the historical division between the environmental and environmental justice movements. While this is a study of the climate movement, it would be incomplete without understanding the influence that other social movements that have had on the climate movement. Additionally, many of the activists and organizations within this study identify as a part of the climate justice movement or frequently center climate justice in their framing. Figure 2 displays how social movement spillover shifted the climate movement's identity over time.

Besides the influence of environmental and climate justice movements, the contemporary climate movement has been influenced by a collection of other interrelated social movements

The Development of the Climate Movement:

Eras	Description	Time Period	Status
#1: Access-Oriented Era	An offshoot of the environmental movement establishes the climate movement.	1988 - 2010	Completed
#2: The Second Wave of Spillover	Reckoning period where movement grapples with shortcomings.	2010 - 2017	Completed
#3: A Green New Deal paradigm	A progressive, grassroots, political, youthful, justice-oriented movement emerges.	2017 - present	In progress

Figure 2: This graphic displays the two phases of spillover that have contributed to the movement's emergence and development.

including civil rights, labor, Occupy, ACT UP, and the broader environmental movement. Throughout this thesis, I argue these dynamics are integral to understanding the political impacts of the climate movement and how the climate movement could influence future social movement efforts. The goal of this thesis is to develop our understanding of the climate movement in the United States and, through that assessment, theories and concepts within social movement studies. This includes conceptual clarifications of what social movement impacts are and how they are generated in the United States. Throughout this thesis, I argue that exploring the strategies, impacts, and power behind social movements is integral to understanding past and generating future political change.

Gaps in Previous Research & My Activist-Scholar Approach

In this research, I use a movement-relevant theoretical approach, defined as the practice of generating 'usable' theory for activists, in the hopes of bridging the divide between activists and scholars (Bevington 2005, 189). By adopting this approach and combining insights from both political process and collective identity theory, this thesis speaks to previous shortcomings in social movement literature and offers insights for filling newly identified gaps. Han and Barnett-Loro (2018) constructed a framework for research on movement-building that distinguishes three levels of intervention (micro, meso, macro) and three research focuses (trends, tactics, and strategies). They argue research must focus more on the meso (organization) and macro (structural) levels, with specific attention given to tactics and strategies. Additionally, they call for a greater exploration of the interaction between levels of intervention. They further acknowledge that movements operate under "persistent uncertainty, the need to focus on power not policy, and the complex interests of movement targets" (Han 2018, 2). As such, this thesis keeps power at the center of its discussion of the political impacts of the climate movement. It

does so by moving in and out of the different levels of intervention, primarily meso and macro, and focusing on strategies and trends within the movement. Throughout, a variety of theoretical shortcomings in social movement studies, including a lack of conceptual clarity and overly structuralist tendencies, will be addressed by the adoption of a movement-relevant theoretical approach. More precisely, I propose a typology for clarifying collective identity, a balance between structure and agency is struck by centering activist voices, and a model to understand the climate movement's political impacts to overcome shortcomings of previous research and bring the field into alignment with activist experiences. As such, this thesis provides both theoretical and practical insights to one of the most difficult questions that scholars face. This is also one of the most formidable obstacles to social movements themselves: answering the question of how to have the greatest political impact.

While many theorists study the exact strategies for creating change or building capacity, (e.g., momentum model, prisms of the people, political opportunity, mass protest model, etc) each must have an underlying perception of how our democratic institutions work or don't work, who and what they respond to, and why they exist in the first place. Given this, I argue theories of social movement change must reckon with the structure of democratic institutions—the anti-majoritarian tilt in the United States—if they hope to achieve movement objectives. Grounding this study of the climate movement in decades of insights from the field of social movement theory will allow us to further hone this crucial discipline, provide guidance to activists, and expand our knowledge of American Political Development. By expanding our understanding of the movement's political impacts with a myriad of qualitative data sources including semi-structured interviews with climate activists, observation of climate organizations, general organizational research, major shifts within American politics, political rhetoric, and media

content analysis, I paint a comprehensive picture of the movement's underlying strategies and subsequent political impacts.

It is essential scholars studying social movements sift through what works and why in every facet of social movement organizing so activists can be better prepared to change our society for the better. I contribute to the vast array of writings, both activist and academic, that assess the dynamic and complex nature of social movements by building on previous and generating original theoretical, empirical, and practical insights. While I am writing about climate activism at an academic institution, I also incorporate my years of experience as a climate and democracy activist. These hands-on experiences inform and strengthen my academic work. Thus, I approach this work as an activist-scholar, a strategy that was pioneered by environmental justice scholars, albeit found less frequently in other social movement scholarship. My activist-scholar and movement-relevant approaches work well together because it more accurately reflects how activists engage with the sociopolitical structures that surround them. Activists often include elements of several different social movement theories in their strategies, including many that they develop through their movement experiences (Engler 2016). I aim to develop a narrative of the climate movement that resonates with activists, not one that blinds understanding of the movement because of a dedication to theoretical purity.

The climate movement has employed insights from social movement studies to influence American politics. Central to my study of movements is that the field of social movement studies should be supported by both activists and scholars. Academics typically retroactively posit theories based on previous social movements, yet some study more recent movements. On the other hand, activists are scholars in their own way, often applying lessons learned from their own organizing experiences and experimenting with different models. Sometimes activists are

inspired by academia, but more commonly they find the insights of fellow activists to be more compelling. This thesis bridges insights from activists and academia to further knowledge on how social movements can and do generate political impacts in the United States. Recently, the climate movement has found significant success in utilizing lessons from the momentum model, as proposed by two activists, Mark and Paul Engler in *This is an Uprising*. The momentum model posits that combining mass protest organizing with structure-based organizing, through a repeated escalation cycle will be most effective at generating political power (Engler 2016). Activists in several social movements, including the Sunrise Movement in the climate space, worked closely with the founders of the momentum model to build their organizations and political power. Nevertheless, while perhaps the most effective organizing model in recent years, this model struggles to reckon with the incremental nature of policy change in American political development and the anti-majoritarian tilt of the country's political institutions. Fearing this weakness, one climate leader wondered aloud to me if their organization had overemphasized the momentum model. While the momentum model effectively creates political urgency through narrative change and galvanizing supporters through polarization, it struggles to generate a clear answer on how to overcome the status quo bias, elite and anti-majoritarian tilt of the American political system. Additionally, momentum can be expanded beyond its relatively narrow capacity-building application. The momentum model will be explored in detail in Chapter 2 and its influence within the climate movement will be a notable component of Chapter 3.

How do we Analyze Social Movements?

Establishing set levels of analysis creates guideposts in our study of social movements that allow us to distinguish shifts within different levels of activism. As I move through this research, I will be moving through multiple levels of analysis and intervention. Specifically, this

research explores the movement and organizational levels of analysis and the macro and meso levels of intervention. The levels of analysis (inter-movement, movement, organization, and individual) largely map onto Han and Barnett-Loro's (2018) levels of intervention (macro, meso, and micro). The inter-movement level of analysis includes multiple social movements, how they interact with one another, and how they experience and influence the political system that they all exist within. The movement level includes studies and questions about a specific social movement and how that movement changes over time. The organization level of analysis focuses on a specific organization or a few organizations within a social movement. Lastly, individual-level research centers the experiences of the individual. It explores questions about how partaking in the movement impacts an individual's perceived identity, understanding of self, or way of life. There are important nuances to these levels to consider. For example, there are steps between these levels (ex: coalitions). By adopting this 'levels of analysis' approach, we can establish a more comprehensive picture, rather than focusing purely on one level of organizing. I argue that doing the latter would fail to develop a comprehensive understanding of the movement. These levels of analysis are also useful when exploring the different ways in which the movement is influencing politics.

Understanding the political impacts of a social movement is one of the most challenging questions facing the field. Early on Gamson proposed a success-based model, which identified twelve variables likely to contribute to a movement achieving its goals or having its vision incorporated into the policy regime (Gamson 1990). This model made little room for a more dynamic view of movement impacts, including unintentional ones. As a result, the scholarship has largely moved away from Gamson's understanding of success. Amenta (2010) argues historical analysis is an effective scholarly method to understand the impacts of a movement

(300). While this is useful for the academy, it does not meet the needs of activists of the movement under study, because they need real-time analysis of their movement's impacts and associated strategies so they can innovate before the climate crisis reaches irreversible tipping points. Facing one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century, climate activists need analyses of strategies and impacts while the movement is still active. Instead of waiting until the movement is history, I contend an assessment both of historical movements, recent developments, and real-time perspectives are the most effective methodological approach for developing research that is both theoretical novel and practically useful for activists. This strengthens the practical and theoretical claims that I make in measuring the political impacts of the climate movement, a question that social movement theorists, political actors, the media, and activists continue to grapple with. I examine it throughout this study.

Previous research offers insights on how to go about this research. Amenta et al. (2010) show the study of social movement impacts has gained more attention in recent years with limited consensus on movement consequences. Specifically, 38 articles on the political consequences of social movements were published in the top 4 journals between 2001 and 2009 without a consensus (Amenta et al. 2010, 288). Despite this growth in literature, Amenta et al. (2010) note unresolved questions persist in this subsection of social movement research, including the question of how to measure *how* influential movements are. At the same time, conceptual innovations have occurred in attempting to grasp the political consequence of social movements. Scholars have moved beyond the success model because of its narrow interpretation of social movement impacts (Amenta et al. 2010, 290). Additionally, scholars have gravitated towards political mediated models that emphasizing there is no one-size fits all combination of variables – including organization strategy, structure, or political context that inherently favors

challengers to the status quo (Amenta et al. 2010, 296). Lastly, Amenta et al. (2010) notes the

methodological difficulties associated with studying social movement impacts.

A Breakdown of the Following Chapters:

Chapter 2 delves further into the social movement theory and other theoretical

background that grounds this study of the climate movement. It will also begin to provide some

of the theoretical insights proposed by this study into the climate movement. The explanatory

power of these insights will be explored in-depth in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 studies the political impacts, tactics, identities, rhetorical strategies, and goals

of the climate movement from the perspective of 8 prominent national climate organizations,

through semi-structured interviews with top activists at these organizations and data gathered

from observation of these climate organizations. This research allows us to ground our

understanding of progress in the eyes of the activists themselves.

Chapter 4 analyzes the evolution of the rhetoric and behavior of political actors

(politicians/political parties), the media, and the public to understand the political impacts of the

climate movement. Despite facing formidable challenges to impacting politics, this research will

help us understand the profound political impacts of the climate movement thus far.

Chapter 5 presents a vision for a future and highlights the ways in which this study

expands our knowledge of the climate movement and social movement theory. This chapter will

highlight the overarching insights of the thesis and act as a conclusion.

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Chapter 2: Social Movement Theory and the Latest Era of Climate Activism

Solidarity at Standing Rock

In the spring of 2016, protesters began to gather at Standing Rock to oppose the Dakota Access Pipeline near Cannon Ball, North Dakota. Over the course of 2016, these protests became a national flashpoint for environmental justice, Indigenous rights, and climate activism. The proposed pipeline was originally expected to bend north of Bismarck, ND, but was rerouted over concerns that the state capitol's water supply would be polluted. The new proposed path would cut through disputed Sioux territory and travel under Lake Oahe, a lake-created by a dam on the Missouri River. The pipeline would be located less than a mile from the Standing Rock reservation (Aisch 2017). This raised fears that the water supply of the Sioux Tribe and other tribes along the Missouri River would be polluted by the seemingly inevitable leaks from the pipeline. Additionally, the proposed pipeline would trample over cultural and spiritual sites including burial grounds of the Sioux people continuing the dark legacy of colonial land dispossession by the United States (McKibben 2016; Lequesne 2019).

In a call to action, thousands of Indigenous people, including representatives from over 300 Indigenous tribes arrived at Standing Rock to protest the pipeline (Read 2016). Many described themselves as "Water Protectors" rather than protesters, professing a simple but crucial message: Water is life. Over time, the Indigenous protectors were joined by environmental activists from around the country determined to defend Indigenous rights and protect the water supply from the harmful fossil fuel project. Through protest and prayer, this Indigenous-led resistance to the Dakota Access project, known as the NoDAPL movement, carried on

throughout the summer into the fall and winter. Activists were met with police violence, including tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, water hoses, armored vehicles, and K-9 units. Over the course of months hundreds were arrested (Skalicky 2016). The chairman of Standing Rock Sioux, Dave Archambault II, requested the Justice Department investigate possible civil rights violations in the police response to the peaceful protests (Healy 2016). Reflecting on the pipeline battle, the prominent climate activist, Bill McKibben wrote, "We shocked the conscience of the nation during the fight over the Dakota Access Pipeline, when Americans saw vivid images of police officers hosing down Native American protesters in the frigid Dakota winter, as they silently insisted that water is life" (Prakash 2020, 59). Activists from 350.org, a climate advocacy organization that McKibben founded, played a supportive role at the camps established as a launching ground for the protests and a place of rest for the protestors (McKibben 2016). Indigenous activists and non-Indigenous allies protested into the winter months as snowstorms blanketed the area.

The activists' months long uproar brought needed attention to the pipeline project and provided time for the Sioux tribe to pursue tactics besides direct action. The legal and political battles surrounding the Dakota Access Pipeline have continued for years. In December 2016, the Army Corps of Engineers denied the pipeline company from drilling underneath the Missouri River. The Corps decided to begin a 2-year long environmental impact review to examine whether to move or cancel the pipeline project, which the activists had been demanding from the start (Meyer 2016). Four days into his presidency in January 2017, President Trump signed an executive memorandum to fast track the project and oil began flowing through the pipeline by June 2017. However, in recent years the Indigenous protectors began to win substantial legal victories. In 2020, a federal judge ordered for a stronger environmental review as the previous

attempts had been deemed inadequate. The judge's ruling also required that the pipeline be emptied of oil by August of that year (Fortin 2020). In 2022, the Supreme Court, despite its conservative tilt, upheld the lower court ruling and rejected the pipeline company's appeal (Lakhani 2022). The Indigenous tribes outlasted the Trump Administration's hostility and successfully placed the pipeline in jeopardy of being shut down for good.

Even at the time of the Standing Rock protests in 2016, movement leaders recognized the historic importance of their mobilization. In the Washington Post, Tom Goldtooth, a tribal leader and the Executive Director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, was quoted saying, "'This pipeline represents something deeper...We have to start worrying about the rights of our future generations. We have to start looking at making a just transition as a society away from a fossil fuel economy'" (Sullivan 2016). The language of a 'just transition' has flourished throughout the climate movement. In *The Atlantic* Robinson Meyer, suggested Standing Rock could provide us with insight into the future of the American environmental movement. This was a pivotal moment for the shifting climate movement and the larger environmental activist world. Reflecting on the events at Standing Rock four years later, Julian Brave NoiseCat, an Indigenous activist, wrote, "For a decade, pipeline politics shifted the center of gravity in the environmental movement," noting the significant role of Standing Rock, NoiseCat continues, "In 2016, more than 1 million people checked in at Standing Rock in solidarity with the fight against Dakota Access" (Prakash 2020, 123).

Alongside these established impacts, this moment is exemplary in terms of its influence on the climate movement. As I highlight in this chapter, Dakota Access, Keystone XL, and other pipeline battles led by frontline communities contributed to an integral shift in the climate movement's identity towards justice and centering the frontlines. By making space for the

exchange of ideas, strategies, and tactics, protests are an integral vehicle for the spillover effect to occur. The spillover of a justice frame within the climate movement has become a key component of its identity and to the movement's impacts in recent years. Yet, collaboration between the climate movement and justice movements was not always the case. For decades, the climate movement ignored the teachings and experiences of other social movements, particularly the environmental justice movement.

Where Were the Grassroots?

Drawing from forty years of social movement theory, McAdam (2017), mainly employing political process theory, identifies three explanations for why the climate movement in the United States has historically failed to generate significant grassroots activism: political opportunities and constraints, the mobilizing structures, and the framing processes (McAdam 2017), 193). The political opportunities of the movement are constrained by the increasingly dominant and conservative Republican Party, partisan polarization and gridlock, and money-in-politics. Regarding mobilizing structures, resource mobilization holds that well-resourced organizations are crucial to movement success. Similarly, political process theorists argue mobilizing institutions are necessary for movement emergence. McAdam (2017) notes the mobilizing institutions in the climate space were inadequate for grassroots emergence. However, other theorists point to the fact that these organizations often become hesitant to engage in sustained disruptive action, which they argue is crucial for creating change (McAdam 2017, 199). McAdam concludes, "the failure to achieve any significant legislative or policy breakthroughs on the issue at the federal level has to be seen as a stark rebuke to the institutionalized movement" (McAdam 2017, 199). Simply put, McAdam (2017) identifies the cons of the first phase of spillover described in the previous section. Lastly, McAdam argues that

a lack of identity ownership over the issue and the dominant distant future narrative and emotional distance suppress movement organizing (McAdam 2017). In other words, non-movement actors did not feel a need to get involved or act on climate change, because the urgency of the issue was not effectively emphasized in movement framing.

In recent years, the climate movement transformed in several noticeable ways, allowing them to transcend these barriers to accruing power and impact. Three interconnected developments exemplify this change: the surge of the Sunrise Movement and other youth-led organizations, an embrace of political polarization meaning an abandonment of bipartisan policy development, and the prominent rise of the Green New Deal, which encapsulated many elements of the second spillover phase. The main impact of these developments *within* the movement include: the creation of powerful organizational identities and a movement identity that resonated with both activists and politics. In terms of *output*, this has resulted in a more politically powerful, confrontational, and people-powered movement. The movement has accrued power because its narratives, both regarding the problem and the vision for the future, resonate more with the grassroots activists than the previous technocratic approach. In recent years, the movement had gained momentum, forcing the Democratic Party to take climate action more seriously. This identity shift within the movement, driven in large part by effective organizational identities, is integral to understanding the political impacts of the modern climate movement. I focus extensively on the modern climate movement, defined here as the movement since 2017, as it represents the materialization of a new era of climate organizing in large part due to the emergence of these new organizational and movement identities. While events prior to 2016 were integral to the emergence of these identities, as well as to the political environment

that the movement operates within, the climate movement impact was largely limited until this inflection point (McAdam 2017).

Justice Gains Ground in the Movement

After the election of President Obama in 2008, the Democratic-controlled government took up climate legislation, spearheaded by Representative Waxman (D-CA) and Senator Markey (D-MA). Throughout 2009, negotiations on the bill pursued and it passed the House of Representatives. Yet, the bill never saw a vote in the Senate as it became clear it could not overcome the Senate filibuster. After the institutionalized movement of the first phase could not get the Waxman-Markey bill passed during the early years of the Obama Administration, a cohort of other social movements, actively and passively, encouraged the climate movement to incorporate more resonate frames and strategies through a phenomenon known as social movement spillover. This term describes the ways in which contemporary movements influence the ideas, strategies, and tactics, of present movements. On top of this, it describes how past movements can generate a downstream spillover effect thus continuing to influence modern day organizing. Meyer & Whitter (1994) offer the most comprehensive exploration of this crucial concept and provide a useful bridge between collective identity and political process theory, providing a holistic framework for analyzing movement-movement influence. Prior, research largely focused on influence within movements but rarely on how they impact one another. They identify four specific avenues where spillover can occur: "organizational coalitions, overlapping social movement communities, shared personnel, and changes in the external environment achieved by one movement that then shape subsequent movements" (Meyer 1994, 278). Within the climate movement, I argue all four of these avenues have been used. Meyer and Whittier (1994) separate spillover into two categories: the movement of resources (organizations and

personnel) and the movement of ideas and strategies. Both are present in the modern climate movement, but I contend the latter has played a more significant role in increasing the influence of the movement in recent years within the context of anti-majoritarian institutions in the United States.

While there have been many case studies that strengthen the theoretical argument for spillover as an effective explanation for movement-movement influence, there has yet to be a comprehensive exploration of the concept as it relates to the climate movement in the United States. Kuchler (2017) explores the shift in rhetoric of three environmental NGOs towards human rights and climate justice and away from ecological modernization, largely at the international level between 1997 and 2015. This can be described as a shift in framing, the process by which issues, events, or conditions are given meaning and understood through the development of narratives, or 'frames'. Generally, a frame provides an interpretation of the problem and how it should be resolved to a broader audience. Movement frames are both anchored by empirical events and constrained by sociopolitical and cultural dynamics including ideologies, narratives, values, and beliefs (Snow & Soule 2010, 58). It is rare for a movement to develop and spread a frame in an uncontested political arena. Rather counter-movements, political opponents, and institutions frequently interfere by establishing contradictory and competing lens from which to interpret the issue. Thus, to generate political impacts, a social movement must develop a frame that can broadly resonate with society and disseminate it through tactics, rhetoric, and identity. Frames are so integral to the identity of some social movements that the movement is named after the frame (ex. environmental justice). Creating frames that resonate with other activists, the media, politicians, and the broader public is a significant challenge for activists, but when developed, they are potent tools for creating political

change as they can alter the political common sense, thus generating new opportunities for shifting both power and policy.

In recent years, the dominant climate organizations in the United States have embraced a justice frame, similar to the human rights framing in the international movement. However, each movement developed their respective framing in distinct political contexts. While the spillover effect is integral to understanding both developments, it is important not to conflate the two, as each faced unique sociopolitical barriers for spillover to take hold in their respective political arenas. Domestically, there has yet to be a comprehensive study of the spillover effect's influence on the climate movement in the context of American politics. Here, I strengthen the theoretical potency of social movement spillover by demonstrating its deep ties with organizational gravitation and both movement and organizational identity. By organizational gravitation, I am referring to the dynamic that occurs when an organization rises to prominence within a movement and the other organizations shift towards its politics, tactics, structure, and/or identity. In the context of spillover, this process has pros and cons. It can amplify the spillover effect's influence within the movement by uplifting elements of organizational identity that are at least initially effective at mobilizing supporters and/or increasing political power. However, if the movement becomes too homogenic it will lose the dynamic nature important to movement identity. I argue spillover has shifted the climate movement's identity, specifically through the movement's embrace of a dominant justice frame and progressive politics, alongside its tactics, structure, and constituencies. These have been positive developments for the movement; the spillover effect and shifts in the movement's identity can largely be seen through organizations as they both play a prominent role in the climate movement and are a critical vehicle of social movement spillover (Davis 2005, Haydu 2020). Furthermore, the spillover of this justice frame is

not only integral to understanding the movement's identity in recent years but is also crucial to comprehending its political impacts.

Social movement spillover within the climate movement largely mirrors the two categories established by Meyer and Whittier (1994). The climate movement emerged in the late 20th century and was largely an intellectual effort to influence policymakers. In its first few decades, it was most heavily influenced by the environmental movement, which had become a political force since it emerged in the 1960s. However, as described in Chapter 1, the environmental movement had become largely institutionalized in subsequent decades. It continued to influence policymaking, but it embraced "inside-game" tactics including legal action and lobbying (Coglianese 2001; Brinkley 2022). This was effective at upholding the environmental policy regime that was established by the movement in the years prior (Coglianese 2001). However, it was not as effective at creating political energy and action around the issue of climate change. The 'Big Green' environmental organizations, as they are often called, began to spill into the climate movement as our knowledge of climate change and the threat that it poses increased. In large part, this first phase of spillover was dominated by Meyer and Whittier's (1994) first category: the movement of resources. Strategies and ideas came along with the movement of resources. However, they were not developed for the unique circumstances of the climate crisis or generating a broad-based grassroots movement. Thus, this initial spillover had mixed results on the movement's potential and accrued political power. The movement has matured significantly since this initial phase.

Throughout the late 2000s and 2010s, the modern climate movement continued to gravitate away from its elite roots, becoming a more effective movement as it broadens its appeal (O'Neill 2012, 118). As it was locked out of legislative power, the climate movement went

through a second phase of spillover from 2010-2017, which can be seen through the adoption of different frames, strategies, and politics, as well as organizational shifts including the establishment of new organizations (ex. Fridays for Future, Sunrise Movement, Extinction Rebellion) and alterations in the identity of old organizations (ex. the Sierra Club supporting a Green New Deal). Meyer and Whittier's (1994) second category exemplifies this spillover effect, the movement of ideas and strategies between movements, as a multitude of social movements reshaped the climate movement during these years. This second era of spillover came from a variety of other social movement influences, including the environmental justice, Indigenous environmental justice, civil rights, labor, and Occupy movements. Each movement has made its own mark on climate organizing resulting in the development of a stronger, more dynamic, movement able to contest political power and weaken fossil fuel hegemony. This method of movement learning and movement-movement influence is crucial for understanding both internal movement dynamics and its ability to accrue political power.

The environmental justice and Indigenous environmental justice movements have been integral to the adoption of a justice frame within the climate movement. These justice movements have and continue to impact the climate movement through coalitions and actions, like the Dakota Action Pipeline protests at Standing Rock described at the beginning of the chapter. The justice framing of the climate movement became baked into the text of the Green New Deal, the dominant progressive vision for addressing the climate crisis. Efforts to strengthen ties between environmental justice and climate movement organizations have continued in recent years. The Climate Forum is one such coalition, established in late 2018, it brought together 346 climate/environmental and environmental justice organizations around the Equitable & Just National Climate Platform to align around "a bold national climate policy

agenda that advances the goals of economic, racial, climate, and environmental justice" (Just

Climate n.d.). These efforts build off the decades of previous work between the environmental

and environmental justice movements including, for example, the Jemez Principles for

Democratic Organizing established by national environmental organizations and environmental

justice organizations in 1996 (Jemez Principles 1996). While more work is needed to bridge the

divide between the environmental and environmental justice movements, a divide perpetuated by

a history of racism and classism within the environmental movement, these efforts indicate

progress between the movements. This is one of many crucial impacts that can be attributed to

the environmental, Indigenous, and climate justice movements. At this point, it is quite difficult

to distinguish between the climate and climate justice movements. This phase of spillover

resulted in major shifts in movement and organizational identities, increasing the movement's

power as it challenged a political system dominated by anti-majoritarian institutions and status

quo bias. While the movement must further contend with these institutional challenges, this

movements-movement influence profoundly strengthened the movement's footing.

As the climate movement began to establish an identity distinct from its environmental

predecessors in the 2010s, it also began to frame the issue of climate through a justice lens. The

Green New Deal resolution, the strongest vision for addressing the climate crisis within the

movement acknowledges, "climate change, pollution, and environmental destruction have

exacerbated systemic racial, regional, social, environmental, and economic injustices by

disproportionately affecting indigenous communities, communities of color, migrant

communities..." and argues, "It is the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New

Deal... to promote justice and equity by stopping current, preventing future, and repairing

historic oppression of indigenous communities, communities of color..." (Res. 109). The

Indigenous and non-Indigenous environmental/climate justice movements worked tireless to promote a justice frame that spilled into the climate movement and has become the dominant frame for contextualizing and addressing the climate crisis within the movement as seen by its prominent role within coalitional efforts and the Green New Deal resolution.

Additionally, the labor movement has been influential in the climate movement in two distinct ways: establishing the jobs component of the jobs-justice paradigm that characterizes the modern movement and guiding climate activists toward structure-based organizing. Similarly to the environmental justice movements, the labor movement's influence can be seen in the text of the Green New Deal, which calls for a 10-year mobilization that "creates high-quality union jobs that pay prevailing wages, hires local workers, offer training and advancement opportunities, and guarantees wage and benefit parity for workers affected by the transition" and advocates for "strengthening and protecting the right of all workers to organize, unionize, and collectively bargain" (Res. 109). The labor movement was the last social movement to anchor the Democratic Party, thus it remains a historically powerful member of the Democratic coalition. It is crucial for the climate movement to gain the support of labor if they hope to use the Democratic Party as a vehicle to address the climate crisis (Schlozman 2015). Efforts to unify these two movements can be seen through prominent coalitions like the BlueGreen Alliance. The second major way in which the labor movement has influenced the climate movement has been through the teachings of structure-based movement organizing. Working together, these two movements could theoretically amplify both of their political impacts. Momentum organizing, a model that has gained steam in recent years, attempts to bridge mass protest organizing with structure-based organizing, by capturing the momentum created from mass protests in organizational structures and repeating the cycle (Engler 2016; Momentum Model). Many

leading climate activists have gone through Momentum training where they learn about the strategies of historic labor organizers like Saul Alinsky, best known for organizing the Industrial Areas Foundation, a prominent national community-based organization throughout much of the 20th century. The labor movement is both instructive to the climate movement regarding strategy and influential on the movement's frames and goals as seen by the Green New Deal.

Likewise, the civil rights movement and other racial justice movements are key sources of inspiration within the climate movement and 21st century progressive social movements generally. First, the environmental justice movement grew out of the civil rights movement and went on to influence the modern climate movement. This adds a multi-step movement influencing factor to the downstream effects of the social movement spillover framework. Second, tactics, strategy, and literature from the civil rights movement are still critical to social movement organizing including climate activism. For example, the Sunrise Movement, one of the most prominent climate organizations in the United States, adopts a hybrid strategy largely from studying the civil rights movement that incorporates both "inside-game" tactics like electoral politics and negotiating with politicians, with "outside-game" tactics including protesting in the streets, birddogging lawmakers, and civil disobedience (Marantz 2022, Grable 2022). Additionally, the Black Lives Matter movement, along with the Indigenous and non-Indigenous environmental justice movements, have challenged the climate movement to see the integral connection between racial justice and climate. In June 2020, in response to George Floyd's murder the interaction between these movements became even more apparent. The Sunrise Movement published an article on their website titled, "If you care about the Green New Deal, we need you to join the Movement for Black Lives" and within it they provided avenues for their activists to become active within the racial justice movement (Sunrise Movement 2020).

The influence of the civil rights movement and other racial justice movements on the climate movement has been crucial to creating a dynamic movement that more-adequately centers the disproportionately minority and low-income communities most endangered by the climate crisis (EPA Report 2021).

Finally, the Occupy Wall Street movement has shaped the climate movement in overlapping as well as unique ways. First, it joins the other movements in promoting an economic justice framing of the climate crisis. Second, it influences multiple internal movement dynamics, including the development of more participatory democratic processes within organizations, the prioritization of decentralized movement organizing, and the need to alter the political common sense. It influenced the climate movement both with its ideas and its personnel. In 2018, the Sunrise Movement emerged as a focal point within the climate movement. While the activists that started the organization had experience in other climate spaces like the divestment movement, an integral avenue for youth climate activists to influence and engage with the larger movement. At least one founder was part of the Occupy Wall Street movement years prior (Levitin 2021). This allowed for cross-movement ideas through another avenue that Meyer and Whittier (1994) note, shared personnel. The decentralized structure of the Occupy movement and the ability to command narratives around crucial issues through resonate frames were just a few of the strategies that Occupy contributed to the climate movement in the years that followed.

These movement-movement impacts are crucial to understanding the shifts that occurred in the climate movement throughout the 2010s. Not only was there the emergence of a new frame, seen by the 'jobs and justice' paradigm but there were also significant shifts in strategies, tactics, and organizations within the movement. Ultimately, this period was represented by major

shifts in the movement and organizational identities that profoundly altered the overarching

movement's ability to accrue political capital and influence to combat the climate crisis. Shifts

from this movement-movement influence have increased the climate movement's political

capabilities as they have created more space for strong organizational identities and grassroots

mobilization within the movement. By altering the movement, these other movements expanded

the constituencies that feel issue ownership over the climate crisis, addressing all three key

shortcomings identified by McAdam (2017).

The Center of Gravity Shifts

In the previous section, I detailed how, through social movement spillover, a myriad of

other movements influenced the climate movement mainly by pushing it to incorporate new

frames and employ different strategies. However, not all the developments within the movement

at this time were initiated by other movements. In the aftermath of the failed 2009 attempt to

pass the Waxman-Markey cap-and-trade legislation. Contrasting the Waxman-Markey

mobilization efforts with the efforts to pass healthcare reform in the early years of the Obama

Administration, Skocpol (2013) argues the institutionalized environmental movements'

investment in "insider bargaining" and lobbying efforts than building grassroots capacity limited

their potential (44). The Waxman-Markey cap-and-trade proposal was a moderate attempt to

address climate change and required a small amount of Republican Senate support to pass into

law. As the movement pursued the bipartisan route of past environmental efforts, they failed to

reconcile with the rising Tea Party movement and the accompanied anti-climate tilt of the

Republican Party (Skocpol 2013). Skocpol criticizes the movement's focus on public polling that

demonstrated passive support for climate policy rather than engaging with the public to generate

true grassroots energy (51). This is in part a function of the technocratic nature of the policy, as it

is difficult to communicate how a cap-and-trade program impacts the lives of everyday

Americans. Skocpol concludes, "Here, then, is the bottom line: The political tide can be changed

over the next decade only by the creation of a climate-change politics that includes broad popular

mobilization on the center left" (Skocpol 2013, 116). Skocpol's critique of the movement's weak

grassroots, is seen by many in the environmental movement as a seminal text to the modern

climate movement (Colman 2022). However, I contend the climate movement, and especially its

youth leaders, embraced people-powered politics in response to the Waxman-Markey debacle in

ways that reflected Skocpol's concerns about the movement's limited grassroots influence.

Before 2016, the climate movement was largely recovering from the 2009 Waxman-

Markey legislative battle and laying the groundwork for future political action. Despite a failure

to pass substantial legislation, the domestic climate movement pre-2016 was able to generate a

few major impacts: executive action on the climate crisis and establish a sympathetic public that

passively supports climate action. Executive climate action became a priority of executive action

in President Obama's second term. The EPA strengthened emissions regulations and proposed

the Clean Power Plan, which was held up by the courts. However, the incrementalistic approach

of the Obama Administration, in part the result of a hostile Congress and a weak climate

movement, was not inspiring to activists nor effective at addressing the existential threat of the

climate crisis. The problem was only going to get worse.

In 2016, two events stand out for the prominent role they played in shaping the

movement: the election of Donald Trump as president and the brave mobilizations at Standing

Rock. Detailed at the beginning of this chapter, the Standing Rock protests, lasting most of 2016,

showed the resilience of grassroots, frontline-centered, justice-oriented activism. They were an

inspiration and a call to action for many within the climate movement. In fact, Representative

Ocasio-Cortez, the original Green New Deal champion, credits Standing Rock for profoundly shaping her views on the climate crisis (Prakash 2020, 59). The protests also encouraged climate activists to center justice and frontline communities in their response to the climate crisis. The inspiration of the Dakota Access protests accompanied by fear of Donald Trump's anti-climate agenda and a public that consistently wanted action of the climate crisis, led to increased mobilization potential around the climate crisis (Fisher 2021).

Yet, mobilizing potential is not the same as actual mass mobilization. As McAdam (2017) and Skocpol (2013) emphasize, the movement had many shortcomings including a lack of grassroots power caused, in part, by weak identity ownership and ineffective frames. These shortcomings compounded with constrained political opportunity as an increasingly conservative Republican Party opposed climate action and concentrated political power in the hands of corporations and the elites. The fossil fuel industry's close relationship with the Republican Party appeared to pay off in the Trump Administration as Trump pulled the United States out of the Paris Agreement, appointed Rex Tillerson, the CEO of ExxonMobil to the Secretary of State position, and worked tirelessly to roll back the environmental and climate efforts of the Obama Administration (Fisher 2020).

Since 2017, there has been a burst of new climate organizations all inhabiting different niches within the movement. Between 2017 and 2018, three new and notable climate organizations emerged, each exemplifying different elements of the reimagined movement identity: Sunrise Movement, Fridays for Future, and Extinction Rebellion. In 2018, a year after its founding, Sunrise gained a prominent position within the climate movement which, because of its powerful organizational identity, focused on a multi-faceted youth empowerment and justice frame, Green New Deal vision, passionate partisan politics, and strategic employment of

momentum politics. While in many ways, the Sunrise Movement represents a confluence of social movement spillover, leveraging partisan politics, and the growing youth movement, it is not the only new organization that has helped shift the movement identity towards one that is distinct from the institutional climate movements origins. Greta Thunberg, a young activist from Sweden, created the youth-focused organization Fridays for Future which established dozens of chapters in the United States. It takes a less partisan approach to organizing but nevertheless emphasizes its youth identity. Extinction Rebellion was another organization that rose to prominence in European climate activism, however, it struggled to establish itself in the United States. Extinction Rebellion embraces confrontation but largely shuns electoral politics. The organization is well-known for their theatrical and often disruptive organizing tactics. This strategy is theoretically effective at emphasizing the urgency of the crisis (Social Change Lab, n.d.). While all three of these organizations prioritized people-powered activism, other organizations emerged that continued to focus almost exclusively on the "inside-game". For example, Evergreen Action, emerging out of Governor Inslee's failed 2020 Presidential bid, primarily accrued influence inside the beltway. Evergreen prioritizes policy expertise and narrative change and only plays a supportive role to other organizations, as they take the lead on direct action.

The evolving movement identity, led largely by the arrival of new organizations, is more confrontational, openly partisan, young, and grassroots. It stands in stark contrast to the institutional, incremental, and "inside-game" oriented movement of the previous decades. These developments had a ripple effect throughout existing movement organizations. Older organizations began to adapt their organizational identity in response to these new movements, including their approach to party politics. For example, Greenpeace supported Senator Ed

Markey, the sponsor of the Green New Deal in the Senate, in his primary election against Rep.

Joe Kennedy despite having never engaging in electoral politics in the 50 years prior. (Colman

2022) Between 2014 and 2018, the League of Conservation Voters added a whole host of

progressive issues in its annual Environmental Scorecard including voting rights, immigration,

and environmental justice. In 2015, the Sierra Club began to more adequately center racial and

environmental justice as its new board president came from the environmental justice movement.

Their newest Executive Director is a long-time civil rights activist (Cruz 2023). With the help of

the previous Executive Director, the Sierra Club became further aligned with the Democratic

Party over the course of the Trump-era and in 2021 the organization announced its support for

reparations, a key racial justice priority (Colman 2022). The shifting identities of many

entrenched environmental-turned-climate organizations throughout the 2010s was caused by a

culmination of factors including the failure to pass the Waxman-Markey bill, social movement

spillover, an embrace of partisan politics, and learning from new organizations that rose to

prominence within the movement.

The shift in the makeup of the primary organizations within the climate movement can

been seen through the press coverage of the climate movement. While generating press does not

necessarily mean that an organization is inherently more influential, it is frequently a stated goal

within social movements, including the climate movement. Figure 3 displays the number of

appearances of ten major climate organizations in the New York Times from 2008 through 2022.

The New York Times is not known amongst activists for its coverage of social movements, so it

is quite impressive that some of the newer organizations even appear on this graph. Additionally,

the older organizations have multiple advantages when it comes to sustaining press coverage.

They are likely to have established relationships with reporters, are seen as more institutionally

acceptable as they are generally less confrontational, and many of them are from the environmental movement and have only transitioned to climate in recent decades. This means that they could still be generating press coverage due to their efforts within the still well-established environmental movement. Looking at 2020, three years after its founding, the Sunrise Movement generated more New York Times appearances than any of the other organizations in this dataset. The center of gravity has clearly shifted.
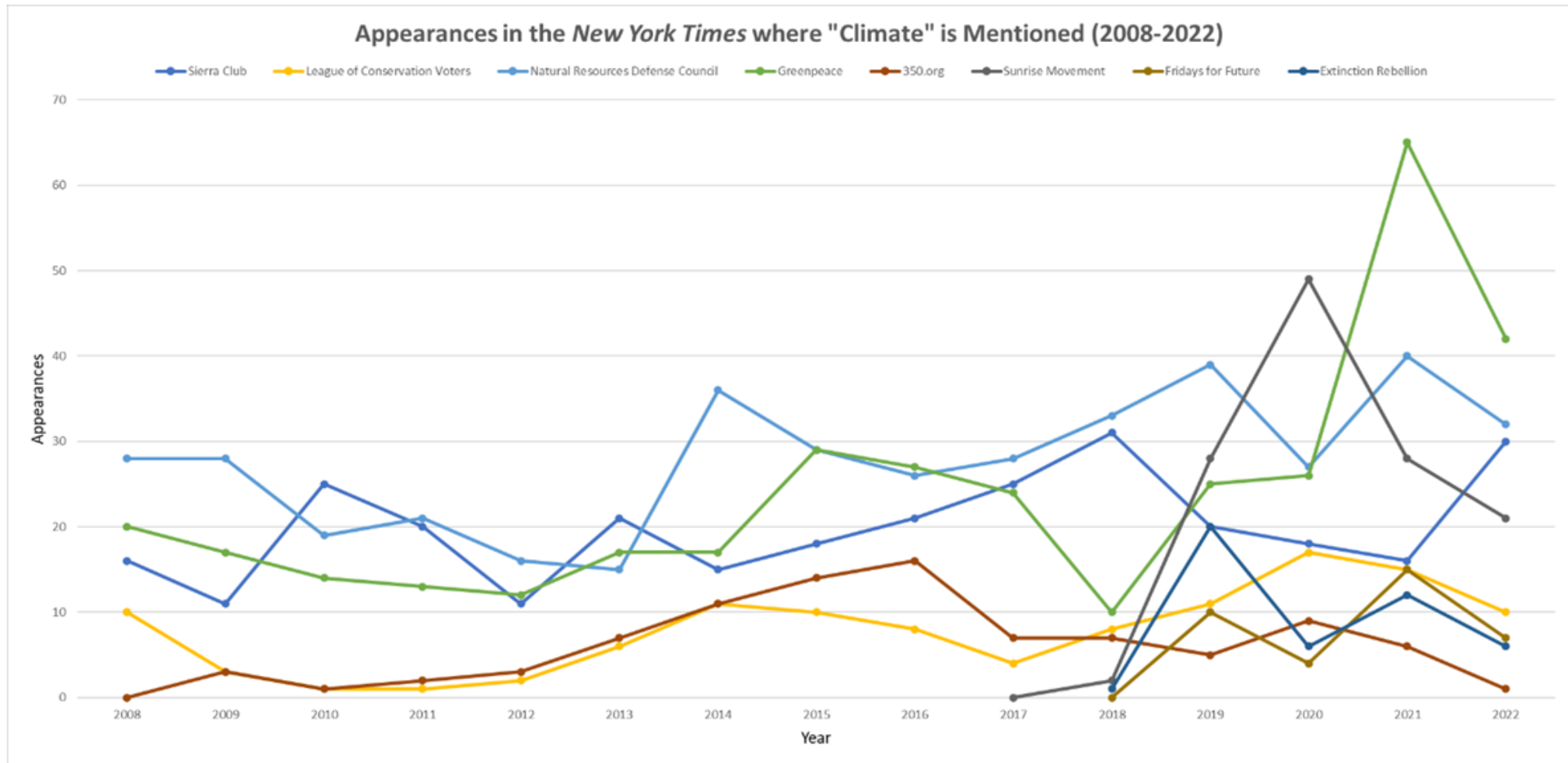
Figure 3: This chart displays the frequency at which 8 top climate organizations appeared in the New York Times in Conjunction with "Climate" from 2008 to 2022

Collective Identity Explained

Following the guidance of decades of new social movement theory, I explore this shift in the center of gravity of the climate movement through the lens of collective identity, specifically movement and organizational identity. Sociologists have explored collective identity in the hopes of filling in gaps present in both resource mobilization and political process theories. However, the concept of collective identity has been quite muddled. Jasper and Polletta (2001) highlight the impacts of these definitional struggles: "As a result of this definitional catholicity, key questions have been obscured. To what extent are collective identities constructed in and through protest rather than preceding it? Is the identity a group projects publicly the same one that its members experience? Are collective identities imposed on groups or invented by them? Do individuals choose collective identities to maximize their self-interest or do interests flow from identities? How is collective identity different from ideology? From interest? From solidarity?" (Polletta 2001, 285). Considering these questions, I propose a hybrid typology for understanding
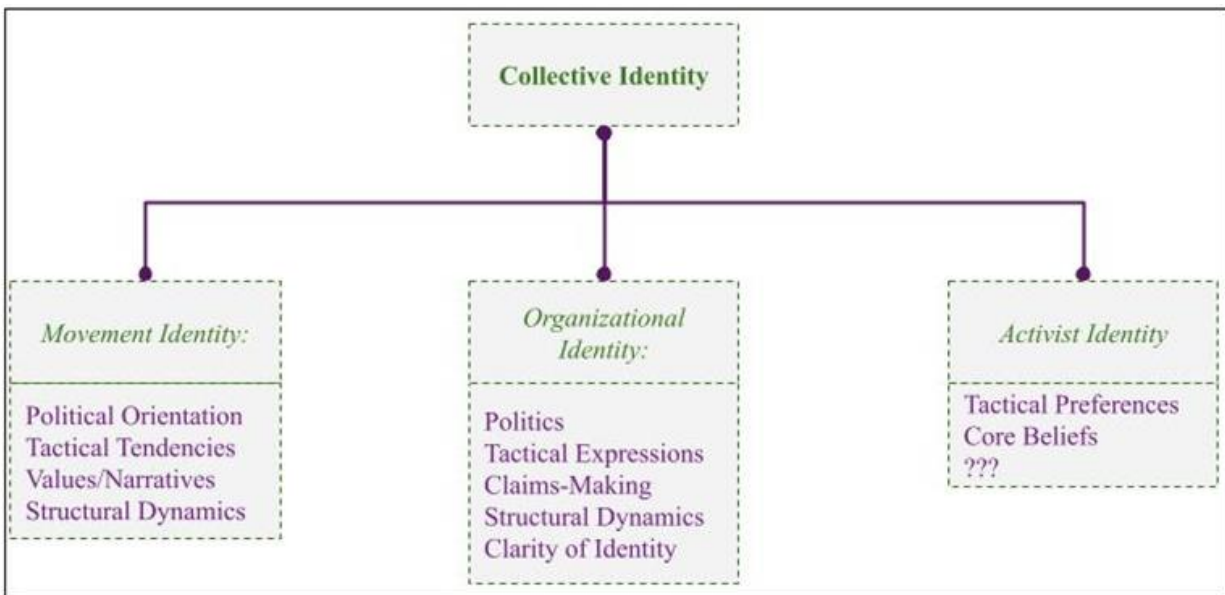
Figure 4: This graphic illustrates our proposed typology for understanding collective identity.

collective identity, specifically by breaking the concept into movement, organizational, and activist identity (pictured in Figure 4). This combines insights from Gamson (1991) and Jasper (1997, Polletta 2001) who both developed their own collective identity typologies. I argue this breakdown is useful for understanding the shifts within the climate movement as it leaves room for differing identity variables based on the level of analysis.

First, Gamson (1991) presents a typology for collective identity that has three layers: organizational, movement, and solidary (40). Solidary identity describes the social position of an individual, which could contribute to them feeling part of a collective, but not necessarily an organization or movement. He concludes the most powerful and enduring collective identities link the solidary, movement, and organizational layers of identity. By breaking down collective identity into three parts, Gamson allows us to better understand the different types of identity at play. He also highlights how "The best long-run guarantor of democratic participation in a movement is a collective identity that incorporates the idea of people as collective agents of their own destiny, and adopts a practice that encourages them to be active and collaborative" (Gamson 1991). Thus, fostering an empowering identity is critical to the success of the social movement. People are more likely to engage in a movement if they feel it can create change on the issues that they care about. This definition also provides explanatory power into the rise of youth climate organizations within the larger movement. While this also applies at the movement level, Gamson highlights the role it plays at the organizational level.

Gamson describes a concept that Breines (1982) calls 'prefigurative politics', which is the practice of creating relationships and communities that activists would like to see mirrored in their desired society. He argues organizations apply this vision of prefigurative politics to their internal operations (Gamson 1991, 48). In other words, if they are advocating for democratic

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principles or climate-friendly behaviors, then they might in turn generate those dynamics within their organization. The internal behaviors of an organization build into their organizational identity and influence both the effectiveness of the organization at generating and exerting political power as well as recruiting members who feel at home in the organizational identity. While some see prefigurative politics as harmful as it could hinder cut-throat political strategy which some argue could allow the movement to generate power more quickly, I believe a nuanced perspective to their effects within movements is necessary. Oftentimes, seemingly prefigurative features of a movement or organization operate as identity maintenance and make activists feel at home in the organization or movement. Gamson, with the help of Breines, provides us with this insight on the internal operations of organizations, as well as a typology for collective identity that we can use as a starting point for the typology I propose.

Jasper (1997) provides a different typology, but a few similarities persist between the two models. He separates collective identity into activist, organizational, and tactical identities. The hybrid typology proposed in this research utilizes Jasper's understanding of activist and organizational identity. Differing from Gamson, Jasper uses solidarity to describe an overarching force that influences and consolidates identity. Thus, solidarity shapes Jasper's three categories of identity and how they interact with one another. In his view, this solidarity contributes to the creation of a 'movement identity' that may serve much of the same function as a preexisting collective identity (Polletta 2001). Differing from Gamson, Jasper highlights activist identity, which he defines as identifying "with a broader activist subculture that might nourish several distinct movements" and tactical identity, which he describes as a preference "with using a particular tactic like direct action or being in some wing of a movement" (Jasper 1997, 87). Jasper separates tactical and organizational identity because some people may have greater

allegiance to a specific tactic and their perceived efficacy of said tactic, rather than feeling that way toward an organization. Recent activist-theorists have criticized strong allegiances to tactics since it can get in the way of developing larger more-effective frames and adapting to changing political dynamics (Smucker 2017). While Jasper's distinction between tactical and organizational identity is important, I argue that tactical preferences fit within organizational and activist identities, rather than representing a unique identity as they can be seen at individual, group, and movement levels.

Jasper and Polletta (2001) highlight the role of identity framing in generating activism. Identity exists internal to an organization or group, but it is also perceived by people and groups outside of the organization. The decisions activists make when it comes to framing their identity are critical to their ability to mobilize members. "How successfully groups frame their identities for the public thus affects their ability to recruit members and supporters, gain a public hearing, make alliances with other groups, and defuse opposition" (Polletta 2001, 295) Organizations need clarity in their identity if they are going to be able to successfully frame it to the public, politicians, and fellow activists. It is not just outside perception that matters. A shared internal understanding of the organization's identity or lack thereof will directly impact the efficacy of the organization in achieving its goals and satisfying its activists. Additionally, if the external and internal identities of an organization are out of alignment, then this lack of clarity can potentially hinder the organization. For example, exploring the important role that identity can play in movements, Lacombe (2019) finds that the National Rifle Association cultivates a 'distinct politicized gun owner social identity', which "informs how they [NRA and its supporters] view, and mobilize against, gun control legislation" (1353). By cultivating a distinct identity amongst its membership, the organization was able to generate grassroots support for its political agenda,

thus empowering it to counter efforts by its opposition movement on the left. This work illustrates the importance of cultivating identity for organizations as they attempt to expand their political influence and organizing capacity (Lacombe 2019, 1354).

Specifically, I highlight three types of identity in my typology: movement, organizational, and activist. Each of these levels of identity interacts with one another but are unique. I concur with Jasper that solidarity operates as an overarching force on collective identity. As such, my work focuses explicitly on two interrelated types of identity: movement and organizational. Movement identity is defined by how a movement views itself and is perceived by others based on their values, beliefs, political orientation, interaction with the public, and constituencies within the movement. Acknowledging the importance of identity in movement and the fact that organizations are the building blocks for the climate movement, I argue it is essential we better understand what organizational identity is, why organizations develop the identities that they do, and how this impacts their political power because it played an important role in the development of the modern climate movement.

Organizational identity is the culmination of several variables that characterize both how members within the group and people/organizations outside of the group perceive the organization. In both this and a previous study of the climate movement, these variables include: politics, claims, tactics, structural dynamics, and confidence/clarity of identity. The politics of the organization, most broadly describes their position on the political spectrum but also can include their specific positions on policies or legislative frameworks like a Green New Deal in the case of the climate movement. The politics of the organization factor directly into the vision of the organization, why people participate, and who they can work with in the political arena and movement. Next, the ability and strength of organizational claim-making about what the

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who they represent, what the problem is, and what power structures must do to address the problem, is integral to understanding an organization's identity. As Tilly and Tarrow write, "Claims range from timid requests to strident demands to direct attacks, just so long as they would, if realized, somehow affect the object's well-being, the object's interest" (Tilly 2015, 8). The choices that organizations make in regard to establishing claims are strategic in nature and directly influence how it is perceived by both political actors and the public.

The third variable that builds into organizational identity is their tactical preferences. Tactics are how organizations express themselves to the public, politicians, and any other targets they might have. Whether they are focused more on tactics that operate through the traditional political avenues or tactics that are outside of the norm is important when constructing their identity. Notably, organizational tactical preferences are different than individual tactical preferences that are incorporated into activist identities, although some similarities can translate from activist identities to organizational identities. Next, the structural dynamics of an organization play a critical role in constructing and maintaining an organization's identity. This can include the level of hierarchy within an organization, who has the power to make decisions, and how responsive an organization is to change. This variable can also include the levels at which they operate (ex. national, state, and local) and how these levels interact with one another. There are other factors that play an important role in the development of organizations. It also includes an organization's ability to dynamically learn from its own experiences as well as the experiences of others. Hahrie Han, Elizabeth McKenna, and Michelle Oyakawa, develop the concept of 'prisms of the people' through the exploration of leadership within six grassroots organizations. The three argue it is critical for organizations, and especially organizational leaders, to develop power through an independent base and cultivate learning loops (Han 2021,

125). An independent base of power is strategically important for grassroots and hybrid organizations, but its role in non-grassroots organizations is less clear. Although, McAdam's (2017) critique of the institutionalized climate movement provides evidence that movement spaces should prioritize grassroots organizing. Organizations that are unsuccessful at learning to be dynamic are unlikely to have the influence they desire. The main takeaway from their research is that it takes dynamic organizations (and dynamic leaders) to be successful in 21st century American political activism.

Lastly, the confidence/clarity an organization has in its own identity plays a crucial role in characterizing identity. Organizations bring together a variety of activists and often differing visions and strategies emerge. If conflicting organizational identities become too pronounced or there is a lack of faith in the identity, it will change both how activists within and people/organizations outside perceive that organization, thus altering its organizational identity. Prominent organizations have found their political identity and power weakened when internal divisions have become too pronounced. For example, Extinction Rebellion split into two organizations in the United States due to disagreements over climate justice.

These five variables (politics, claims, tactics, structural dynamics, and confidence/clarity of identity) are arguably the most important for understanding organizational identity in the climate movement, as they encapsulate the major features of how climate organizations tend to show up in the world. It is worth noting, elements of these variables show up frequently in social movement literature. For example, the learning loops that Han et al. see as critical to organizational success fall directly into the "structural dynamics" category of organizational identity. This collection of variables come from different elements of social movement literature, organizational theory, and practice. However, to my knowledge, they have not been put together

in this way to create organizational identity before. The overall purpose of the variables within organizational identity is to enhance our understanding of this aspect of the collective identity typology as well as enable us to compare different organizations and their positions within the larger movement It also provides organizations with a framework for exploring how they develop and maintain their identity, enabling them to make sure that they are clearly and consistently expressing themselves. It would be too simplistic to view movement identity as the sum of organizational identities, rather organizations help shape movement identity in a more nuanced manner. For example, if an organization rises to prominence within a movement that does not mean that they are the movement's identity, but they can pull the movement towards their powerful identity, a phenomenon I have termed *organizational gravitation*.

The last component of my typology, activist identity, comes from Jasper's typology. It describes a broader subculture amongst activists, which can impact multiple movements. This subculture is not monolithic. Activist identity can influence organizational identity and movement identity as both are built in large part by activists, however, neither identity level is the culmination of activist identities. This typology for understanding collective identity and specifically the movement and organizational levels will be employed extensively throughout this research as I argue it holds significant explanatory weight within the climate movement.

Tactics, as a subcategory of organizational identity, receive a greater attention than the other four variables, because they are how organizations actively interact with the broader society. However, as we see in the next chapter, this does not mean activists focus on tactics more than other variables. The greater attention on tactics is not meant to reduce the importance of the other variables. Tilly describes a general tactical repertoire as the total possible options that collective action agents can engage in at any given time (Tilly 1986). As Jasper states,

"*Tactics are rarely, if ever, neutral means about which protestors do not care. Tactics represent important routines, emotionally and morally salient in these people's lives*" (Jasper 1997, 237). Organizations prefer specific tactics; thus, their tactical repertoires (all possible tactics) are narrowed down further by their organizational identity. Organizations are more likely to continue to utilize tactics that work yes, but also tactics that align with their identity. Jasper highlights this distinction, "Different tactical tastes can lead to conflicts among different groups within the same movement, and conflicts within a single group, just as surely as differing goals can" (Jasper 1997, 240). This conflict emerges because the organizational identity is being stretched and challenged due to the tactical choices. Tactics play a critical role in organizational identity formation, maintenance, and evolution, as well as the external perception of organizations. Recent research on tactics has built on, "Piven and Cloward's (1977) classic statement on the institutionalization of social movements suggests that tactical innovation becomes stifled when movements become structured around formal organizations" (Wang 2016, 519). This would suggest that the more organizations are institutionalized, thus moderating a part of the movement, the more likely the organizations are to choose more institutionalized tactics to fit in with their less-dynamic organizational identity. However, organizations can resist the tendency to become institutionalized, especially if they are committed to maintaining a 'radical flank' within the movement. Large environmental organizations are entrenched enough in political power structure that they are constrained from leading bold nonviolent campaigns (Engler 2016, 28). In part, this contributed to the lack of grassroots mobilization structures that McAdam (2017) described. I utilize the language of this collective identity typology throughout this thesis to bring clarity to shifts within the climate movement.

Political Opportunities in an Anti-Majoritarian Democracy

The political environment plays an important role in mediating the political impacts of a social movement, a key argument behind the political process model (McAdam 1982; Amenta 2010). Other theorists from different schools of thought also emphasize the importance of the political context. Piven (1977) writes, "The main point, however, is simply that *the political impact of institutional disruptions depends upon electoral conditions.* Even serious disruptions, such as industrial strikes, will force concessions only when the calculus of electoral instability favors the protestors" (32). In the previous chapter, I highlighted a few of the anti-majoritarian mechanisms in the United States' federal political system that stack the deck against majoritarian social movements. This section explores how these mechanisms and others influence the political opportunities of the climate movement. I suggest many of these insights can also be applied to other majoritarian social movements operating in our political system. In social movement theory, political opportunity structures refer to how open or closed a political system is to change from challenger groups (Snow 2010, 66). It is often used to explore the possibility for social movement mobilization and impacts across different political systems. However, by exploring the political context in which a movement must navigate, we can generate valuable insights into why the movement has or has not achieved its goals and where its shortcoming may lie.

The political opportunities facing a social movement are rarely static nor fully independent of movement influence. Rather, political power and methods of generating change are constantly negotiated and renegotiated within the broader political arena. This is no different for the climate movement. The pre-2016 national climate movement's identity was failing to resonate with the grassroots in large part because of the movement's inside-the-beltway focus

and elite roots (Skocpol 2013; McAdam 2017; O'Neill 2012, 112). In turn, the movement was unable to generate the political power necessary to pass the Waxman-Markey bill and did not have the electoral power to expand Democratic majorities in Congress. Rather, Republicans won the House of Representatives in the 2010 midterms. With significant investments in state-level elections, they were also able to institute gerrymanders around the nation, cementing their power in the House for years to come (Daley 2016). In 2012, the Democrats won the national popular vote but that did not matter for regaining control of the House (Goedert 2014). Given the polarized nature of climate change within Washington, the climate movement turned its focus towards the Executive Branch, which was still occupied by a Democrat. Until Democrats regained full control over the legislative and executive branches, federal climate legislation became nearly impossible to pass. This did not reoccur until 2020. While the Democratic Party had slimmer majorities than it did in 2008-2010, the climate movement made significant changes in its identity, strategy, and subsequently its political power within the Democratic coalition during these intervening years.

The two major political parties in the United States are a crucial tool that effective social movements can utilize to set the agenda of the party and the nation, promote policy solutions, elect movement-friendly politicians, and achieve their political goals. In *When Movements Anchor Parties*, Daniel Schlozman proposes a new framework for understanding movement-party interactions including the coveted status of a movement becoming an "anchoring group" within a political party. Anchoring groups "exercise broad influence on national politics by virtue of the money, votes, and networks that they offer to the party with which they have allied" as well as, "shape parties' long-term trajectories by enacting favored policies and shaping parties' ideological development (Schlozman 2015, 3). While Schlozman focuses primarily on

the 20th century, this movement-party interaction can still be seen in the 21st century, however, it has occurred more at an ideological or multi-movement level than a single social movement and has been more overtly polarizing in nature. The rise of the conservative Tea Party movement in 2009 and 2010 forced the Republican Party to the right on a multitude of issues including climate change (Costley White 2020). This movement relied heavily on primary challenges to more establishment politicians. This tactic has been mirrored in recent years by the progressive movement within the Democratic Party (Rakich 2022). While neither of these movements have reached the anchoring status that Schlozman assigns to the labor movement and the Christian right, they exhibit another method for exerting influence over the two major American political parties and subsequently national politics in a highly polarized era. Specifically, they align with one of the two parties and then hold the partisan line with the implicit threat of primarying disloyal politicians. By aligning with other movements within the political party, they can increase their political pressure potential. In other words, a politician crossing one movement would theoretically have a multi-movement backlash.

Today, movements can utilize partisan polarization to their advantage in our political system. However, they must embrace the prominent role it plays before they can do so. Movements that are pushing for a bipartisan solution to a politically polarized issue will struggle significantly to achieve anything beyond incrementalism as the 2009 Waxman-Markey efforts displayed in catastrophic fashion. It is important to note, the issue does not necessarily have to be polarized within the national public. Rather the movement must recognize if the issue is polarized between the two political parties. While McAdam (2017) emphasized the constraining nature of polarization on the movement, in recent years the movement learned how to navigate this polarization effectively. If a movement leverages polarization to their advantage, they can

push a single political party to take a stance that more closely aligns with the movement on their chosen issue. The next step for the movement is to grow their power within the political party and force the party to take their demands seriously, by raising the issue's salience. Yet, in a polarized political environment within the context of a two-party system, both the party and the movement know it is nearly impossible that the movement will abandon the party in favor of the alternative party. This makes it much easier for the party to take the movement for granted and it is at this point that both social movements appear to falter, and grassroots political power is most important. The presence of anti-majoritarian institutions and mechanisms in American politics, including gerrymandering, makes it harder for majoritarian movements to punish legislators for unfavorable policy decisions.

Gerrymandering is yet another challenge to popular movements (Daley 2016), yet turning the political power of the climate movement into legislative accomplishments has been made significantly harder due to other anti-majoritarian mechanisms and tendencies as well, including the electoral college, states' rights, the Senate filibuster, and money-in-politics. The electoral college, and its winner-takes-all system of delegate distribution, reduces small-d democratic outcomes in several ways. First, as we have seen twice in the last two dozen years, a candidate does not have to win the popular vote to ascend to the presidency. Many activists on the left and within the climate movement were particularly frustrated by this outcome in 2016 when Trump became President despite receiving millions fewer votes nationally. Thus, he did not receive a majority mandate for his anti-climate agenda, nor any other aspect of his platform. On top of this, the electoral college encourages presidential campaigns to focus on battleground states that are not inherently representative of the nation more broadly. For example, it has been difficult for any presidential candidate to oppose fracking, a particular detriment form of fossil fuel

extraction, in recent elections. In 2020, YouGov found that despite Americans opposing fracking nationally by 9 percentage points, voters were nearly evenly split in key battleground states like Pennsylvania and Ohio (Sanders 2020). This discourages presidential candidates from taking a strong stance on the environmentally detrimental practice. Lastly, the electoral college amplifies the state-representation that the Senate is structured upon. Each state is provided electoral college delegates equivalent to the number of House members they have plus their two senate seats. The state's rights-tilt of Senate representation also produces antimajoritarian outcomes within the legislative body as each state is represented by two senators regardless of population, empowering states with small populations. This creates difficult math for achieving electoral majorities that support climate action in the Senate as rural states in recent elections have tended to vote Republican.

An even more formidable obstacle to action on the climate crisis is the Senate filibuster, which when blended with polarization, enshrines minority rule in the United States Senate. The filibuster creates a de-facto 60-vote threshold in the 100-member body for most legislation (Jentleson 2021, Fisk 1997). While the Waxman-Markey bill passed the House of Representatives, which operates with a simple majority, it was unable to reach the 60-vote threshold to overcome a filibuster by Republicans (Skocpol 2013). Under this system, rather than negotiate compromise legislation, the party in the minority is incentivized to obstruct the actions of the majority party, as they believe voters, frustrated with inaction, will blame the majority in the next election (Broockman n.d., Jentleson 2021). Over the years exceptions have been carved out of the filibuster, including a process known as budget reconciliation, so that the government could continue to function in a timely manner as it relates to budget issues. The climate movement and their allies within the Democratic Party were able to use this process to sidestep

the filibuster and pass the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022, the largest investment in climate action in the history of the United States. This strategy is uncapable of meeting the demands of the climate movement's transformative vision for the future as it is severely limited by Senate rules.

While navigating the peculiarities of the American legislative system, activists must also contend with the pervasive role of money-in-politics as the Supreme Court equated money with speech in *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010). The oil and gas industry gave $84 million to congressional candidates in the 2018 election cycle alone over double what they gave in the 2010 cycle. By studying campaign contributions from 1990-2018, Goldberg (2018) concluded that "the more a member of Congress votes against environmental policies, the more contributions they receive from oil and gas companies supporting their reelection" (Goldberg 2018). They also found that 88% of the industry's donations in 2018 went to Republican Party candidates up from 63% in 1990, displaying the polarization of the issue amongst the two major parties (Holden 2020). This is also an acknowledgement that their money is more effectively spent bolstering Republicans than dissuading Democrats. To pressure Democrats to oppose oil and gas donations, several climate organizations, including the Sunrise Movement, have required politicians to sign the 'No Fossil Fuel Money Pledge' to receive the organizations' endorsement. To achieve their goals activists must overcome or sidestep the anti-majoritarian impulses of the Legislative branch (gerrymandering, state-representation, the Senate filibuster, and money-in-politics) and their counterparts in the Executive branch (electoral college and money-in-politics) that constrain the movement's political opportunities.

The political opportunities of the grassroots climate movement are further challenged by counter-vailing social movements like the conservative legal movement and a status quo bias

that favors elite interests. The conservative legal movement, in large part an extension of the Christian right that anchors the Republican Party (Schlozman 2015), has accrued significant power in the judicial branch. This has not only made it more difficult for climate activists to utilize the judiciary to promote climate action, but also pushed the judicial institutions to be even more hostile to climate action (See *West Virginia v. EPA*). On top of these barriers to action in all three branches of government, the United States political system incorporates a status quo bias that makes rapid mobilization around a specific issue even more difficult to achieve. This can be seen through anti-majoritarian mechanisms like the Senate filibuster which promotes inaction unless a supermajority can be achieved, as well as more subtle phenomenon like the incumbency advantage present in our federal elections and the committee system within the legislature (Cox 1996; OpenSecrets n.d.). Overall, the American political system, due to the prominent role of antimajoritarian institutions and the interrelated status quo bias, makes it difficult for an insurgent social movement to generate political impacts. However, social movements are resilient and with effective political strategy, resonate identities, and learning from one another, they can generate substantive progress on their issue area.

The Momentum Model Proves Effective

While academics study social movements, activists generate their own contributions to this field. Given their hands-on experience with organizing, their insights often resonate more with their fellow activists and deserves greater scholarly attention. In *This is an Uprising*, activists Mark and Paul Engler (2016) proposed the 'momentum model' for social movement organizing. Building from this work, I complexify the Momentum model by highlighting the anti-majoritarian institutions that activists must contend with in the context of American politics.

These institutions are often resilient against the pillars on which the Englers' encourage activists to target. While the climate movement has navigated many of the pillars to achieve its goals, it has struggled to consistently permeate the halls of power. This suggests a strategic focus on specific pillars is necessary to overcome these anti-majoritarian tendencies within American politics. Additionally, I propose an expansion on the concept of momentum as a broader force within American politics. Momentum provides invaluable insights into how activists can accrue political power and exercise it to alter dominant institutions and power structures. Yet, I argue it can be strengthened when considered with other concepts in social movement studies including organizational/movement identity, social movement spillover, and a proper understanding of the anti-majoritarian power structures that complicate achieving majoritarian political goals.

The momentum model combines insights from a variety of movements, both domestically and internationally, including Optor in Serbia, the Global Justice Movement, the labor movement, and Occupy Wall Street. The Englers developed momentum training, which the Momentum Community continues to offer to activists across the progressive political social movement spectrum. Many of the leaders of some of the most prominent social movement organizations in recent years were trained in momentum, including many of the founders of the Sunrise Movement. In fact, on the Momentum Community website, Sunrise co-founder, Sara Blazevic writes "Momentum is the single most valuable training you can go to to advance your understanding of how social movements build power to win" (Our Community – Momentum n.d.). The influence of Momentum on the social movement community led *Vice* journalist Tyler Kingkade to title a 2019 piece on the nonprofit, "These Activists are Training Every Movement that Matters" (Kingkade 2019). The Momentum Community was started in 2014 and has incubated several social movement organizations and trained thousands of activists. In the fall of

2022, I participated in a 3-day Momentum 101 training along with dozens of other activists to expand my knowledge on the Momentum theory of change, which I was already familiar with from my previous climate activism.

By exploiting the dynamics of momentum in organizing, the model attempts to reconcile structure-based community organizing, which they largely associate with Saul Alinsky, the labor movement, and transactional politics, with mass protest theory, and its associated transformational politics, that Piven popularized in *Poor People's Movements* (1977). This pluralist or hybrid approach to organizing brings together seemingly disconnected elements of social movement organizing to change dominant institutions. The structure-based organizing has been bolstered by, in many respects, its academic counterpart: resource mobilization theory (Engler 2016). The Momentum model believes in a combination of mass protest and structure-based organizing, as outside strategies that organizations that should apply in conjunction with insider political efforts, including legislative advocacy and electoral campaigning. They advocate for the 'cycle of momentum' which involves an action, absorbing participants into movement organizations, then escalating with the next action, generating more support, with the cycle repeating itself. Additionally, they argue in favor of decentralized social movement organizations which unify activists through a 'movement DNA' rather than hierarchical power relationships within the organization (Engler 2016, 71). This relates to aspects of organizational identity described earlier in this chapter as the adoption of a decentralized movement DNA is one method of implementing organizational identity. They also find evidence for the "moment of the whirlwind" concept, first described by civil rights organizers, where the 'rules' of both mass protest and structure-based organizing no longer apply (Engler 2016, 177). Regarding politics, Momentum sees polarization as a strategy that provokes people to choose a side and generates

active support (Engler 2016, 233). It is a movement's job to harness polarization through popular demands that isolate the opponents and strengthen the active supporter base. They then advocate for weakening the 'pillars of support' that uphold the status quo, a concept developed by George Lakey and Robert Helvey. Pillars include the institutions within and outside the government as the pillars holding it up including military, media, business, churches, educational establishment (Engler 2016, 91-92). Momentum campaigns are measurable through polls more so than tangible wins as they are attempting to change public opinion on an issue (Engler 2016, 103). Overall, the Momentum model argues that weakening these pillars will result in progress on the movement's issue. While I agree with the overarching arguments of momentum, I argue it needs to engage with the prominent position of anti-majoritarian institutions more seriously and strategically.

A Model for Contesting Political Power

Bringing together the observations and theoretical contributions from activists and academics alike, I propose a comprehensive theoretical model for analyzing factors that contribute to social movements generating political impacts. This model operates at both the movement and organizational levels. This theoretical model (displayed in Figure 5) is meant to help navigate the different aspects a movement engages with our political system. It advocates for centering identity, political opportunity, and momentum in our study of social movement impacts and recognizing the influential role of social movement spillover within movement spaces. While it advocates for these features in our scholarship, this model is not meant to instruct movements on which identities to adopt. Rather, it provides them with another way to conceptualize how they operate within the status quo biased and anti-majoritarian institutions of American politics. Throughout this thesis, as I analyze the identity-shifts within the climate

movement, specific organizational and movement identities appear more effective than others. This may be true in the climate movement, but further research is necessary to see if there are similarities across social movements. In short, there is no silver bullet for cultivating an influential identity, especially as they are tied to the political context within which they are developed and reside.

The model can be broken into two overarching categories: movement variables and non-movement feedbacks. The first category is made up of three movement/organizational factors: momentum, identity, and political opportunity. Social movement spillover operates as an overarching force specifically on identity and opportunity at this level of the model. Additionally, these three factors interact with one another and combine to create a broader organizational or movement political strategy. This strategy is then filtered through the second

Figure 5: A Proposed model for mapping how elements of social movements influence impacts.
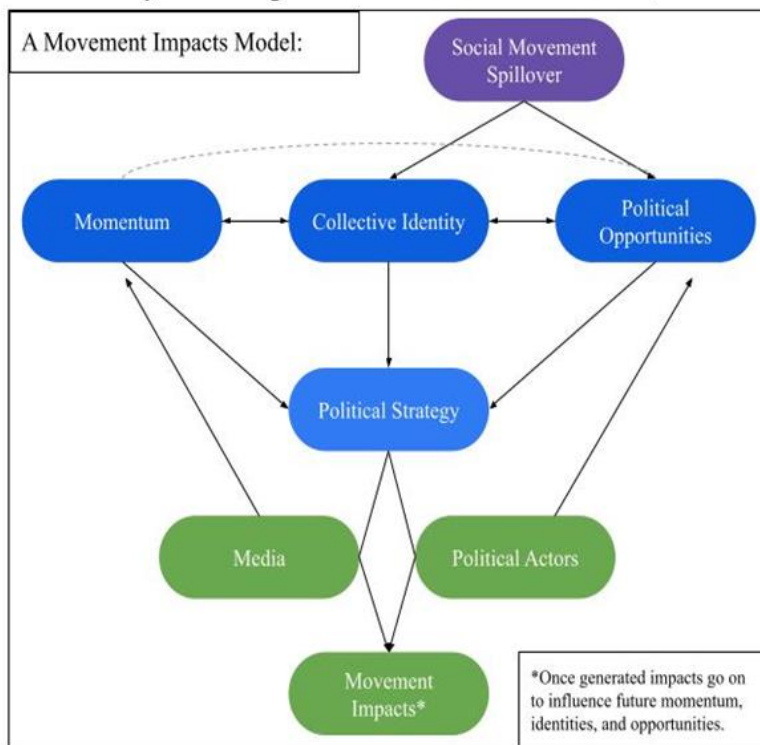
category, the political arena (including politicians, political parties, media, counter-movements, and the electorate), to generate the political impacts of the organization or movement. Social movements and organizations have little control over many of the model's components, including aspects of political opportunity, the media, and political actors. However, there are some areas where they have more control than others. Exploring the three starting factors, movements and organizations have the most control over identity, which is why is so integral to our understanding of movements. A movement must cultivate an identity that puts it at an advantage within the political context in which they are operating. Otherwise, even if their issue area is popular, they will fail to make substantial progress.

This model combines several elements of different academic and activist social movement theories. As stated earlier, the concept of momentum organizing was established in *This is an Uprising*, by activists Mark and Paul Engler. However, I argue we should explore the concept of momentum as a theory of change not just within movements, but also within politics more broadly. The legislative battles of the climate movement provide a glimpse into the role of momentum in passing bills at the federal level. Yet, even as momentum builds for political action both within the movement and within Washington, activists must rely on a mutual dedication to organizing. The development of resonate identities is integral to maintaining this level of political participation and mitigating the strains of political activism. Collective identity, including movement and organizational identity, has been explored by theorists for decades, most prominently the New Social Movement theorists. In this model, I rely on my hybrid typology for collective identity developed earlier in this chapter that combines insights from Jasper (1997, Polletta 2001) and Gamson (1991). This provides much needed clarity to the concept of identity. I argue this identity is built by several different factors and is heavily

influenced by social movement spillover (Meyer 1994). Additionally, political opportunity theory, originally proposed by McAdam (1982), helps us understand the third major factor that contributes to movement and organizational strategy: the political context within which the movement resides. Lastly, this model for the climate movement aligns with many features of Ganz's (2009) strategic process model. Specifically, the two both recognize the role of identities, tactics, environment, strategy, and learning. They differ in two notable respects, my proposed model gives greater weight to momentum theory, social movement spillover, and collective identity. Given their significant similarities, I argue that these two models are not in conflict with one another, but rather speak to the nuance of different movements. My pluralist movement-driven approach to this theoretical model comes from the insights of multiple schools of thought in academia, as well as the knowledge developed by generations of activists.

While this model has the capacity to operate as a guide at both the movement and organizational levels, there are some key differences between the two, most notably with the category of identity. The identity that benefits an organization and that of a movement are not necessarily the same. While an organization benefits from a strong identity that unifies its activists to make sacrifices to further their cause, a movement is likely to be built up of multiple organizations, which means each organization will occupy a niche within the movement. For example, the climate movement is made up of progressive youth fighting for a Green New Deal, but it also includes more-moderate 'Big Green' organizations, as well as activists that embrace disruptive tactics and focus exclusively on the "outside" game. This diversity of organizational identities within the movement is often seen as a strengthen as different organizations can fit different 'inside' and 'outside game' niches of the movement. However, competing organizational identities within an organization can be detrimental, as it often results in a lack of

clarity/confidence thus increasing the likelihood that the organization sends mixed messages about its vision.

The Path Forward:

Chapter 3 will explore the explanatory power of this model through a deep dive into the political impacts, tactics, identities, rhetorical strategies, and goals of the climate movement from the perspective of prominent climate organizations, through semi-structured interviews with top activists at these organizations and data gathered from scholarly and non-scholarly experiences within the climate movement.

Chapter 4 analyzes the evolution of the rhetoric and behavior of political actors (politicians/political parties), the media, and the public to understand the political impacts of the climate movement through the lens of both activists and electoral, legislative, and political rhetoric. Despite facing formidable challenges to impacting politics, this research will help us understand the political impacts of the climate movement thus far. This chapter will employ a variety of methods and techniques to understand the political impacts of the climate movement, thus contributing to scholarship on measuring social movement impacts.

Chapter 5 will bring together the insights of the previous chapters into social movement theory, the climate movement, and the movement's impacts on American politics to explore what this research means for the subfields of social movement studies and American Political Development. It also presents a vision of where the climate movement could take the United States. This chapter will serve as a conclusion to the entire Honors Thesis.

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Chapter 3: Evidence of Spillover, Identity, and Opportunity in the Modern Movement

Young People Strike for Climate Action

Throughout the 21st century, we have seen young people globally mobilize around the issue of climate, including engaging in school strikes to raise the salience of the crisis. In August 2018, inspired by the youth activism of March for Our Lives, a movement to pass legislation to address school shootings in the United States, Greta Thunberg, a young Swedish activist, decided to begin school every Friday to protest outside of Parliament. Her activism gained international attention and was a catalyst to the organization Fridays for Future. While weekly strikes became regular across the world, three times the organizers strategically planned mass decentralized protests to demonstrate the youth force behind climate action, specifically climate justice. In March 2019, the first global climate strike took place with over one million young people around the world protesting the lack of government action to address the climate crisis (Fisher 2021). The young activists followed up this impressive feat in September 2019 when they organized a mass week of action surrounding the United Nations Climate Action Summit. In this week, over 7 million people mobilized to demand climate action, including half a million people in the United States (Fisher 2021, Prakash 2020). This latter protest brought together a variety of prominent newer movement organizations including the Sunrise Movement, Fridays for Future, Zero Hour, and Extinction Rebellion to name a few. Reflecting on this day, Prakash, a founder of the Sunrise Movement, recalled that the average age of the protesters was three decades younger than any other mass protest she had been to (Prakash 2020 viii).

In describing the September 2019 protests, the New York Times wrote, "Rarely, if ever, has

the modern world witnessed a youth movement so large and wide, spanning across societies rich and poor, tied together by a common if inchoate sense of rage" (Sengupta 2019). Young activists marched across the United States, from New York to Iowa, and from Florida to San Francisco, united around climate action. Tens of thousands of protestors in San Francisco chanted 'Green New Deal, make it real' (Sengupta 2019). It was a sunny day in New York City, where Varshini Prakash said to the demonstrators, "If we are going to win, we have to bring society and even our economy to a standstill again and again. If we are going to win, we have to make sure that our politicians win or lose based off where they stand on this issue" (Prakash 2019). These young activists were committed to spreading a progressive political climate justice message through the streets demanding that politicians act or prepare to be voted out. Speaking in front of a massive crowd in New York City on the last day of the week of action, Thunberg said, "We have not taken to the streets sacrificing our education for the adults and politicians to take selfies with us and tell us that that really admire what we do. We are doing this to wake the leaders up. We are doing this to get them to act. We deserve a safe future. And we demand a safe future" (Thunberg 2019).

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, putting large gatherings on pause and left young people attending school online, making the strikes less visible. Adapting to the changing circumstances, the organizers shifted gears from an even larger in-person strike and planned a series of Earth Day events in April. According to survey data of the organizers behind these three actions, Fisher (2021) found that the adult-led organizations within the climate movement in the United States took over a central role as these protest events progressed. One notable exception was that the Sunrise Movement remained at the center of the organizing efforts in the United States, while the other youth organizations were displaced by the professionalized organizations (Fisher 2021). This is evidence of the *organizational gravitation* concept introduced

in the previous chapter. Specifically, it shows the tendency of organizations to move towards the tactics and strategies of organizations that appear successful. While the movement was forced out of the streets by the pandemic, young activists navigated the digital space to continue to shape climate politics, organize electoral efforts, and stay in community with one another throughout the public health emergency. While the youth climate strikes have yet to gain the traction they had before the pandemic, young activists announced that they would be planning a mass school strike in the spring of 2023. These strikes indicated that young people remain a distinctly powerful force in the movement and a crucial component of the movement's identity.

Data and Methods for Chapter 3

In the previous chapter, I established multiple theoretical contributions including an expanding on social movement spillover, proposing a hybrid collective identity typology, recentering anti-majoritarian mechanisms, and developing a model for mapping movement impacts. In this chapter, I share the voices of a dozen climate activists from eight organizations. Their testimony lends credence to my prior observations and provide us with a comprehensive view of the movement's history, priming us for a deep dive into its impacts in the next chapter. Over the course of four months, I interviewed a dozen top climate activists from eight different organizations across the climate movement. These interviews serve multiple purposes. First and foremost, they center activist voices when understanding the movement that activists create, sustain, and sacrifice for. Second, they provide an insider perspective into movement dynamics, shifts, and power. This method works well with the activist-scholar approach and has provided me the ample opportunity to make sure that my findings are grounded in the movement, rather than the academy. My activist-scholar and movement-driven pluralist theoretical approaches

provide me with a lens that is most accurate to how activists engage with the sociopolitical structures that surround them. These interviews focus extensively on organizing inspiration within the movement, shifting aspects of the movement's identity, and how activists grapple with anti-majoritarian institutional hurdles. This chapter provides us with a clearer understanding of the movement, in the words of activists themselves, which I argue is essential to comprehending the movement's impacts. The information from the interviews is crucial in two ways: it ensures that the movement is not misunderstood, and it provides us with a more nuanced perspective on how activists define movement impacts. Some of the climate activists have elected for their organizations to remain anonymous, however, others were okay with their organization being named. Additionally, all activists' names have been randomly generated as to protect the identity of the interviewees. Seven of these organizations were nationally based while often having local affiliates, while one organization was locally based but engaged with federal politics. On average, these open-ended semi-structured interviews lasted one hour, and 25 minutes and interview participants had been involved in the climate movement for an average of 8.5 years, with a maximum of 19 years and a minimum of 4 years across the sample.

Before approaching organizations about potential activist interviews, I sorted a list of prominent climate organizations into five categories based on their main tactical approach, center-left political ideology, and other identity characteristics (e.g., age). While some activists who participated asked to be fully anonymous, several were willing to be listed alongside their organization. Throughout the thesis, I sometimes utilize the phrase "Big Green" to describe an activist who did not want their organization to be named. This enables the reader to understand the activist's position within the movement, without being able to precisely locate it. Figure 5 displays the five categories, with a few example organizations sorted into them. Many more

organizations were contacted as part of this research, but I include this visual to provide the

reader with some understanding of how organizations were chosen. It is crucial to note just

because an organization is listed in Figure 5 does not mean they or any activist associated with

them participated in this research. This method, as opposed to a random sample, was employed

to prioritize the organizations that are most impactful on the larger movement and thus the

movement's political impacts. To map organizations, I utilized knowledge from my years in the

climate movement as an activist to have a more fleshed out understanding of organizational

identities than what is publicly available. Activists were interviewed in a semi-structured

manner, which means I question template was present, but I frequently strayed from it to probe

deeper into specific topics that activists brought up. An example of what this question template

looks like is included in the Appendix.

Multi-Pronged Outreach Strategy for each Organization

Choosing Organizations (Options)				
Category 1	*Category 2*	*Category 3*	*Category 4*	*Category 5*
Moderate Legal/Policy	**Moderate/Less-Partisan Grassroots**	**Center-Left Grassroots**	**Progressive Grassroots (Youth)**	**More-Confrontational Left**
NRDC	League of Conservation Voters	Sierra Club	Sunrise Movement	Rise and Resist
Earthjustice	Greenpeace USA	350.org	Fridays for Future	Extinction Rebellion NYC

Figure 6 displays the five categories used to map the climate movement in this study.

These interviews are complimented with other data sources, most notably an analysis of

New York Times appearances of ten major climate organizations. The *New York Times*

appearances of the organizations were gathered from a ProQuest database. This data provides

insights into how the organizations are presented to the broader public. More importantly to

understanding the movement, the newspaper data helps us see how the organizations are framed

to the broader public via the media. This provides us with a stronger understanding of the organizational identities that play a prominent role in the broader movement. In the next chapter, an in-depth analysis of media, legislative, and political rhetoric, as well as electoral outcomes provides a different lens through which to measure the political impacts of the climate movement.

A Movement Guided by Past Movements

Social Movement Spillover

As shown in the previous chapter, the modern climate movement has been influenced by other social movements in two distinct phases. The first phase was dominated by 'Big Green' organizations shifting their focus towards climate. The second involved the spillover of ideas and strategies from a variety of different movements to the climate movement. This argument is two-fold. First, this second spillover phase radically shifted the vision and identity of the climate movement to one that has largely, although not completely, embraced a justice frame. In this chapter, my semi-structured interviews show evidence of the different movement influences on activists, organizations, and the movement more generally. Activists and their associated organizations draw inspiration and learnings from a variety of movement spaces, as well as from their own experiences. Yet, as I began to describe in the previous chapter, my argument goes further. I demonstrate this spillover effect has played a crucial role in generating favorable impacts for the movement. Specifically, by introducing resonate frames, identities, and tactics spillover cultivated the political momentum necessary for the movement to shape the political agenda, influence prominent elections, and pass climate legislation for the first time in United States history. I believe social movement spillover is a concept that American Political

Development scholars should explore more as a force behind political change and an integral component to institutional interactions. Bringing this concept to American Political Development works nicely with many of the concepts that are integral to the discipline. The spillover effect is one method for understanding how movements change over time, thus implicitly making the argument that history matters to how movements emerge, strategize, and act. As many American Political Development scholars point to history to understand political change over time, I argue that this must also include movement history (Pierson 2000, 2004).

Social movements look to one another to learn and adapt to the political challenges they face. It can also help activists identify potential weaknesses within their movement or organization's frames, identity, or goals. Displaying this phenomenon, one activist at a Big Green legal-focused organization said to me, "I don't think the environmental movement ever had a particularly strong sense of power relationships, unlike the civil rights movement." By looking towards and interacting with one another, movements are exposed to different strategies, ideas, tactics, and frames that they can employ in their own movement space through a phenomenon known as social movement spillover. As described in the previous chapter, social movement spillover can be observed at the individual, organizational, and movement level. In conducting this research, I uncovered a surprising breadth of movements individual activists looked to for inspiration. These included: Environmental Justice, labor, Civil Rights movement, Indigenous movements, Occupy, Black Lives Matter, anti-nuclear, Rainbow coalition, Kurdish Liberation movement, March for Our Lives, environmental movement, anti-poverty movements, divestment, Dream defenders, Quakers, Indian Independence Movement, Jewish tradition. Some drew influence from movements they have interacted with on a regular basis, for example, one activist from the League of Conservation Voters said, "I've worked with partners in both the

environmental justice and labor movements. So, I've been most exposed to those." Two other activists noted that they worked in the labor, environmental justice, and Black Lives Matter movements before joining the climate movement and have carried their experiences with them. Meanwhile, other activists drew their inspiration from historical movements. One Sunrise Movement leader said, "I feel like I've drawn a lot of organizing inspiration from SNCC and Ella Baker, who believe deeply in participatory democracy, which is why I care a lot about democratizing Sunrise." Another Sunrise Leader pointed to different inspirations from a similar era, "I just had a natural inclination toward more radical sides of the Black Liberation movements, from the Black Panthers, from the Rainbow Coalition, especially for working and trying to create a multiracial cross-class movement." As it relates to past movements, activist knowledge is mediated by the historical narratives crafted about them. Thus, as new history is uncovered, these past movements will continue to influence present day activists in unique ways.

While individual education operates as one avenue for the spillover effect to occur, the activists also highlighted several other avenues, including actions, coalitions, and training spaces. One climate policy staffer at a 'Big Green' organization reflected on his experience working on an anti-fracking campaign with environmental justice groups in the early 2010. He describes the transformative nature of this experience, saying, "That was a transformative moment. I think it also changed or shifted our theory of change to one that looked at working with grassroots groups and with an even clearer understanding of the need for EJ protections." Similarly, a Sunrise Co-Founder that I spoke with emphasized the role that key actions played shortly after the Waxman-Markey bill did not pass in the Senate, noting, "There was like 18 months where it was clear that the big organizations had no idea what was going on, like nobody knew what to do. And then it was the tar sands action, and the divestment campaign, Keystone campaign...

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Were really the big answers in that moment that we're returning to a grassroots movement, learning how to build a fighting force." Actions were a crucial spillover avenue throughout the early 2010s for exposing climate activists to the organizing tactics and visions of environmental justice and Indigenous environmental justice movements.

Emphasizing the crucial role of the Environmental Justice movement, one League of Conservation Voters activists said, "I think it is definitely centered in the decades of advocacy and leadership in the environmental justice movement, both frontline leaders of color and Indigenous communities finally being listened to. You look at the 1991 Peoples of Color Summit and what was written then about what green groups were doing. I was 11. Fast forward to 2010 and the same exact things could have been written." Rightfully so, the environmental justice movements distrusted the environmental movement and particularly many of the major organizations in it. Thus, when the first phase of spillover, the movement of environmental organizations to climate, occurred, the distrust was transferred to the climate movement. Reflecting on the go-it-alone approach of the institutionalized movement pushing for the Waxman-Markey bill, one 'Big Green' climate activist said, "I think there was either, you could say, no engagement or an active disregard for concerns raised at the time by environmental justice communities and organizations. And there was next to no engagement with labor, they were brough in incredibly late in the bill writing process, an afterthought at best." After the 'Big Green' faction of the climate movement was unable to pass the cap-and-trade bill, a period of movement reckoning occurred. As we discussed the movement's position in 2010 and the ways in which in grew throughout that decade, one activist made it clear how weakened the institutionalized movement was saying, "And so I think looking back you can say all these things were sequenced, but I think some of it was out of just the utter ashes of that failure." This

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provided the space for EJ activists to finally be heard and respected to some extent by the larger

climate organizations. However, the process of repairing trust takes time. One activist at a Big

Green organization emphasized the important role that coalitions played in bridging the

movements, "The tables and coalitions that got set up, that built relationships and trust across

some of these different movements were really important." A Sunrise Leader highlighted the

crucial space the Momentum training community created for activists from several movements

noting, "Momentum was really big, it arrived in 2014, and that was a place where a lot of people

came together, whether it was people from the dreamers movement, Black protest activists, BLM

people, climate movement, student movement, and some others too." While these efforts began

to bridge the divide between the climate movement and the justice movements, that process

continues today especially in the wake of the Inflation Reduction Act.

When the Green New Deal emerged in 2018 and 2019, a culmination of efforts by labor,

environmental justice, and climate activists, the distrust of the climate movement was present. A

Sunrise leader noted, "The critics were mostly from the EJ side of things, who you know, were

talking about how we were kind of building on ground that they had tilled, around the climate

justice and climate injustice thing and they... were wondering if we were going to take it and not

involve them, in a sense. So we made a lot of efforts to involve them." Indicating how careful

they were to make sure the Green New Deal was a vision that the justice movements saw

themselves in, the Sunrise Leader continued, "We did a lot to try to create space for people to

feel like the Green New Deal could belong to them whether that was EJ, or whether it was labor,

or whether it was a lot of other progressive organizations that were not necessarily environmental

or climate organizations." This justice-centric vision for addressing the climate crisis is

indicative of the transformation of the movement's identity that occurred through a second

spillover phase led by justice movements. One 'Big Green' climate strategist, reflected on this new approach to addressing the climate crisis arguing, "Meeting people where they're at is really one of the most important things that we can do in the climate space, in the electoral space. And that is just not something you really would think about so deeply if it weren't for the influence of the EJ movement currently." In sum, the spillover of frames, strategies, and tactics from the justice movements to the climate movement throughout the 2010s, culminated in a new vision for the climate movement.

A Mostly Unified Vision

The rise of the Green New Deal paradigm has solidified the movement around a progressive systems-focused approach to addressing the climate crisis. This has strengthened the movement's position as it pressures lawmakers by inspiring grassroots activists, increasing solidarity, and setting a guidepost for elected officials. Yet, the rise of the Green New Deal was hardly guaranteed even after the Waxman-Markey debacle. While by the middle of the decade, the climate movement began to accept the justice frame, the outcome of the 2016 appears to have played a role in this vision. One activist hypothesized that, "If Hillary Clinton had won in 2016, we would not have been ready to build the policy based upon that [justice-oriented] vision." Echoing this, another 'Big Green' activist said, "There's a notion that Hillary would have been a third Obama term, especially on the environment, a number of these important moments would not have come to fruition. The Green New Deal probably wouldn't have had anywhere near the kind of political capital that it was able to build."

Additionally, before the Green New Deal could be used to pressure politicians, the champions of it had to make sure the movement was largely aligned around it. While some climate organizations did not endorse it, across the eight that I spoke to, not one opposed it. One

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Sunrise National activist described this movement-unifying process, "Our partnerships director, I feel like he was doing a lot of work to push other organizations to be like 'No, you need to endorse the Green New Deal if you care about the climate this is the solution'. So, there was also internal organizing of institutions happening to push people further to the left." Another reflected on how impressed they were when they first got to read the Green New Deal resolution saying, "When I first saw it, the first version of the resolution as a draft, thought was, 'Man, I didn't, I just, I didn't know that you could say all that at once'... That was the rule of the game that it kind of broke." He was not alone. The vision of the Green New Deal was particularly empowering by connecting the climate crisis to the lives of everyday people, centering marginalized populations, and providing an effective critique of the structural forces causing it. Climate organizations that have emerged in recent years have adopted a similar emphasis on the structural barriers to addressing the crisis. One youth-led organization's co-founder noted, "Our platform identifies four systems of oppression as the root cause of climate change. And those are capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and racism. And we think that to adequately address climate change, those systems have to be dismantled... It really means system-level change."

Connecting the crisis with the lives of people struggling, this framing of the climate crisis was recognized throughout the movement for its strength, particularly as it relates to embracing climate justice and structural transformation. In this regard, an electoral climate leader at a 'Big Green' organization said, "If we're not working with and incorporating those ideas and those wide coalitions into these issues, like working closely with labor, working closely with racial justice leaders is what makes our movement more powerful and authentic to voters. Working in isolation, will get us nowhere." This is an impressive movement transformation that even permeated the organizations that were leaders in the first era of the movement, which had been

characterized by a narrow vision for addressing the climate crisis. Yet as one Sunrise leader

acknowledged, that phase of the movement was not able to pass key legislation and thus a new

vision was required. To explain the logic behind this he said, "The idea was for it [Green New

Deal] to be a majoritarian coalition, a coalition that could plausibly unite the Democratic Party,

as a congressional majority to pass climate law." Another activist at a Big Green organization

noted how this approach differed from the environmental movement by articulating, "You have

to build a narrative and build a program and a strategy to have a go at them [polluter lobby]. And

I think environmentalists until really the last decade have been very, very backward as far as

understanding that... Now, I think that's changed. I think the Sunrise Movement created a whole

new dialogue, which was profoundly positive and important. The Green New Deal did that too."

These observations suggest the movement's political vision for addressing the climate crisis

shifted in the second spillover phase, resulting in broader systemic goals, a greater engagement

with the grassroots tactics, and the rise of new organizations that could champion this vision

within the movement. It also represents the culmination of the second phase of spillover and the

solidification of a new set of identities within the movement.

The Strength of a Progressive People-Powered Movement

Collective Identity

The emergence and strengthening of a progressive, grassroots, youth, justice-oriented

climate movement has been integral to the growth of the movement and its influence within

politics. This identity-shift is integral to understanding the modern climate movement. In this

section, I utilize activist voices and my proposed typology (movement, organization, and activist

identities) to illustrate shifts in several elements of the movement's identity as well as a glimpse

into how a few specific organizational and activist identities within the movement have manifested. This provides insight into the crucial role that organizational identity plays in both the development and perpetuation of the organization and the movement. At the activist identity level, while some activists were drawn to organizations that aligned with their personal values and tactical preferences, others acknowledged an imbalance between their own activist identity and their organizations. For example, an activist at the League of Conservation Voters illustrated this tension by saying, "Sunrise was deeply inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and a lot of the tactics and approaches pioneered there. And so I think that I would also identify those as the most impactful for me in terms of non-violent demonstration and civil disobedience. We don't practice at LCV". While this tension can exist to some extent for career activists, it did not appear with volunteer activists. Hinting at the concept of activist identity, an Extinction Rebellion activist described their reasons for joining the more 'radical' climate group by saying, "But is seemed like XR was kind of trying to be the group that really pushed things along in terms of the messaging and the tactics and I don't know, something about that just really spoke to me, it felt exciting and felt necessary." At a different point, he described this connection and its catalyzing potential for his activism further stating, "And it felt like, I had the knowledge, I had the understanding, but I didn't quite know what to do with it. When I finally found some like-minded folks and an organization that felt, or a couple of organizations, that felt like they aligned with my values and my understanding, it was both a relief and empowering and exciting." I want to highlight a key word in this description: *empowering*. In alignment with previous research, I found that empowerment was integral to both activist and organizational identities. Frequently noted by its presence, but also visible by its absence. Describing their experience with an organization in a different movement, one activist said, "That's I didn't join

the other group. I was like, 'Wait, what are we doing here?' The strategy wasn't clear. And it wasn't like energizing or wasn't empowering." While activist identity plays an important role in whether a person participates in an organization or movement, it is never static. In this vein, one activist at a 'Big Green' organization described how they experience assisting an environmental justice campaign shifted their tactical preferences and strategic interpretations: "The issue really gave me a certain kind of revitalization of how I saw the political possibilities in these issues and how it meant the activist piece of it was as important as the lobbying piece, or more." The shifting activist identities are indicative of a larger shift in both organizations and the movement.

As advocated for in the previous chapter, organizational identity for the climate movement can be broken down into five categories: politics, claims, tactics, structural dynamics, and confidence/clarity of identity. Similarly, movement identity is defined by how a movement views itself and is perceived by others based on their values, beliefs, political orientation, interaction with the public, and constituencies within the movement. There are similarities between the two yet different conditions are ideal when you scale from organization to movement. This section will focus on shifts in the movement's identity, as well as illustrate insights in regard to how organizations both maintain and alter their identities. As described in the above section, for the most part, the climate movement unified around a much broader vision for addressing the crisis in the form of the Green New Deal. This was an immense shift in the political orientation of the movement and the politics of the most prominent organizations within it. One 'Big Green' activist referenced the shift saying, "We talked about organizing then, but there was no grassroots real energy or push... Its vision was narrow, right? This was about the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, putting a cap on it, the market-based systems, it was not a vision for improving people's lives." A Sunrise activist critiqued this early

approach and applauded the identity shift stating, "I think there was a shift towards actually being like, you have to connect the environment and jobs because many people are workers and they're also fossil fuel workers who need to transition to green jobs, there was an orientation towards demands of people not just protect the polar bears." They were not alone in critiquing the stereotypical 'protect the polar bears' approach that is deeply associated with the 'Big Green' organizations and the environmental movement that they come from. However, in the moment of reckoning after the Waxman-Markey bill, one 'Big Green' strategist admitted, "I think for the national green groups, by and large, it was a recognition that okay, we had confused access with influence. And we didn't have a lot of power, we didn't have a lot of political power." The shifting political orientation of the movement, including its embrace of a progressive approach, grew out of an understanding that moderate politics were ineffective.

That being said, one activist found their organization's identity made it difficult to fully embrace the movement's political identity shift. This 'Big Green' policy strategist shared why his organization never endorsed the Green New Deal despite his insistence saying, "We never supported it publicly. We had bits and piece of it that [our organization] supported, but it never supported the Green New Deal publicly, partly because of the inner attitude about not having the full technical explanation of things. And that [Green New Deal] politically, is something that I argued [the organization] should support." As this example shows, at times tensions between a movement's identity and an organization's identity will come into conflict. This tests the flexibility of the organization to adapt or risk their position in the movement ecosystem. It might not come as a surprise that the organization hesitant to embrace the Green New Deal vision also lacks grassroots capacity and instead continues to embrace a lobbying and legal expertise approach, indicative of the first phase of the movement. This is not inherently a bad thing, but

rather it displays the challenges with cultivating a unified vision for a movement when several major institutionalized organizations exist within it. This faction of the movement is already comfortable with the political power structures and is less likely to challenge them, especially in the way a Green New Deal does. Yet, as a Sunrise Leader emphasized, "I feel like the Green New Deal honestly was one of the big turning points... It has become an all-holistic all-systems approach that covers everything from education to housing to transportation. Everyone can see themselves in the vision of the Green New Deal." Whether the more moderate factions of the movement liked it or not, the political orientation of the movement had shifted as a more resonate strategy and frame were pushed by insurgent groups. They had to embrace or at least accommodate this shift in the center of gravity if they wanted to maintain their position in the movement. The reasons why organizations may embrace shifts in the movement are plentiful, no doubt including both altruistic and strategic reasons, as well as a fear of losing their relevance within the movement.

This new progressive justice-oriented political identity was largely driven by youth-led climate organizations who then spurred significant grassroots mobilization. This addressed one of the key shortcomings within the movement that McAdam (2017) identified: the lack of issue ownership. This new political identity altered the claims that the movement could make, as new groups accrued more influence within the movement. This also touches on an important theme in the climate movement more broadly, specifically its reliance on youth activists to push the identity forward. One activist described to me how 350.org, a climate organization that heavily embraced student activism, pushed the movement towards grassroots activism after the Waxman-Markey struggle and embraced a divestment strategy. Yet, this organization only took the movement so far, as a result, one activist noted the rise of a different youth-led organization

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saying, "Sunrise coming out of 350 and coming out of 350 realizing that divestment was not enough." At the same time, a different movement leader described 350 as the Sunrise before Sunrise existed, but noted that when 350 was hesitant to embrace a progressive strategy, Sunrise rose up to do so. This same leader reiterated the power that young people, along with Indigenous activists, have had in strengthening the movement to address the climate crisis stating, "I think the young people are the story of truly organic catalyzing force on climate, I actually do believe that, that this seems to be a renewable form of genuine alarm and activity among young people upon learning about climate change... I think that Indigenous people worldwide are the other just constantly leading in important and visionary ways on climate." This bodes well for the continued growth of the movement, yet only if these voices are empowered within the movement. Integral to grassroots majoritarian movements is that activists feel empowered within the organizational and movement identities present within them.

Presently, the progressive justice framing that defines the claims made by the climate movement became well-ingrained into the movement. While it must be expanded and regularly maintained, as with any element of organizational or movement identity, the progressive justice-oriented approach has become dominate within the movement. One activist who was part of an effort to ingrain a new organization into the United States movement ecosystem described this dynamic saying, "Without that commitment to racial and economic and all forms of justice, it would be very difficult for us to collaborate with organizations here in the US and win their respect." Another activist with a youth-led organization proudly shared his organization's first endorsement experience announcing, "Let's see, 2020 was the first time we endorsed any candidate, and our first endorsed candidate was Senator Bernie Sanders for President." This same activist when asked about the relationship between the climate and climate justice

movements responded, "I think that we don't view the climate movement and the climate justice movement as distinct movements, I would say that we draw distinctions between what could be traditionally considered the environmental movement and the climate justice movement." This shows just how far the second phase of spillover shifted the movement's claims. Many of the activists reflected on both the morally correct aspect of centering justice, as well as the strategic benefits that this approach had. One activist put it in a matter-of-fact way saying, "I don't think there's movement without the justice framing without the people-centered framing at all." While I agree with the activists that pointed out the strategic value in embracing these claims, it is integral that they do so in an authentic manner. That appears to be the case, but it is something that activists must diligently keep in mind. While activists seem to overwhelmingly support this new identity, this shift and the organizations propelling it has not gone without criticism (Colman 2022, Ball 2022).

As the politics and claims of the movement shifted so did the primary tactics of the movement. The tactics of key new organizations were quite different and more confrontational than the 'Big Green's' that preceded them and were a direct result of the second phase of spillover. One Sunrise Leader referenced the organization's tactical approach saying, "Those are movement tactics and folks have been doing those for the last century... Sunrise, bringing that to the national space, far more confrontationally, than a lot of the organizations that have been doing those actions were. Let's be real because those tactics come from the Civil Rights movement. Those tactics come from the environmental justice movement, and the immigrant rights movement." Another activist remarked on the political context that provided the space for these new tactical approaches to rise by describing 2016 as, "An inflection point that changed how the politics is perceived by Big Greens, but also it gave political space to what we'll call

grassroots groups, Sunrise and others, who were able to more impactfully start building towards something much bigger, which became the IRA." The 2016 election was a significant threat to the movement and forced it to continue to reckon with its relatively weak political position. In many ways, 2016 is an inflection point for the movement, both by encouraging the movement to embrace a stronger political program that could expand grassroots mobilization and by solidifying the belief that confrontational politics were required to achieve their vision.

At the same time, many 'Big Green' organizations found a middle ground between embracing the new bold vision and continuing to utilize tactics that aligned with their organizational identities. For example, one activist said, "We're progressive, having said that, it is an organization that plays within the arena of formal established politics, electoral politics." One activist emphasized the importance of maintaining this tactical continuity, seeing it as one of their major contributions to the movement at-large. Describing this dynamic they said, "We have direct relationships with members of Congress, their chiefs of staff, we know the political pressures they're under, so we bring a different mindset to the Hill that kind of understands all the priorities they are balancing." This shows how some elements of an organization's identity can shift while others remain intact. This does not sacrifice the clarity of the identity as long as the two do not conflict with one another. Additionally, tactical flexibility is present as the political circumstances change. For example, one organization highlighted their shift in strategy as Democrats took control of Washington saying, "But since 2020, after the presidential election, we've really gotten involved in policy... one of the few youth-led organization in the US, that is joining adult led organizations like Sierra Club and Greenpeace to actually work on policy and to lobby the government." It is crucial that these young leaders that helped transform the movement's identity are also in the room with legislators. This empowers them to carry the

voices of the grassroots with them into the halls of power. Many of the institutionalized organizations emphasized their commitment to uplifting the voices of activists, particularly from marginalized populations, who are not traditionally given the same access to elected officials. On top of this, even activists at organizations that are committed to maintaining strong relationships with politicians recognized that they will not put the relationship above inaction. One strategist at a 'Big Green' emphasized, "If you're a Dem and you're not living up to where you need to be one climate, you run the real risk of being primaried." This is a significantly more confrontational approach that was simply not present within the movement a decade prior. In sum, the more confrontational tactical approach of key organizations within the movement resonated enough that even when other organizations were unwilling to adopt these tactics themselves, they were able to at the very least accommodate their presence and at best work in coordination with them.

Lastly, the structural dynamics and clarity/confidence of the organizational identities play an important role in the movement's ability to accrue political power. Many of the top climate organizations adopt a two-tiered structure, which includes a national organization and then state or local affiliates, chapters, or hubs. This structure appears to be widespread across the movement due to its effectiveness in a federalist system. It enables organizations to have a grassroots presence in multiple locations, thus making their primarying potential more palpable and strengthen its 'grassroots lobbying' capacity while also coordinating messaging throughout the nation. While most organizations in this study had this structure, they differed widely in how they approached the relationship between state/local and national. While resource mobilization theorists would promote a hierarchical relationship within organizations, it appears that horizontal democratic structures were a great priority for these activists, as many of them

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described the importance of democratic decision-making structures in empowering activists, embracing creativity, and spreading organizing knowledge. This is integral to grassroots organizing under a national umbrella organization as too much hierarchy could alienate the grassroots and severely weaken the overarching organization. Resource mobilization seems to miss the mark in regard to the climate movement's embrace of a multi-level organizing approach.

In addition to this, activists frequently emphasized the importance of learning from experiences and allowing their organizational identity to grow as a result. One activist humbly put it this way, "We recognize that as we do this work, we're going to gain new insights, some things are going to work, other things are not going to work. And it's important to have those channels available for making adjustments." A pair of activists at Sunrise talked extensively about their organization's identity and the ways in which they were going about addressing weaknesses that were identified. Describing their need to go through a second 'frontloading process' and revise their organization's DNA, a Sunrise Leader said, "There was a realization that Sunrise was built on a foundation where a couple of parts of the foundation were shaky." Another concurred, "We do have a movement culture already, that movement culture is not what we want it to be. And so [we are] putting a lot of resources and actual attention and structures and programs into creating a political home." Even while describing these weaknesses in the organization's identity, the activist acknowledged that before and even during this period of change, "Sunrise has been extremely effective in perpetuating outwardly a very solid organizational identity." Sunrise clearly recognized that their organizational identity was a liability in specific ways, particularly as it related to cross-class cross-race organizing and thus committed resources and build structures to strengthening their identity. One Sunriser noted

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other efforts to maintain the organization's identity, particularly as a youth climate organization, describing a new program they have been working on, "We are running a 'Schools Program' to really build out our young people under 18." This investment in youth empowerment is integral to the organization's identity and thus something that they are willing to dedicate significant resources to maintain. While shifting the organization's identity can spur a lack of clarity as the organization is pulled in a certain direction, it is with the bet that the organization will be stronger for the transformation and thus have more to contribute to the larger movement.

While alterations to organizational identity are regularly underway, particularly to stay relevant in the fast-paced world of American politics, some things are so deeply ingrained into an organization's identity that they are unlikely to change. For example, one activist said of their youth-led organization, "I think that [organization] at its core is an organization that will always be youth-led and will always center the voices of frontline youth and people of color." A Sunrise Co-Founder described youth identity that several organizations have held at different times and the important role it plays in the larger movement saying, "They [350 and Sunrise] were born out of the youth movement and a version of this like youth activist disrupting the existing climate movement that had been there, and sort of changing the terrain in a big way." These youth organizations play an integral role in the movement by pushing it to be more dynamic as it challenges the political status quo. Organizations that can alter their identity in response to changing political conditions, prior weaknesses, or to better resonate with activists, are at a strategic advantage. Learning loops like these allow them to outsmart the barriers that they face; this could be particularly important as the climate movement begins to more seriously grapple with the anti-majoritarian institutions that are empowering their opposition and inhibiting our society from realizing their transformative vision. A major reason why the Sunrise Movement

rapidly grew to be the one of the most powerful climate organizations in the country is because of the organizational identity that they constructed. Nearly every activist I spoke with used the Sunrise Movement as a focal point that they could either compare or contrast their own organization with. Yet, the Sunrise identity was incredibly clear particularly as it centered cultivating people powered political power. This resonated deeply with young people resulting in the organization's ascendency. One Sunriser provided their interpretation of the organization's identity saying, "And to me, it was militant, powerful, audacious young people that are bold enough to call for the biggest things and take action and get it. I feel like that is the political identity." They continued by emphasizing the organization's continued dedication to confrontationally accruing more political power until a Green New Deal is realized saying, "We are on the offense, we have to create the conditions regardless of who's in office, and how do we build the type of power that we need, the people power, the disruptive power, the political power in the government to enable us to massively transform our country." A collection of strong organizational identities accompanied with a dynamic and resonate movement identity has been integral to the climate movement's increase in political power in recent years. As stated earlier, this identity transformation was made possible by a second phase of spillover where justice movements were able to influence the frames, strategies, tactics, and overarching vision of the climate movement. I argue that these identities will have to be further refined and cultivated even more if the movement is going to be able to accrue the political power required to effectively address the climate crisis.

A Movement to Redefine the Political Common Sense

Political Strategy in an Anti-Majoritarian Democracy

The climate movement, along with other social movements, must navigate a federal political system that is dominated by anti-majoritarian institutions making it more difficult to create rapid political change. As noted in the previous section, the climate movement's identity has shifted, allowing it to better navigate these obstacles by embracing political polarization by attaching itself to the left wing of the Democratic Party, challenging party elites, and establishing a federalist-structure. The anti-majoritarian mechanisms in the U.S. constitutional system tend to offer multiple avenues of sustaining power for minority parties by diffusing power throughout the system with multiple veto points and creating super-majoritarian hurdles to legislative success. This becomes a significant challenge for social movements that attach themselves to one political party, which has become more necessary considering our highly polarized era. Describing the one-sidedness of the climate issue one activist expressed, "The organization I work for is a nonpartisan organization, but it's when you work on climate, there's only one party that seriously is interested in addressing the climate crisis." While a multitude of mechanisms, as explored in the previous chapter, tend to empower minority parties, movements have grappled with potential strategies to address these barriers. It is worth noting that activists focused their ire most on the senate filibuster, unsurprisingly given its growing obstructionist role in recent years. In the climate movement, activists have also looked towards the democracy reform movement, strategically navigated the budget reconciliation carveout of the senate filibuster or toyed with ideas to democratize the anti-democratic features of several political institutions. However, I argue the climate movement must take these hurdles more seriously if they are to achieve their

political vision of a Green New Deal. Before delving into this or the strategies activists utilized thus far to sidestep or overcome the barriers that anti-majoritarian institutions pose, it is worth highlighting their experience with the problem itself. One 'Big Green' strategist described the presence of anti-majoritarian institutions by saying, "One, it is very demoralizing, it's like playing chess but you're playing against someone who gets 10 moves for every one that you get, the board is so stacked." He continued to express this frustration saying, "I think, whenever I hear the term, institutional challenge, I will always think of American politics, no matter what I do the future of my career. Oh, it's terrible... Oh, it just miserable to think about all the hurdles that you have to go through." After acknowledging the massive challenge that these anti-majoritarian institutions posed, activists would often discuss how they can or have tried to create change despite them.

Some activists looked to other movements to answer the question of American democracy being dominated by anti-majoritarian institutions, while others appeared to accept their existence, and still a majority embraced structural change to weaken the dominance of the anti-majoritarian mechanisms within these institutions. After expressing skepticism about the weaknesses of the democracy movement, one activist still saw them as their best hope and emphasized the importance of moving in lockstep with them and trying to bolster their efforts. Describing their experience at a Momentum retreat they said, "I was at a Momentum retreat in the summer and we were talking about this... Maybe it would be smarter for everyone to drop everything and go all in on democracy. But there is still a climate crisis... Someone gave a really good metaphor, it's like a battle on all fronts. I think the question is how to boost the ecosystem of people doing democracy work and move in sync with them." This activist also acknowledged that the climate movement needed to better incorporate a strategy to overcome these institutional

hurdles in their narratives about transformative change pondering, "How do we connect our institutions where we actually need to vote for these senators, you know, they could vote to abolish the filibuster, so we can then vote to pass legislation that helps us mitigate our impacts on the climate crisis. How do we tell a story about how all the strategies are connected to each other?" The climate movement must develop these stronger narratives, but they can only be developed if a unified vision can be achieved on how to overcome these barriers. The climate space can defer to the democracy movement, but a clear vision is required regardless to generate the necessary grassroots mobilization. In 2022, the climate movement managed to pass legislation by sidestepping the senate filibuster by utilizing the budget reconciliation process. This exception to the senate filibuster allows for budget-related bills to pass without the need to clear the 60-vote threshold the filibuster establishes. This carve out to the filibuster was established in the 1970s and has strict rules of what can be included in a reconciliation package. The senate parliamentary rules on different reforms to inform senators if the can include them in a budget reconciliation package

Put simply, this approach had consequences for the movement's legislative ambitions. At its core, reconciliation will not be able to bring our society in line with the movement's vision for a Green New Deal. An activist with the League of Conservation Voters described the constraints and benefits of this approach by saying, "The tools we could use in the legislation were hampered and narrowed by the reconciliation constrains... Largely, you were dealing with carrots and that is much easier to unify folks around." This incentives-based approach is not viable long term for phasing out fossil fuels swiftly, a requirement to addressing the climate crisis effectively. Similarly, a co-founder of a youth-led climate organization described the strategic choice that was made by a key coalition they are a part of noting, "We knew that we weren't

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going to pass sweeping climate legislation, because we didn't have a filibuster proof majority. But from the point that people were sworn into Congress, our coalition started organizing around budget reconciliation." Other activists accepted and supported the reconciliation approach after the 2020 elections but recognized the need for a stronger strategy to overcome these hurdles in the future.

One climate strategist at a 'Big Green' organization appeared excited about the possibilities of democratic transformation, while acknowledging the difficulty in achieving such change as the institutions structure the choices of legislators. He said, "I think there's so many out of the box ideas that could work. And I think these institutions are certainly, not open to it. But they certainly need some kind of transformational change." Several activists articulated full opposition to the existence of a senate filibuster, as one strategist put it, "Looking down the road, it's making sure that we have a Congress that is going to act meaningfully on climate with either a majority that's going to alter, do away with the filibuster, or we get the 60 votes in the senate or what have you." Others more explicitly acknowledged the unlikeliness of achieving a 60-seat filibuster majority in time to address the climate crisis in a comprehensive manner. Thus, the pressed timeline of the climate crisis combined with the movements loyalty to democratic institutions has resulted in a seemingly widespread anti-filibuster sentiment. Yet, a Sunrise co-founder had a more acute observation of the movement's shortcomings as they relate to the dominant positioning of anti-majoritarian institutions in American democracy. He put it plainly saying, "I don't think we have reckoned with it [anti-majoritarian tilt] or we didn't before. Now more people are and they're becoming more radical as a result." Delving further into this perspective, which is given some degree of legitimacy as budget reconciliation worked for the Inflation Reduction Act but could not achieve a Green New Deal even if a majority of legislators

supported it. The movement must reckon with the overbearing role of these institutions in the

coming years, but insights from the second phase of spillover (confrontational politics, centering

justice in the movement's vision, and youth-led grassroots organizing) could be part of the

solution as the movement grapples with these shortcomings.

Momentum Politics

By effectively harnessing momentum both in organizing and in politics, key movement

organizations were able to set the policy agenda despite the significant challenges they faced

including competing issues, several antimajoritarian veto points, and a relatively short window of

opportunity. One League of Conservation Voters activist acknowledged the intentionality of this

approach saying, "This momentum building piece is really important, and I think quite

intentional." The movement put a lot of trust into this strategy as the activists were clear that they

felt this window of opportunity could not be missed. Kingdon (1995) highlights the brief

windows where policy reform is more feasible, 2020-2022 acts as one of these opportunities for

the climate movement. One activist put it like this, "We cannot fail again. Failure is not an

option." This sentiment comes from the movement's experiences in 2009 and 2010, but also

from the pressing timetable of the climate crisis. Yet, there are strengths and weaknesses to the

current momentum approach. One Sunrise Leader described the strength of momentum when

blended with other organizing strategies saying, "I think the strategy particularly that appeals

most for influencing Sunrise is the combination of using structure-based organizing, and mass

protest organizing to do something like shift the political common sense nationally, and then be

able to have the power to translate that public shift into legislation, you can't just base build from

the ground up, you need to create moments of momentum." Momentum is an inherently

grassroots approach to building political power, which as the movement learned, is integral to

forcing political leaders to pass legislation. One lobbyist/activist emphasized the potential influence of the grassroots on elected leaders noting, "Even when they're [federal candidates] here in D.C. and you're lobbying them, they want to hear from people who are in the district, because at the end of the day, the trusted messenger is not some politico who lives in DC and goes to think tank polling conferences... it's someone who's in the district." This understanding amongst the 'Big Green' organizations appeared absent before the second phase of spillover. Yet even still the movement's engagement with momentum must be refined further.

The climate movement had enough momentum from the rise of the Green New Deal and the strategic choices of movement organizations in the build up to the 2020 elections to pass the Inflation Reduction Act through budget reconciliation. Yet as one activist put it, "You need momentum to have something as big as a Green New Deal to pass. How do we create that level of momentum over the next two to five years, to make it possible to pass bigger parts beyond the Inflation Reduction Act?" It is unclear that the movement has answers to how to do this. Given Republican control of the House of Representatives after the 2022 midterms, many climate organizations shifted their focus back to the state and local level, while also attempting to ensure an effective implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act. I argue that the movement must refine its momentum approach moving forward if it is to be able to achieve something as big as a Green New Deal. One Sunrise Co-Founder, reflecting on momentum said, "I think we overtrained the movement on it [momentum], while also believe that because it just seems simpler to believe in the movement, rather than believing that we all have to learn how to be really ruthless and do politics, which is probably closer to the truth" Given the dominance of anti-majoritarian institutions, the momentum method must be strategically applied to take on said mechanisms. In other words, to enact the vision of the movement, it will take a massive infusion

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of grassroots energy, building momentum to overcome these barriers rather than sidestep them. Thus, not only would a Green New Deal transition our economy away from fossil fuels, ensure justice in the government response to the crisis, and establish a different relationship between the government and the governed overcoming the flawed neoliberal paradigm, but it would also require and create more democratic governing structures throughout the federal government. While the momentum approach is promising to achieve this vision, it cannot do so until activists acknowledge its shortcomings as it relates to anti-majoritarian mechanisms and establish a momentum-based vision for taking them head one. Specifically, momentum must be applied strategically and target the anti-majoritarian mechanisms directly. These mechanisms insulate lawmakers from the political pressure movements are cultivating, yet by making these mechanisms visible activists can channel grassroots energy into weakening these mechanisms, thus strengthening democracy and come closer to achieving their legislative goals. At the same time, the momentum does not end when the vision is enacted. Thus, the benefits of overcoming the anti-majoritarian mechanisms infecting our democratic institutions and passing a Green New Deal would be truly profound. As one youth activist described it, "If the filibuster were to end, and we successfully passed, essentially, Green New Deal legislation in this country, the momentum that we would have in just that two-year window would mean that there would be no possibility to reverse it." This activist may be right, but we will not know until the movement discovers and refines the strategies necessary to develop the political power required to bring about a Green New Deal. A necessary step in this vision is grappling more substantively with the institutional barriers to both expanding electoral allies and generating policy change. In the next chapter, I will explore the political impacts of the movement thus far to see if it provides any clues into this challenge.

The Next Chapters

Chapter 4 analyzes the evolution of the rhetoric and behavior of political actors (politicians/political parties), the media, and the public to understand the political impacts of the climate movement through the lens of both activists and electoral, legislative, and political rhetoric. Despite facing formidable challenges, this research will help us understand the political impacts of the climate movement thus far. This chapter will employ a variety of methods and techniques to understand the political impacts of the climate movement, thus contributing to scholarship on measuring social movement impacts.

Chapter 5 will bring together the insights of the previous chapters into social movement theory, the climate movement, and the movement's impacts on American politics to explore what this research means for the subfields of social movement studies and American Political Development. Additionally, the chapter provides fruitful avenues for the movement to explore moving forward. This chapter will act as a conclusion to the entire Honors Thesis.

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Chapter 4: Agenda-Setting, Electoral Outcomes, and Governing Capacity

The Second Window of Opportunity

After spending years momentum-building, the climate movement finally had a second window of opportunity to pass federal climate legislation in 2021 with the election of President Biden and Democratic control of both the House of Representatives and Senate. To pass legislation, they could not lose a single Democrat in the Senate, nor the two Independents caucusing with Democrats. Moreover, they only had a few votes to spare in the House. Throughout his first year in office, Biden pushed for Congress to pass his Build Back Better Plan, a sweeping budget reconciliation package. In October of 2021, he proposed the Build Back Better framework which would have made significant investments in healthcare, childcare, climate action, affordable housing, and immigration reform (White House 2021). Despite large swaths of the bill that were covered by tax reforms, moderate Senate Democrats expressed skepticism of this burst of government spending (McPherson 2022). Though negotiations in Washington continued infrequently throughout the early months of 2022, the Build Back Better Act was considered 'dead' by many in the media and even by Manchin himself (Fram 2022). Deciding to narrow their focus to climate, healthcare, and tax reform, Majority Leader Schumer (D-NY) and Manchin (D-WV) reengaged negotiations in the late spring.

Into mid-July it was unclear if they would be able to find common ground, especially as it related to the climate provisions of any legislation (McPherson 2022). Senator Manchin (D-WV) had few electoral incentives to support climate legislation given his state's rightward lean, a lack of allies in the movement, and his close ties with the coal industry. Throughout the 2010s,

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Senator Manchin made over five million dollars from his family's coal company, many times more than his Senate salary (Flavelle 2022). Losing Manchin's support would mean another Congress without climate legislation, and a poor showing in the midterms would result in the Democrats losing their chance at climate legislation for the next Congress as well.

This scenario arguably presented a much more challenging political opportunity than the climate movement had in 2009 trying to pass the more modest proposal encompassed in the Waxman-Markey's American Clean Energy and Security Act. The climate movement coalesced around Biden's policy agenda and prioritized building support among the Democratic coalition. Coming off the momentum generated by the 2020 elections, activists' consistently pressured lawmakers to pass climate legislation for the first time in United States history. Given the closely divided legislative chambers on Capitol Hill, the movement had little room for error. By meeting with lawmakers, holding grassroots events in member districts, as well as, engaging in disruptive protest actions, the climate movement kept climate legislation on the agenda. While navigating this legislative scenario, one activist described their organization's constant communication: "Our daily Monday through Friday, war room planning calls where people from our comms team and our political team that does ads and our lobbying team and our state coordinator for all the work on IRA that was happening... things were always changing, and things are always fluid. And as you know, we died 1000 deaths. In that case, we had some several near-death experiences and how to recover from those and several timelines that, like we had to get it passed by x time and then wouldn't happen. There was a lot of momentum to keep fostering." Momentum from the years prior to Biden's election carried over, yet it must be consistently maintained to have an impact of legislative politics.

Throughout this period, climate activists employed a variety of tactics including grassroots events, hunger strikes, advertisement placements, lobbying, and arrests, to keep lawmakers at the negotiating table. One morning towards the end of 2021, Sunrise Movement activists confronted Senator Manchin as he was leaving his houseboat for the Capitol, demanding that he commit to climate action. Signs read, "Manchin knows he is killing us" and "Joe Manchin is burning our future for profit" (Arrieta-Kenna 2021). Despite limited influence over Senator Manchin, activists from around the movement kept the heat up, particularly on their allies. As a result, despite Manchin's willingness to walk away from the climate talks, Majority Leader Charles Schumer kept pushing him to return to the negotiating table.

In late July, it was announced Senator Schumer and Manchin had come to an agreement on a reconciliation bill: the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. A few weeks later it passed the Senate. It was a sunny mid-August day in Washington when the bill came up for debate in the House of Representatives. Dozens of activists had gathered at the steps of the Capitol to spectate, encourage, and celebrate the bill passing through one of its final phases before becoming law. After years of pressuring Democrats to legislate, activists were determined to keep the pressure on as well as express their appreciation. One activist provided a nuanced characterization of the Inflation Reduction Act, by saying, "... it is against all odds kind of a miracle that this got done. And the climate got added back in at the last minute, right when it looked like they were just going to do the health care provisions. I think and we recognize that it only gets us part of the way to what needs to happen by the end of this decade, let alone by mid-century." The same day the bill passed the House of Representatives, the *New York Times* published an article titled, "As Historic Climate Bill Heads to Biden's Desk, Young Activists Demand More." Starting the article, they quote Varshini Prakash, the co-founder of Sunrise saying, "This bill is not the bill

that my generation deserves and needs to fully avert climate catastrophe, but it is the one that we can pass, given how much power we have at this moment" (Friedman 2022b). This chapter continues the story of how the movement accrued the political power necessary to achieve the Inflation Reduction Act.

Understanding Impacts

It will require a political social movement to generate the structural change required to shift the economy away from fossil fuels and towards renewables, to mitigate the severe impacts of the crisis, and promote a just transition for vulnerable populations most affected by climate change. Given that power is constantly in flux and often invisible in nature (Han et al. 2021), it would be a theoretical misstep to view social movements in any less of a dynamic manner. Additionally, the political power of a social movement is challenging to measure (Amenta 2010). It is masked in shifts in dialogue, ideologies, and the potential paths forward. Given our own activist experiences, we join other scholars in calling for a dynamic understanding of power in social movement studies (Gillion 2013; Han 2021). In this vein, there is no single quantitative measure for the political power of a social movement. As Han (2021) reminds us, "Power is not only about winning elections or passing policies; it is also about getting a seat at the decision-making table, shaping the terms of the debate, and impacting the underlying narratives" (66). It is a disservice to both the movements and the scholarship to equate movement success to only the most visible political outcomes (Han 2021, 97). In other words, by adopting a multifaceted dynamic lens of power we better understand how movements influence our politics.

This chapter aims to provide this multifaceted view of the climate movement in its current position. I argue the identity of a movement directly influences the political power it

accrues, as movement identity mediates the relationship between movements and other political actors. I describe the ways in which the climate movement has accrued more political power as its identity was shaped by justice movements through social movement spillover. To illustrate this power shift, I emphasize changes in the political narrative of the climate crisis, highlight key electoral moments, and contrast two windows of opportunity to pass climate legislation through the federal government. I argue that this foray into shifting power dynamics between the movement and the Democratic Party can inform the power that progressive social movements can accrue in our political system more broadly. Additionally, by analyzing these shifts, movements learn lessons that can inform strategies to expand political power moving forward.

Given the urgent crisis facing the contemporary climate movement, it is critical the movement generate change swiftly. Yet, to do so the movement must analyze its own impacts and shortcomings within the context of the political system within which it operates. While Amenta (2010) finds comparative historical analysis to be the most effective scholarly method to understand the impacts of a social movement (300), this approach does not meet the needs of activists of the climate movement under study. Facing one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century, climate activists need "real-time" analyses of strategies and impacts while the movement is still active. As such, I focus my analysis on the development and impact of the contemporary movement since 2008 and identify pressing challenges it must address to achieve its goals. I break the movement's history into three phases: the access-oriented era (emergence-2010), second spillover era (2010-2017), and the Green New Deal era (2017-present).

The 2016 November election was a pivotal moment in the movement's recognition of the need for a bolder strategy, solidifying a paradigm shift and setting it on the trajectory of embracing a more progressive vision. A leader within the Sunrise Movement explained how the

movement's identity shifted during the Trump presidency, "…[T]o me," they offered, "it was militant, powerful, audacious young people that are bold enough to call for the biggest things and take action and get it. I feel like that is the political identity." They went on to emphasize the organization's continued dedication to confrontationally accruing more political power until a Green New Deal is realized saying, "We are on the offense, we have to create the conditions regardless of who's in office, and how do we build the type of power that we need, the people power, the disruptive power, the political power in the government to enable us to massively transform our country." As described in the previous chapter, this sentiment is emblematic of the shifts in identity and strategy that solidified in the wake of the 2016 presidential election.

After a brief discussion of the anti-majoritarian barriers facing popular political mobilizations at the federal level, I lay out the political impacts of the climate movement. This analysis is broken into three parts: agenda setting, electoral impacts, and governing capacity. First, the agenda setting section employs media content analysis along with continued insights from the activist interviews to explain how the movement has influenced the framing and salience of the climate issue. Second, the electoral impacts section describes the mixed results of the post-2016 climate movement as it relates to electing allies. Lastly, the final section compares the political rhetoric and legislative ambition of the movement through an analysis of Congressional debate around the Waxman-Markey bill and the Inflation Reduction Act over a decade later.

I take a multifaceted approach to assessing impacts to account for the different arenas in which power is needed to generate significant political change. This approach aligns with my dynamic understanding of power and its constantly shifting nature. One activist described impacts as follows: "…it's not just you're going to win or lose, it's that getting that message

across has some impact in itself, because it resonates, and it creates public discussion. It gets in the media, it builds up a sense of public dialogue, so that's a major part of it no matter what." It is crucial to define political impacts in the same dynamic manner that we understand political power, as the two are deeply interconnected.

In social movement theory, political opportunity structures refer to how open or closed a political system is to change from challenger groups (Snow 2010, 66). They are often used to explore the possibility for social movement mobilization and impacts across different political systems. However, by exploring the political context in which a movement navigates, we can generate valuable insights into why the movement has or has not achieved its goals and where its shortcomings may lie. Previous debates have occurred over whether the dominant schools of thought in social movement theory were too 'structuralist', meaning that outcomes are solely determined by the governing structures and activist agency does not play a significant role (Jasper 2004; McAdam 2001). Illustrating this critique, Jasper notes, "Participants in social movements make many choices, but you would never know this from the scholarly literature" (Jasper 2004, 2). Meanwhile, political process theorists emphasize this structuralist approach, arguing it compensates for resource mobilization's failure to recognize the role of political structures (McAdam 1982).

I find use in political process theory, despite its structuralist tilt, by combining elements of this perspective with concepts from collective identity theory. Thus, I argue for a theoretical aproach where the agency of activists is centered, while at the same time not displacing the constraining structures that mediate their strategic choices. It is my hope this synthesis of the political impacts of the climate movement and innovations in social movement studies will

provide activists and scholars with a better understanding of how to make transformative change in a democracy dominated by anti-majoritarian institutions.

The constraints and hurdles social movements face due to the prevalence of anti-majoritarian institutions in American democracy present a very real threat to the possibility for their impact on politics and policy. The Presidency is decided by the electoral college rather than the popular vote. Twice in the 21st century a Republican has won the presidency with a minority of the votes, with significant consequences for climate policy. The Senate represents states, meaning that small states enjoy the same 2 senate seats that large states possess. In 2021, Democrats and Republicans each held 50 senate seats even though Democrats represented over 40 million more people (Liasson 2021). Within the Senate, most legislation can be prevented by a silent filibuster, effectively establishing a 60-vote threshold for legislation to clear first to be debated then to end debate and vote (Fisk 1997; Jentleson 2021). When it became clear the Waxman-Markey bill would not reach 60-votes, the Democrats scrapped the bill. To sidestep this hurdle, the climate movement organized around a budget reconciliation bill, which can be passed into law with a simple majority. This was a strategic choice by the movement that was conditioned by the institutions it is trying to impact.

One youth activist described this coalition-level decision, saying "We knew that we weren't going to pass sweeping climate legislation, because we didn't have a filibuster proof majority. But from, honestly, like the point that people were sworn into Congress, our coalition started organizing around budget reconciliation. Which I didn't even know was, I mean, I'm sure most people have no idea what budget reconciliation is." The filibuster, while formidable, is just one of the antimajoritarian hurdles to the movement. Throughout its lifespan the movement must navigate a multitude of antimajoritarian mechanisms, offering a complex path towards their

ultimate goals. These anti-majoritarian features of our democratic system tend to insulate lawmakers from a polity of which large majorities express the desire to address the climate crisis more directly (Nadeem 2021). Much of the future of the movement will depend on the choices it makes regarding these antimajoritarian features of American democracy.

In the 21st century, many progressive political activists in the United States, across a variety of social movements, have run into the barriers of these anti-majoritarian institutions repeatedly. How does a movement succeed when the political system under which it operates fails to live up to democratic principles? If the climate crisis is one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century, then this is, perhaps, the greatest question to 21st century climate activists, and progressives more generally. Given the anti-majoritarian tilt of American democracy, the United States political system is not one where a shift to the majority of the public supporting a cause will inherently result in meaningful political action (Gilens 2014). While the United States has yet to embrace democracy restoration in a meaningful way, majoritarian movement activists have still been able to influence our politics to be more in line with what the American people desire from government.

By breaking movement impacts into three categories (agenda setting, electoral impacts, and governing capacity), I find the movement has succeeded in redefining the Democratic Party's approach to climate change, establishing strong electoral connections in the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, and passing the first climate law in the history of the United States. The strategies necessary to make positive impacts in each of these categories are not necessarily the same. Yet, by cultivating a dynamic movement, organizations can fulfill different niches. Thus, by working collaboratively towards a unified vision they can overpower the status quo bias that dominates American politics, leading to significant ideological, electoral, and

policy shifts. As displayed throughout the previous chapters, shifts in both movement and organizational identities, often through social movement spillover, reestablished the climate movement in a more politically powerful position than it had ever been in previously. Before being able to pass legislation, the movement needed to wake up Washington from its slumbering climate politics.

Agenda Setting

The political opportunities facing a social movement are rarely static nor fully independent of movement influence. Rather, political power and methods of generating change are constantly negotiated and renegotiated within the broader political arena. This is no different for the climate movement. The pre-2016 national climate movement's identity was failing to resonate with the grassroots in large part because of the movement's inside-the-beltway focus and elite roots. In turn, the movement was unable to provide the political power necessary to pass the Waxman-Markey bill and did not have the electoral power to expand Democratic majorities in Congress. Rather, Republicans won the House of Representatives and with significant investments in state-level elections, they were able to institute gerrymanders around the nation, cementing their power in the House for years to come (Daley 2016). In 2012, the Democrats won the national popular vote but that did not matter for regaining control of the House (Goedert 2014). Given the polarized nature of climate change within Washington, the climate movement turned its focus towards the Executive branch, which was still occupied by a Democrat. Commenting on this, a League of Conservation Voters activist said, "We were in the deep wilderness on Capitol Hill for a long time with the Republican Congress control since 2010 to 2018." Until Democrats regained full control over the legislative and executive branches, federal

climate legislation became nearly impossible to pass. This did not reoccur until 2020. While the Democratic Party had slimmer majorities than it did in 2008-2010, the climate movement had made significant changes in its identity, strategy, and subsequently its political power within the Democratic coalition.

The two major political parties, even in their weakened state, are a crucial tool that effective social movements can utilize to set the agenda of the party and the nation, promote policy solutions, elect movement-friendly politicians, and achieve their political goals. In, *When Movements Anchor Parties*, Schlozman (2015) proposes a new framework for understanding movement-party interactions including the coveted status of a movement becoming an "anchoring group" within a political party. Anchoring groups "exercise broad influence on national politics by virtue of the money, votes, and networks that they offer to the party with which they have allied" as well as "shape parties long-term trajectories by enacting favored policies and shaping parties' ideological development" (Schlozman 2015, 3). While Schlozman focuses primarily on the 20th century, this phenomenon can still be seen in the 21st century. By applying Schlozman's lens of analysis, I show the climate movement has become an ascending group to the Democratic Party. While it would be premature to declare it an anchoring group, the movement has potential to become one if it does not tolerate complacency within the party.

At the same time, the climate movement's goals are bigger than the Democratic Party. For example, in the run up to the 2020 election, the *Washington Post* wrote of the Sunrise Movement, "Sunrise says its goal has always been bigger than Biden – or party politics. **It is to reorient the entire project of government around climate change –** and make solving it an electoral winner like the New Deal was for Franklin D. Roosevelt" (Grandoni 2020). As the climate movement shifted from the 'access-oriented era' to the 'Green New Deal' era, it

dramatically changed its approach to the Democratic Party, embracing a confrontational progressive approach to politics. This new strategy matches the urgency of the political moment, as well as the scale of the problem.

Movements pushing for a bipartisan solution to a politically polarized issue will struggle significantly to achieve anything beyond incrementalism as the 2009 Waxman-Markey efforts displayed. The issue does not necessarily have to be polarized within the national public. Rather the movement must recognize if the issue is polarized by the two political parties. McAdam (2017) emphasized the constraining nature of polarization on the movement. Only in recent years did the movement learn how to navigate this polarization effectively. Specifically, the movement has participated in the broader progressive strategy of primarying moderate Democrats. If a movement utilizes polarization to their advantage, they can push a single political party to take a stance that more closely aligns with the movement on their chosen issue. Given the anti-climate nature of the Republican Party, the movement had to build enough pressure amongst Democrats that inaction would have dire consequences. This is part of the agenda-setting process. It is reasonable to hypothesize that fear of electoral consequences was part of the reason Majority Leader Schumer would not give up on finding a path forward on climate legislation with Senator Manchin.

Reflecting on the impacts of Sunrise, one activist noted, "Sunrise played a major [role] in changing the state of climate in the general zeitgeist, putting it into the everyday vernacular, like climate change is here and it's a major problem... That framing was not the framing in 2017." Fridays for Future and other youth-led organizations have been instrumental in emphasizing the urgency of the crisis. Noting this impact, an opinion writer in *New York Times* reported, "...millions of people, many of them children and teenagers, took to the streets during the Global

Climate Strike, a protest inspired by Fridays for Future, the international youth effort started by the 16-year-old Swedish activist Greta Thunberg. The protesters' call for broad action to combat global warming was powerful, as was the message sent by their numbers: Dynamic, frustrated young people are instilling in the climate movement a new urgency" (Warzel 2019). Similarly, Extinction Rebellion has adopted a fully 'outside game' approach focusing exclusively on media-generating actions that would raise awareness about the urgency of the climate crisis. By dedicating organizational capacity to disruptive actions, rather than electoral politics, Extinction Rebellion is making the argument that a radical flank is necessary to redefining the climate agenda. An Extinction Rebellion activist described this dynamic by saying, "We tend not to focus as much on electoral politics as Sunrise or other groups do, but I think a lot of us would say that it needs to be a 'both and' approach... we don't support specific candidates explicitly, but still a lot of our members do work in electoral politics." Commonly activists from across the movement would recognize the important and collaborative role that other wings of the movement play, which challenges the competitive focus of resource mobilization theory.

Raising awareness about the issue's urgency is crucial (McAdam 2017), but just as important is presenting a vision for addressing the crisis. The technocratic vision of the Waxman-Markey era would not suffice in mobilizing a grassroots movement. Rather the movement evolved to mobilize around climate justice. Figure 7 shows how Americans have been searching about "climate justice" more and more since 2008. In the appendix, a similar upwards slope is visible for the term "climate crisis". In this regard, an electoral climate leader at a 'Big Green' organization said, "If we're not working with and incorporating those ideas and those wide coalitions into these issues, like working closely with labor, working closely with racial justice leaders is what makes our movement more powerful and authentic to voters. Working in

isolation, will get us nowhere." This is an impressive movement transformation that even permeated the organizations that were leaders in the first era of the movement, which had been characterized by a narrow vision for addressing the climate crisis.

In a Green New Deal, they found this powerful mobilizing force within Democratic politics and received significant media attention as a result. One Sunrise Movement leader described the power behind the proposal emphasizing, "I feel like the Green New Deal honestly was one of the big turning points... It has become an all-holistic all-systems approach that covers everything from education to housing to transportation. Everyone can see themselves in the vision of the Green New Deal." This positive vision forcefully combats the fearful imagery that is commonly associated with the climate crisis. While the concept has been around for over a decade including during Obama's 2008 campaign, it went from the margins to center stage when Rep. Ocasio-Cortez and the Sunrise Movement mobilized around it. From 2008-2017, the New
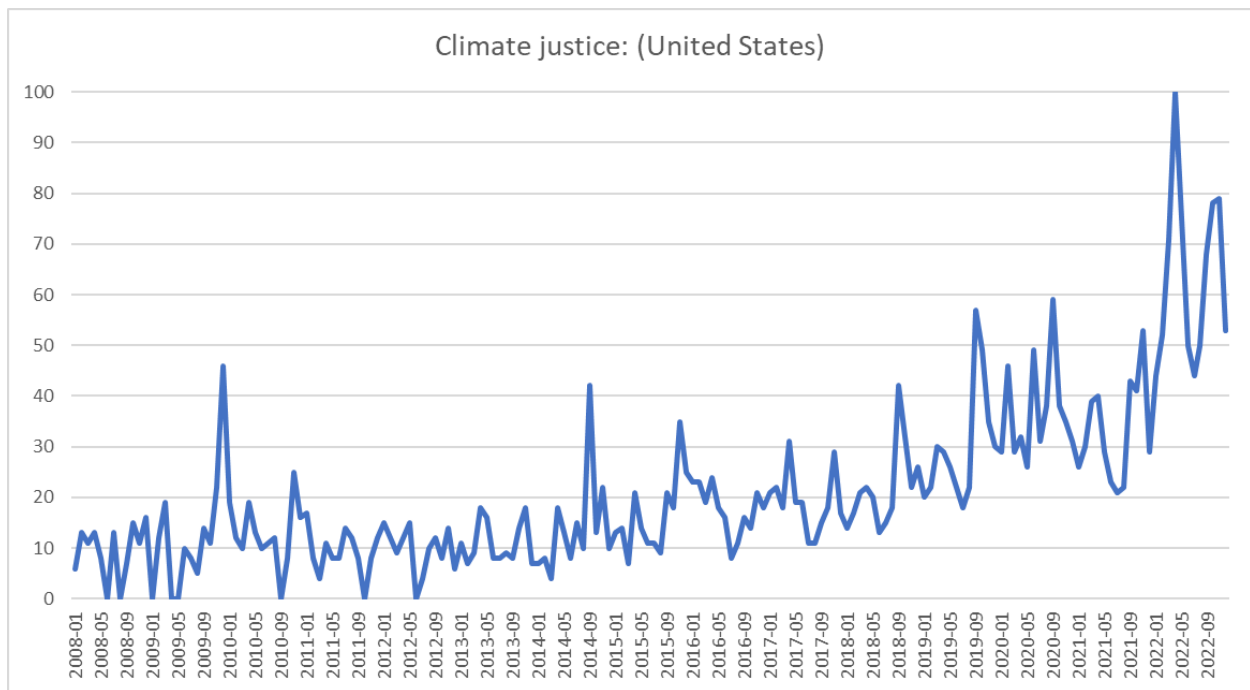

Figure 7: This graph displays Google Trends data showing an increase in searches about climate justice between 2008 and 2023.

York Times published two articles that referenced a "Green New Deal" and "climate" Yet, from 2017-2023, the *New York Times* referenced the vision in 350 articles. While the 2020 Democratic Platform does not mention a Green New Deal, it embraces the rhetoric of the modern climate movement and environmental justice movement. It reads:

"We will use federal resources and authorities across all agencies to deploy proven clean energy solutions; create millions of family-supporting and union jobs; upgrade and make resilient our energy, water, wastewater, and transportation infrastructure; and develop and manufacture next-generation technologies to address the climate crisis right here in the United States. And we will do all this with an eye to equity, access, benefits, and ownership opportunities for frontline communities—because Democrats believe we must embed environmental justice, economic justice, and climate justice at the heart of our policy and governing agenda" (2020 Democratic Party Platform, p. 51).

While large swaths of the party shifted to be bolder on climate, rhetoric and media impact is not enough. Electing allies who will champion transformative climate legislation within committees and on the House and Senate floor is integral to forcing action. Thus, the next step for the movement is to grow their power within a political party and force the party to take their demands seriously. In a polarized political environment, both the party and the movement know it is nearly impossible the movement will abandon the party in favor of the alternative party. This makes it much easier for the party to take the movement for granted and it is at this point many social movements appear to falter. Illustrating this challenge, "'We don't trust that a Democratic Party that has reneged on their responsibility, a complete dereliction of duty for the last 40 years, will actually rise to the challenge at this moment,' said Varshini Prakash, the 25-year-old executive director of the Sunrise Movement" in the *New York Times.* This confrontational tone towards the party is common in the modern climate organizing era (Herndon 2019). A Green New Deal received significant media attention in the days after Rep. Ocasio-Cortez's upset primary victory, as well as the Sunrise Movement's sit-in in Leader Pelosi's Office a week after

the midterms in part because of this confrontational organizational identity. A Green New Deal played a powerful role in increasing the issue salience of the climate crisis during the 2020 Democratic Primary, where activists used it as a litmus test for candidates.

Electoral Impacts

The climate movement echoed throughout the 2020 Democratic Presidential nominating process. While activists held their ground on the importance of a Green New Deal, they recognized candidates who moved closer to their vision. For example, during the primary, the *New York Times* reported, "...Environmental activists largely lauded Mr. Biden's plan and credited the influence of the Green New Deal. 'He put out a comprehensive climate plan that cites the Green New Deal and names climate change as the greatest challenge facing America and the world,' said Varshini Prakash, executive director of the Sunrise Movement, an environmental activist group that has championed Ms. Ocasio-Cortez's proposal. 'The pressure worked'" (Davenport 2019). While Biden is unlikely to ever embrace a Green New Deal as a legislative centerpiece, his recognition of the importance of the resolution, shows how the movement had changed the political common sense within the Democratic Party. Further illustrating this trend, *Data for Progress* tracked Democratic candidates' commitments to addressing the climate crisis through a 'Green New Deal Scorecard'. They found that twelve of the fourteen top Democratic primary candidates called for a Green New Deal and had 'very thorough' or 'thorough' agendas. Drilling down into each candidates plans, they found that more than half of the candidates' plans, including now-President Biden's, addressed more than half of the forty-eight components of their Green New Deal rubric (Data for Progress n.d.). Activists

indicated in the interviews they were planning to push climate onto the agenda just as intensely in 2024.

The movement has also been focusing on electing pro-climate politicians within the House of Representatives and the Senate, where it faces different challenges. While gerrymandering has wreaked havoc on popular movements (Daley 2016; 2020), turning the political power of the climate movement into legislative accomplishments has become more difficult due to other anti-majoritarian mechanisms and tendencies, including the electoral college, states' rights, the Senate filibuster, and money-in-politics. The electoral college, and its winner-takes-all system of delegate distribution, reduces small-d democratic outcomes in several ways. First, as we have seen twice in the last two dozen years, a candidate does not have to win the popular vote to ascend to the presidency. Many activists on the left and within the climate movement were particularly frustrated by this outcome in 2016 when Trump became President despite receiving millions fewer votes nationally. Thus, he did not receive a majority mandate for his anti-climate agenda, nor any other aspect of his platform.

On top of this, the electoral college encourages presidential campaigns to focus on battleground states that are not inherently representative of the nation more broadly. For example, it has been difficult for any presidential candidate to oppose fracking, a particular detrimental form of fossil fuel extraction, in recent elections. In 2020, YouGov found that despite Americans opposing fracking nationally by 9 percentage points, voters were nearly evenly split in key battleground states like Pennsylvania and Ohio (Sanders 2020). This discourages presidential candidates from taking a strong stance on the environmentally detrimental practice. Lastly, the electoral college amplifies the state-representation that the Senate is structured upon. Each state is provided electoral college delegates equivalent to the

number of House members they have plus their two senate seats. The states' rights-tilt of Senate representation also produces antimajoritarian outcomes within the legislative body as each state is represented by two senators regardless of population, empowering states with small populations. This creates difficult math for achieving electoral majorities that support climate action in the Senate as lately rural states have tended to vote Republican.

While navigating the American legislative system, activists must also contend with the pervasive role of money-in- politics as the Supreme Court equated money with speech in *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010) (Goldberg 2018; Holden 2020). To combat this, several climate organizations, including the Sunrise Movement, have required politicians to sign the 'No Fossil Fuel Money Pledge' to receive the organizations endorsement. To achieve their goals activists must overcome or sidestep the anti-majoritarian impulses of the Legislative branch (gerrymandering, state-representation, the Senate filibuster, and money-in-politics) and their counterparts in the Executive branch (electoral college and money-in-politics) that constrain the movement's political opportunities. One 'Big Green' activist described this complicated relationship lamenting the recent surge in anti-voter legislation, "Just read the policy, and you can tell that it's written to disenfranchise people who are lower income and black and stop them from voting... And so, I think that's like one side of it. You're dealing with a board that's really stacked against American democracy. And I think the other side of it is, yeah, we know that we represent the majority of Americans. And we know that people really care about issues of the environment and of democracy." An Extinction Rebellion activist came to a similar conclusion, saying "It's been really great to see that so many people are finding that sense of empowerment whether it's through environmental activism, social, racial justice activism or their local union, whatever it is. More and more folks are waking up [to the fact that] things don't have to be this

way... it really is fundamentally a crisis of democracy and a crisis of capitalism." Despite the significant barriers they face, these activists display a radical hope that the future can be better.

Before highlighting the legislative impacts of the movement, I draw attention to three key electoral moments in the Green New Deal era: the election of Representative Summer Lee (D-PA), the loss of Jessica Cisneros (D-TX), and the re-election of Senator Markey (D-MA). In 2022, several prominent movement organizations unified around Summer Lee's campaign who, if elected, would be another Green New Deal champion in the halls of Congress. On their webpage, the Sunrise Movement announced that they "contacted over 417,000 young, working class, first-time voters in an effort to elect Summer Lee and John Fetterman (Sunrise Movement Election Impact). On top of this grassroots energy, climate related SuperPACs spent a significant amount on Summer Lee's candidacy. The League of Conservation Voters Victory Fund and NextGen Climate Action spent nearly $100,000 combined on the race. Yet, more outside spending in this race was in opposition to Lee, specifically over $3.2 million was spent by opposition groups, whereas $2.9 million was spent in support (Opensecrets.org, n.d.). This electoral victory represents the climate movement, as well as the larger progressive movement's, ability to grow the number of elected officials allied with them, despite often being financially outmatched. While over one hundred House Democrats support the Green New Deal Resolution, given the wide array of problems facing the United States, only a handful are likely to make Green New Deal legislation a top priority; Rep. Lee is likely to join these ranks.

While the movement has succeeded in electing allies, it has also come up short at times. In both 2020 and 2022, Jessica Cisneros ran against a conservative Democrat for a House seat in Texas. Running on a platform that included a Green New Deal, she received significant support from key movement organizations, including endorsements, phone banks, financial

contributions, and canvassing. In 2022, she lost the primary runoff by less than three hundred votes out of over forty-five thousand (Alfaro 2022). It is unrealistic to expect a movement to have a spotless electoral record and the climate movement has made significant inroads in electing bold pro-climate legislators. At the same time, the movement needs significantly more electoral allies if it hopes to achieve a Green New Deal. Unseating incumbents is often crucial to bringing new political visions to Capitol Hill, as the 2018 election of Representative Ocasio-Cortez displayed. Overall, the climate movement appears to have realized that a confrontational electoral strategy is crucial to shifting the Democratic Party's complacency on climate change. In the two election cycles since the emergence of a Green New Deal it has become a rallying call on the left, particularly in Democratic congressional primaries.

Despite growing electoral success in the House of Representatives, one activist I spoke to was quick to acknowledge the movement's electoral weaknesses, particularly its frequent inability to permeate Senate elections effectively. They said, "I don't actually think we figured out how to engage in Senate level races that actually make an impact. Because we don't have any ... Well, Markey". The movement will need to strengthen its allies in the senate if it hopes to enact a Green New Deal, especially given the need to overcome senate-based anti-majoritarian mechanisms like the filibuster. Yet, the activist also noted one exception to the movement's relative ineffectiveness in the Senate. In 2020, Senator Markey, the original sponsor of the Green New Deal Resolution in the Senate, ran for reelection. Reflecting on the race, *Politico* wrote "The outcome was a far cry from last summer, when the consensus in Massachusetts political circles was that Kennedy would be so formidable that Markey ought to retire to avoid an embarrassing defeat" (Murray 2020b). Quickly, key movement organizations including Sunrise and League of Conservation Voters, coalesced behind the Green New Deal champion. Despite a

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global pandemic, young people utilized the internet and phonebanks to shift the momentum of the race in Markey's favor. Describing this loyalty, one 'Big Green' strategist noted, "Ed Markey. That's a really good example of someone who is a true leader on climate. And when he was under threat of getting, really significant primary threat. The climate movement, and especially Sunrise banded behind him really quickly and really authentically to reward him for his leadership on climate." By the end of the primary election, Senator Markey had bested Joe Kennedy III by roughly 11 points. When all was said and done, Markey credited his victory to the movement, saying, "It is a reaffirmation of the need to have a movement, a progressive movement, of young people demanding radical change, demanding justice. A movement giving voice and power to young people when for far too long they were ignored" (Murray 2020b). I argue this example is illustrative of the movement's determination to protect elected allies, even when the political establishment has discounted them. The movement must continue to build its grassroots base to further impact Senate elections if it hopes to build out a Green New Deal. It has to continue to show candidates that running on a Green New Deal is a winning platform.

While the movement has made climate policy a key focus of the 2020 Democratic Primary, elected key Green New Deal champions in the House of Representatives, and defended incumbent Senator Markey in 2020, it must further build out its influence over electoral politics. As with the labor movement, this is integral to becoming a movement that anchors the Democratic Party (Schlozman 2015). Once pro-climate politicians are elected, the movement must also force them to govern in line with their campaign promises. In the next section, I argue the shift in the climate movement's political power is integral to understanding why Democrats did not pass climate legislation in 2009 but passed the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022.

Governing Capacity:

In response to the challenges posted by anti-majoritarian institutions and a politically polarized two party system, people-powered social movement organizing has experienced a resurgence throughout the 2010s, especially in the climate movement. These movements often focus on influencing political discourse, politicians' policy beliefs, and electoral votes. However, not all social movements focus on these popular democratic mechanisms. For example, a social movement might adopt the strategies used by the conservative legal movement (Teles 2007). This multi-decade long movement prioritized the least democratically responsive branch of government, the judiciary, to entrench conservative political ideals within the American judiciary. It emphasized the role of money and intellectual networks rather than people power to accomplish their goals (Hollis-Brusky 2019). While the conservative movement was able to leverage, rather than be constrained by anti-majoritarian institutions in the United States, the Democratic-party and progressive-movement aligned climate activists would arguably have limited success using a similar strategy given the success of the conservative movement and their overarching goals for radical change, rather than the preservation of the status quo by and large endorsed by the conservative movement. Moreover, the urgency of the climate crisis requires more than the incremental change afforded by political institutions in the United States. Just as important, exploiting similar paths to power would not resonate with the movement's identity, making it unlikely activists would even seriously consider using these strategies. Thus, while the success of conservative social movements can clarify how identity and the infiltration of ideas through legal institutions in cultivating movement success in governing capacity (Lacombe 2019, Hollis-Brusky 2019), the anti-majoritarian barriers faced by the climate movement are distinct from those faced by the conservative movement in recent decades.

While the environmental movement does have some history of utilizing the courts as avenues for change, such a focus would be a less effective within the context of the contemporary American political landscape for the climate movement, in large part because of the success of the conservative legal movement. All social movements, regardless of their political orientation, must anticipate, counter, and recognize how their strategies, tactics, and avenues for progress change as other political actors interact with the larger political institutions.

The political opportunities of the grassroots climate movement are further challenged by both other countervailing social movements (ex. conservative legal movement) and a status quo bias that favors elite interests. The conservative legal movement, in large part an extension of the Christian right that Schlozman argues anchored the Republican Party, has accrued significant power in the judicial branch and thus not only made it more difficult for climate activists to utilize the judiciary to promote climate action, but also pushed the judiciary to be even more hostile to climate action (See *West Virginia v. EPA*)[1]. On top of these barriers to action in all three branches of government, the United States political system incorporates a status quo bias that makes rapid mobilization around a specific issue even more difficult to achieve. This can be seen through anti-majoritarian mechanisms like the Senate filibuster which promotes inaction unless a supermajority can be achieved, as well as more subtle phenomenon like the incumbency advantage present in our federal elections. Overall, the American political system, due to the prominent role of antimajoritarian institutions and the interrelated status quo bias, makes it difficult for an insurgent social movement to generate political impacts. However, social

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[1] In 2022, the Supreme Court ruled that Obama's 2015 Clean Power Plan was not constitutional under the Clean Air Act. It severely weakened the EPA's ability to regulate carbon emissions on an industry scale without further congressional legislation.

movements are resilient and with effective political strategy, resonate identities, and learning from one another, they can generate substantive progress.

Perhaps an even more formidable obstacle to action on the climate crisis is the Senate filibuster. The filibuster creates a de-facto 60-vote threshold in the 100-member body for most legislation (Jentleson 2021, Fisk 1997). While the Waxman-Markey bill passed the House of Representatives, which operates with a simple majority, it was unable to reach the 60-vote threshold to overcome a filibuster by Republicans (Skocpol 2013). Under this system, rather than negotiate compromise legislation, the party in the minority is incentivized to obstruct the actions of the majority party, as they believe voters, frustrated with inaction, will blame the majority in the next election (Broockman, Jentleson 2021). Over the years, the filibuster has been strengthened, although exceptions, including a process known as budget reconciliation, have been carved out so that the government could continue to function in the midst of increasing partisan polarization and legislative gridlock. Indicatively, the climate movement and their allies within the Democratic Party were able to use this process to sidestep the filibuster and pass the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022, the largest investment in climate action in the history of the United States.

Waxman-Markey:

This legislation, the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009, was debated and passed through the House of Representatives yet was never brought up for debate or a vote in the Senate because of the threat of a filibuster. As it was debated in the House, the rhetoric sounds both familiar and distant compared to contemporary rhetoric. For example, below are excerpts of representatives Matsui (D-CA) and Hoyer (D-MD) speaking on the House floor:

"I urge my colleagues to recognize the urgent nature of the challenge before us today. If we do not act, we face disastrous consequences. Nearly every scientific society around the world has warned of the cost of inaction. On the other hand, if we do act here today, we make our planet more sustainable, more economically viable and more efficient than the world we live in today," said Rep. Matsui (D-CA) (155 Cong. Rec. 7459 (2009) (statement of Rep. Matsui))

"It's a complex bill because we face a complex problem. But we can sum up its outcome simply: new American jobs, less dependence on foreign energy, a reduction in the carbon pollution that causes global warming," said Rep. Hoyer (D-MD) (155 Cong. Rec. 7677 (2009) (statement of Rep. Hoyer)).

This rhetoric is indicative of how the party described the problem during the early Obama years. In fact, Obama is on record calling for an "all-of-the-above" energy approach in 2012, years after this debate on the House floor (Prakash 2020). Today, it is more common to hear that language from Republicans attempting to delay climate action (Friedman 2022c). During the 2009 Waxman-Markey debate, the issue was described as a "climate crisis" just three times, including once from Mr. Waxman himself. More frequently, there was an emphasis about how the problem would arise in the future. In other words, the urgency was simply not there. The party did not feel enough pressure from the movement.

Additionally, Republican lawmakers were fully opposed to the bill. They frequently attempted to center the debate on whether it would harm jobs as the economy was recovering from the 2008 recession. Representative Roe (R-TN) offered an extensive critique of the legislation:

It defies logic that at a time of eco-nomic recession we would impose a regressive national energy tax that many have predicted will result in a net job loss. Supporters of this legislation only want to talk about the so-called ''green'' jobs that will be created, but they conveniently ignore that some studies indicate that for every one job created, two are eliminated. Worse, we are creating a costly, confusing program of carbon credits. Let me make one prediction: the only certainty under this bill is Wall Street traders sophisticated enough to understand how these

credits are traded will make millions," said Rep. Roe (155 Cong. Rec. 7458 (2009) (statement of Rep. Roe)).

Crucial to highlight is the class argument that Rep. Roe is making. One of the major lessons the movement learned in the second phase of spillover was the importance of connecting the climate crisis to economic justice. While there much more must be done to cultivate working class support of a Green New Deal, the climate movement has begun to recognize the importance of cross-class organizing. While the Republicans could not stop the Waxman-Markey bill from passing through the House, they knew it had little chance of becoming law since Senate Republicans were quite unified in opposition to climate legislation.

Inflation Reduction Act:

Despite still falling rhetorically short of where the movement would want, the Inflation Reduction Act legislative debates, coupled with the fact that the bill passed into law, display a much stronger dedication to climate action by the Democratic Party. As in 2009, Republicans relied on rhetoric about climate legislation being harmful for the economy and the working class. It is unlikely the importance of job creation and economic growth will wane in future legislative debates on climate change. One of the strengths of a Green New Deal is its emphasize on tackling economic justice head on. However, if Democrats are unwilling to defend this transformative vision, voters will have slim odds of knowing this economic justice component.

One thing is quite clear from the analysis of the Inflation Reduction Act debate: the Democrats are still not unified behind a Green New Deal. Every reference to a Green New Deal during this debate was made negatively by Republicans. Specifically, House Republicans referenced a Green New Deal twenty-two times, meanwhile Senate Republicans referred to it

eleven times throughout their debate. An example of this rhetoric can be seen by Rep. Guthrie's

(R-KY) and Senator Grassley's (R-IA) arguments respectively:

"Our country is also facing an energy crisis created by President Biden and Washington Democrats' war on American energy. Despite this, the Democrats' solution is to double down on the   nearly $400 billion to be spent on far-left Green New Deal policies and im-pose billions of dollars of tax increases on energy that will be passed to consumers," said Rep. Guthrie (168 Cong. Rec. 7681 (2022) (statement of Rep. Guthrie)).

"Democrats' inflation act still throws blue-collar workers overboard for their Green New Deal," said Senator Grassley (168 Cong Rec. 4211 (2022) (statement of Sen. Grassley)).

From an electoral perspective, it makes strategic sense Democrats would not defend the Green New Deal vision, as passing the Inflation Reduction Act relied on key moderate Democrats. During two debates between then-President Trump and Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden, Trump only mentioned a Green New Deal a few times, exclusively in an effort to tie the latter to a "radical" vision. To achieve its vision, the movement must be politically powerful enough that a Green New Deal becomes a consensus view within the party and one the Democratic will defend against Republican attacks. While the movement has a long way to go in accomplishing this requisite step in their goals, the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act is reflective of the political power that the movement has been able to accrue thus far. On top of this, the rhetoric of "climate justice," while common throughout the movement was rarely uttered during any of these debates. While this framing has been crucial to mobilizing within the movement, efforts must still be made to push the Democrats to embrace this language broadly speaking. Yet, some activist rhetoric around climate change had filtered into the Democratic Party. For example, "climate crisis" was said thirty-eight times by Democrats in the

House and another eight times during the Senate debate. At the time, Rep. Castor (D-FL), the Chair of the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, supported the bill by saying:

"Today, I am optimistic that America   will lead the world in solving the climate crisis, and I thank the young people all across this country who pushed us to take this historic step," said Rep. Castor (168 Cong. Rec. 7684 (2022) (statement of Rep. Castor)).

This is not uncommon. When climate activists engaged in a sit-in in soon-to-be Speaker Pelosi's office in 2018, they were demanding the establishment of a Select Committee on a Green New Deal. Once in power, Speaker Pelosi instead established a Select Committee on the Climate Crisis. When contrasted with the rhetoric of the Waxman-Markey debate, it is clear the Democratic Party has shifted to take climate more seriously. Prominent climate groups supported the historic climate legislation as a necessary step in a much greater vision. When comparing these two windows of opportunity, the movement was unwilling to confuse access with influence a second time. This is a positive step forward for the movement. Yet with limited time remaining to make its mark, the climate movement must learn how to rapidly scale up its influence or else a Green New Deal will remain out of reach. The next chapter revisits the proposed movement impacts model proposed that illustrates the avenues by which activists and organizations can strengthen the power of the movement within the political arena in which they operate.

The Constantly Shifting Power Landscape

As I write this, Republicans in Washington, now in control of the House of Representatives, are forcing a debt limit fight with President Biden. In this legislative battle, the Republican-led House is attempting to gut several key provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act (Friedman 2023). President Biden is so far unwilling to entertain these legacy-degrading propositions. However, much of the story is still unwritten. This is indicative of the ever-

changing nature of political power. It is always being contested. The legacy of the activists that dedicated themselves to building the political power necessary to pass federal climate legislation will continue to be mediated for years to come. While I provide a glimpse into the political power of the modern climate movement, this ever-moving picture is difficult to capture in real time. Politicians are rarely as open as Senator Markey was in 2020 about the movements that assisted their reelection efforts. Majority Leader Schumer is unlikely to publicly share if his desire to pass climate legislation is due to a newfound dedication to being a leader on climate or if it is a strategic decision to avoid a primary challenger from the left. And so on. Yet, developing an understanding of the climate movement's power in the present is integral to our knowledge of climate politics in the United States. More importantly, it is crucial to gathering any idea about if the United States will adequately address one of the worse crises our country and the world has ever faced.

Assuming we often only see the tip of the iceberg, I embrace a dynamic definition of political power. I argue this comprehensive approach strengthens our study of movements, including the climate movement. The climate movement's embrace of a progressive people-power approach to organizing was necessary for unlocking a transformative movement, one that can match the transformative nature of the crisis. The meteoric rise of the 2017-2018 climate organizations, coupled with the "inside-game" of the 'Big Greens', was powerful enough to force climate legislation to be a top issue in the Democratic Party and hold them accountable to passing legislation when they took back control of Washington. As a result of their nuanced experiences with political power, activists are constantly aware of the threats to their movement's power.

In this chapter and the previous, I share activist voices from across the climate movement to better our knowledge of the movement's past, present, and future. I center their voices in my research as I firmly believe they know the most about the movement, their political possibilities, and in many ways, the climate crisis itself. At the end of the day, climate change is not just a crisis of a capitalist economy dominated by fossil fuels. It is a crisis of democracy. Taken together, these two chapters describe how social movement spillover, enabled by the failure to pass the Waxman-Markey bill shifted the movement's identity through grassroots actions and coalitional spaces, but also through the emergence of new organizations. These shifts in the movement's political positioning enabled it to build grassroots momentum around a justice-centric political program. Through electoral organizing and "outside-game" disruptive protests, the movement managed to keep climate change on the political agenda, forcing the Democratic Party to take it seriously or fear electoral consequences. This dynamic movement identity allowed the momentum to shift into the 117th Congress where they were able to pressure Democrats into passing the Inflation Reduction Act, the first climate law in United States history. While this bill does not live up to the climate movement's ambitions, the law, with the help of executive action, brings Biden in line with his campaign promises regarding climate action. The movement must continue to grow and change if it is going to overcome anti-majoritarian barriers that prevent more transformative legislation, both by making it difficult to elect political allies and setting super-majoritarian thresholds for bills to pass.

Through these conversations, and other sources, I argue shifts in the movement's identity and strategy have been critical for its ability to amass political power, set Washington's agenda, expand its electoral allies, and develop its governing capacity. While activists have so much more they hope to achieve, most adequately characterized through a Green New Deal, this

research shows they have made significant inroads into American politics. In many aspects the climate movement mirrors other social movements. However, unlike most, the climate movement faces an ecological clock, one with existential consequences.

The Final Chapter:

Chapter 5 presents a vision of a future where a Green New Deal has been implemented. Additionally, this chpater bring together the insights of the previous chapters into social movement theory, the climate movement, and the movement's impacts on American politics to explore what this research means for the subfields of social movement studies and American Political Development. This chapter concludes the Honors Thesis.

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Chapter 5: American Politics, Social Movements, and a Vision for the Future

A Glimpse into a Future:

I awake to the sounds of the city, birds chirping from the fire escape of my third-floor apartment. Looking out my window, I see adults commuting in droves to work, some are waiting for the electric bus to take them a few blocks. These buses move unobstructed throughout the cityscape as significant investments in public transportation rendered cars unnecessary within the city's boundaries. Others are heading underground to the subway, now fully powered by renewables. Parents are walking their children to the first day of a 2036-37 school year. Some are bringing the younger ones to universal childcare programs that have are established throughout the city with help from the federal government. Looking further, I see the morning crews restoring the near side of a local park. Once filled with wildlife and wetlands, this park was whittled down through overdevelopment. Yet no longer. The birds chirping in the trees of the park, singing a song of gratitude to the workers for their efforts. These unionized workers, part of the Civilian Climate Corps established by federal lawmakers years prior, take their morning break resting in a grove of oak trees that line the majestic park entrance.

Exiting my apartment building, I see posters to sign up to rebuild communities devastated by the recent hurricane. These storms, worse than when I was a child, wreak havoc wherever they go. They are a constant reminder: we should have acted sooner. Yet the signup sheet is full. I see the names of friends, neighbors, and community leaders, all preparing to give their time, energy, and care to the communities in need. It reminds me of a conversation I had with a climate activist nearly a decade and a half prior, he said, "We're going to see more and more of

an understanding that the climate issue is an issue that's deeply *deeply* related to who we are on a on a kind of a human level, that we're not going to see the same kind of future coming forward as we've just lived." The present, then the future, is nothing like the world of my childhood. While extreme storms persist, made more devastating as a legacy of the climate crisis, and our relationship with the planet is far from fully healed, the constant cycle of climate denial, disinformation, inaction has been replaced.

As I move throughout my day, I reflect on how we got here. We are coming to the end of the first full decade of a Green New Deal in the United States. My excitement grows for the night's festivities, I can barely focus on my work. Tonight, my neighborhood is having a community block party to celebrate how far we have come and reflect on how far we have yet to go. We recognize and thank the visionary young people, Indigenous leaders, and resilient communities that pushed Washington to wake up, to address the climate crisis, and center justice in its response. After decades of shortsightedness about the crisis on Capitol Hill, these talented movement leaders had finally built enough political power they could no longer be pushed to the margins. It is terrifying to think of where our society would be without their efforts. Yet, they had the courage, against all odds, to fight back against powerful corporate interests, the wealthy elites, the anti-climate politicians, and the anti-majoritarian mechanisms of our democracy. I recall one conversation I had with a leading activist all those years ago where they painted a vision for the future, similar to the one I live in now. They said, "Finally, in this world, while people have access to good, union paying jobs that support the work to transition our economy and society to one that runs on 100% renewable energy, people also have time for rest, for leisure, for play, and for engaging in organizations and institutions that are fighting to make sure our government governs in the interest of the majority (including Black, brown, immigrant, poor,

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and working class folks), not the few rich and elite who had gotten us in this crisis to begin with." This was all achieved because climate activists believed in themselves, in one another, in the power of grassroots organizing. They engaged in an act of radical hope that a different world could be created. Most importantly, they understood how to take power from those who would use it to harm the most vulnerable amongst us for their own profit. Reflecting more, I recall a conversation I had years earlier with one of the leaders that led this transformative movement. She said, "Just amassing people power, just amassing the majority of the country agreeing with you, wanting their representatives to vote in favor of that thing that you are fighting for does not mean that you will have it. So therefore, you have to figure out a way to harness that power into political leverage." And that is precisely what the climate movement did.

The first decade of a Green New Deal was ushered in by a diverse coalition of activists, a cross-class, cross-race movement. They reimagined and redefined political common sense, sometimes even surpassing their own wildest dreams. One movement leader reflected on its identity saying, "And to me, it was militant, powerful, audacious young people that are bold enough to call for the biggest things and take action and get it. I feel like that is the political identity." This movement unified around a progressive vision for addressing the climate crisis: A Green New Deal. This vision emerged in the late 2010s, but it took a decade to build the political power necessary to make it a reality. One of the first organizations to champion this vision was a youth-led climate organization known as the Sunrise Movement. When I spoke to one of the founders of this foundational movement organization, he reflected on how shocked he was when he first read the Green New Deal Resolution. I recall him saying, "When I first saw it, you know, the first version of the resolution as a draft, the thought was like, 'Man, I didn't, I just, I didn't know that you could say all that at once. You know, I just didn't know that you could say all that

at once.' That was the rule of the game that it broke." Even when I spoke to him last, the decade of a Green New Deal had not taken off. It is shocking to think how much our world has changed for the better since then.

The first decade of a Green New Deal in the United States began in 2026. Now, nearly a decade later, the lives of future generations are looking better than they have in decades. In this first decade, an explosion of federal policy led to the highest government approval ratings in decades. The nation is on track to hit net-zero years before initially predicted. Finally committing fully to climate action, the nation was able to help lead global climate efforts, with justice centered throughout the response. By centering climate justice in our nationwide mobilization against the crisis, social and economic inequalities no longer predict access to a healthy environment, a right bestowed to everyone in the country. A federal jobs guarantee has led to record low unemployment, and taxing the wealthiest among us to pay their fair share has led to a massive reduction of wealth inequality. Medicare for All passed early in the decade provides universal healthcare to all Americans. The seemingly intractable problems of our politics at the beginning of the century are no longer dominant. Good-paying union jobs are the norm throughout the country as workers are treated with respect and dignity for the first time in decades. Every activist had a vision for what the world would look like once the climate crisis was addressed and despite their uniqueness, they were unified behind a common vision. As daytime turns to dusk and I get ready for the block party. With a smile, I am reminded of one last conversation I had with an activist all those years ago. We were talking about the future of the climate movement, and I cannot at this point remember the specifics of the conversation. I just recall her hope for the future: "Winning a **fucking** Green New Deal everywhere. I want it so bad."

This depiction of the world in 2036 is just one of many possible futures for the climate movement and the United States broadly. This is just part of a story, yet to be written, but not beyond our reach. This battle against the climate crisis and the people, powers, and institutions who stand in the way of addressing it, must continue. While progress has been made, so much more is needed. As Sunrise Movement Leader John Paul Mejia said on the steps of the United States Capitol in April 2023, "We are standing together to forge the path to a multiracial democracy, forge the path forward to a Green New Deal, and forge the path to the America that was always promised but never won" (Sunrise Movement 2023). This thesis hopes to assist activists as they navigate that noble and necessary path. This fifth and final chapter concludes the thesis by exploring the barriers to the climate movement achieving a Green New Deal like the one imagined above, revisits the theoretical contributions of the thesis, and establishes three overarching lessons for climate activists themselves. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a brief passage about what the world can look like if the movement overcomes these barriers.

The Barriers to Getting There:

The climate movement has evolved significantly since its emergence in the latter half of the 20th century. The movement, initially dominated by 'Big Green' organizations has diversified both in strategy and vision. After the institutionalized movement was unable to pass key legislation in the form of the Waxman-Markey cap and trade deal during the Obama Administration and the election of Donald Trump in 2016, a wave of reckoning occurred. Most crucially, a second wave of spillover challenged the movement to embrace a progressive justice-oriented political vision in the form of the Green New Deal, focus on grassroots organizing, and grapple with political power in a more substantial way. While the movement has been quite

successful at pushing the Democratic Party to embrace a Green New Deal, it has had mixed

electoral impacts. Most significantly, it has yet to achieve Green New Deal-style legislation.

Nevertheless, the second phase of spillover and years of grassroots mobilization culminated in

the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022.

While many activists were frustrated by the compromises within this law, they still

acknowledge the significance of the legislation passed. Even still, while the movement is leaps

and bounds more powerful than it was during the Waxman-Markey era, it has a long road ahead

of it. Given recent reports about the urgency of the climate crisis, there is precious little time left

for it to achieve its goals (IPCC 2022).[2] Despite building momentum and a significant legislative

victory, activists remain disheartened when discussing the prospects for change within the

context of the United States. For example, a 'Big Green' strategist described the presence of anti-

majoritarian institutions by saying, "…it is very demoralizing, it's like playing chess but you're

playing against someone who gets 10 moves for every one that you get, the board is so stacked."

He continued to express this frustration saying, "I think, whenever I hear the term, institutional

challenge, I will always think of American politics, no matter what I do the future of my career.

Oh, it's terrible... Oh, it just miserable to think about all the hurdles that you have to go through."

After acknowledging the substantial challenge posed by these anti-majoritarian, activists would

often discuss how they can or have tried to create change despite them.

Moving forward, I argue the movement must reckon with new shortcomings that have

emerged since 2016. Achieving a Green New Deal will require overcoming antimajoritarian

hurdles, as well as democratic backsliding, which has only gotten worse since 2016. Despite the

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[2] The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its sixth Assessment Report
warning that we will surpass the 1.5-degree Paris goal by the early 2030s without a significant shift away from our
carbon-intensive economy. (https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/)

strength of a renewed grassroots movement, strengthened organizational identity, and gravitational shifts in the movement's center, this research suggests there are still limited answers for how the climate movement—and progressive social movements writ large—can overcome these challenges at present. As such, it may be that repair and reform to democratic institutions in the United States themselves are a pre-requisite for addressing the climate crisis through policy. Discussing this challenge with activists their answers, often in regard to the filibuster, largely fit into three types of responses:

1. We were able to sidestep the filibuster this time, but that will be too constraining in the future.

2. The filibuster's days are numbered. When we have the votes for a Green New Deal, we will also have to votes to get rid of the filibuster.

3. We have not grappled with the wide array of antimajoritarian features in our democracy and need to, but I am not sure the climate movement can.

Yet, a Sunrise co-founder had a more acute observation of the movement's shortcomings as they relate to the dominant positioning of anti-majoritarian institutions in American democracy. He put it plainly saying, "I don't think we have reckoned with it [anti-majoritarian tilt] or we didn't before. Now more people are and they're becoming more radical as a result." These responses are not inherently conflictual, yet they show how the movement's historical lack of attention to our democratic predicament have left them lacking the foundation and insight to overcome anti-majoritarian barriers now that they more fully recognize the extent to which they hamper progress on the climate crisis. While the Green New Deal is a powerful mobilizer, the movement needs to articulate a vision for how it will overcome the antimajoritarian hurdles in the way of a

Green New Deal. From my conversations with activists, I believe the second phase of spillover

can provide useful lessons for the path forward even while new lessons remain necessary.

An Overview of the Key Findings:

In developing strategies to create the capacity for change, it is important theorists have an

underlying perception of how our democratic institutions work (or don't), who and what they

respond to, and why they exist in the first place. Specifically, I argue it is integral theories of

change reckon with the anti-majoritarian tilt of the United States if they hope to create the

transformational change that their adherents advocate for. Grounding this study of the climate

movement in decades of insights from the field of social movement theory will allow us to

further hone this crucial discipline, provide guidance to activists, and expand our knowledge of

American Political Development.

I find collective identity, when paired with social movement spillover, is integral to

understanding how the climate movement has changed over time. I utilize a hybrid collective

identity typology to navigate the different levels of identity. Specifically, this research provides

insights into movement-level and organizational-level collective identity shifts. This typology

brings much needed clarity to collective identity, a concept that has been muddled by scholarship

over the decades (Polletta 2001). This concrete typology should allow scholars to reengage with

identity-related questions previously obscured by definitional issues. Crucially, this typology was

developed through a series of conversations with both scholars and activists. This means it could

be one of many fruitful avenues for bridging divides between the two groups. Additionally, I

illustrate the ways in which social movement spillover facilitated an identity transformation

within the climate movement bringing new ideas, strategies, and goals to the fore. This concept

may not be as important when studying other movements. Yet, its prominence in the climate movement and the sheer quantity of cross-movement interaction encountered in this research suggests scholars should engage with social movement spillover more. On top of this, I present a movement-impacts model to the discipline, which should allow both scholars and activists to better illustrate key areas of movement organizing and how they interact with one another. This model also allows us to see the ever-shifting nature of movement power. Lastly, this research encourages the subfield of American Political Development to further study social movements for their ability to cultivate political power, shift policy regimes, and alter the political institutions that govern our society. Extending upon this, I argue American Political Development scholars should further study the role of social movement spillover for its unique ability to alter institutional power dynamics by creating pathways for movements to learn new methods of engagement with the political system. These theoretical contributions are combined with practical insights into how the climate movement has developed. In particular, I contribute to our knowledge of the movement's past, present, and potential future by centering activist voices throughout my research.

A Path Forward for the Movement:

Ultimately, this research tells the story of how a social movement changed over time, learned from its shortcomings, regained legitimacy, shifted its identity and strategy, and transformed American climate politics and policy. Varshini Prakash describes the position the movement found itself in during the Obama Presidency, writing, "Democrats and DC-based environmental groups then pursued a strategy of compromise. They proposed a cap-and-trade bill – the "American Clean Energy and Security Act" – and partnered with fossil fuel companies to

try to pass it in a bipartisan process. The strategy didn't go well" (Prakash 2020, 138). Devastated by this failure, the climate movement began to reckon with its shortcomings. Locked out of legislative power by the 2010 Tea Party movement, the climate movement engaged in a period of reflection and growth. I describe this as the second phase of social movement spillover.

This transformation was led by environmental justice, Indigenous, Black, Latinx, youth, labor, and working-class leaders whose voices finally got through to the mainstream climate movement. These activists, often parts of other movements, caused a *spillover* of goals, strategies, and tactics into the climate movement. Spillover occurred through cross-movement actions, coalitional developments, and activists themselves joining the climate movement. They pushed the movement to abandon its technocratic vision of policy reform, instead promoting an agenda that centers everyday people, one that names race and class, one that everyone can see themselves in: A Green New Deal. The period of spillover from 2010-2017 culminated with new climate organizations that brought with them new identities which better represented the new era of the movement. This shift in the movement's identity was solidified by the 2016 election, a key inflection point. The movement had learned from both its own experiences and the history of movements both past and present. It developed a real sense of power, no longer willing to confuse access with influence as the consequences are too great. By the time of the 2020 election, every Democratic Presidential candidate was expected to have an opinion on a Green New Deal. Despite Biden, not the movement's preferred candidate, winning the primary, the movement did not let up. Activists continued to influence the Biden-Bernie Unity Task Force on climate. They pressured Biden to put allies into key cabinet positions, succeeding with the appointment of Representative Deb Haaland, a Green New Deal Champion, to Secretary of the Interior (Sciales 2021). Additionally, they kept climate on Washington's agenda, which

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culminated in the passage of the flawed yet groundbreaking Inflation Reduction Act, the first and only climate law in United States history. By mapping shifts in the climate movement through semi-structured interviews with activists themselves, a clear picture of movement transformation appears. Similarly, by grounding our understanding of movement impacts in the experiences of activists themselves, we develop a better grasp of the strategic decision facing movements, how they impact politics and policy, and accrue political power within the context of American political institutions.

These shifts were crucial for building grassroots momentum to create legislative change at the federal level. Yet, as Sunrise Co-Founder Varshini Prakash acknowledged when the Inflation Reduction Act passed, "This bill is not the bill that my generation deserves and needs to fully avert climate catastrophe, but it is the one that we can pass, given how much power we have at this moment" (Friedman 2022b). Prakash's centering of power shows how far the movement has come since the Waxman-Markey days when the movement had significant access to elected officials, but relatively little influence. To continue to build power in new and innovative ways the movement must constantly be learning from their own experiences as well as those of other movements. Not only will the movement need more power to have the votes they need to pass bills through both chambers of congress, but it will also need to accrue enough power to dismantle significant anti-majoritarian hurdle. I argue three lessons from the movement's past can inform their efforts if they are to move forward in challenging these anti-majoritarian institutions. Each of these lessons are grounded in elements of the movement's development since 2008.

1. Continue to **learn from other social movements past and present**, including not just from the aspects of organizing that they do well, but also their shortcomings. To

do this, interaction between movements must be expanded in a strategic and intentional manner.

2. Plan and present a **concrete vision for climate and democracy** tying the two issues together with racial and economic justice that most of the movement is unified behind. A Green New Deal has been a useful blueprint, but democracy reform must be taken more seriously throughout the movement.

3. Intentionally **cultivate grassroots momentum** for both policy propositions and institutional change by naming the mechanisms opposing action and the politicians exploiting those antidemocratic features. This requires community building and bottom-up organizational identity development.

These three lessons emerged from deep discussion with activists throughout this research project. Taken together, they offer a path forward for strengthening an already well-developed social movement. While the task ahead for the climate movement seems daunting, it is my hope by illustrating the shifts in the movement since 2008 it is clear how quickly a movement can alter its political strategy and larger identity.

Expanding on Lesson #1, beyond the clear illustration throughout this thesis on the importance of social movement spillover, I argue there is still more to learn. Throughout this research, many of the most promising conversations involved activists who are regularly looking for inspiration across the movement world both past and present. One activist described their exploration saying, "I take a lot of inspiration from the Black Panthers, from the Rainbow Coalition, specifically, especially for working and trying to create a multiracial cross class movement... Most movements are not both multiracial cross cultural and cross class". Despite being part of one of the most prominent organizations, this activist is still open to new ideas and

strategies. Yet, they acknowledged the difficulty of finding strong examples of successful cross-class cross-race organizing in the United States. Organizations across the climate movement should dedicate time and resources to learning from others as this long-term investment can have transformative results. Beyond this, organizations must be humble about their true political power. While it is often crucial to sell donors on their political potential, an overconfident organizational identity can often get in the way of learning from other movements and organizations. The environmental justice movement had been critiquing and encouraging the climate movement to center justice for decades prior to the 2010s when it finally started to listen. It is not a coincidence the 'Big Green' climate organizations only started to listen when they were humbled by the Waxman-Markey experience.

Beyond these insights, lesson #1 also notes movements can and should learn from one another's shortcomings. When I joined the democracy movement after the January 6th insurrection, I found a movement lacking many resonate organizational identities, save a few. This movement had a political agenda, yet one that was difficult to articulate to everyday Americans. Save a few crucial grassroots organizations, it was largely centered away from the grassroots. Given my multi-movement experience, I believe both have significant things they can learn from one another. Beyond the buzzwords we often hear, the climate movement can learn about and incorporate crucial planks of a democracy agenda into their vision for the future.

To be clear, this does not mean they have to take up the mantle of democracy reform policy. One activist discussed this challenge with me, saying, "I was at a Momentum retreat in the summer, and we were talking about this... Maybe it would be smarter for everyone to drop everything and go in in on democracy. But there is still a climate crisis... Someone gave a really good metaphor, it's like a battle on all fronts. I think the question is how to boost the ecosystem

of people doing democracy work and move in sync with them." Based on my interviews with activists across the movements, I do not believe climate movement organizations should shift to be *leading* organizations in the democracy movement. At the same time, I argue creating spaces for learning, teaching, and problem solving together will expand cross-movement connections in a fruitful way for both movements.

Building off the first lesson, the second encourages the climate movement to expand its vision and fully name the ways in which our democracy is not living up to its potential and thus failing to address the climate crisis. The same activist from above, struggled with this exact conundrum, saying "How do we connect our institutions where we actually need to vote for these senators, you know, they could vote to abolish the filibuster, so we can then vote to pass legislation that helps us mitigate our impacts on the climate crisis. How do we tell a story about how all the strategies are connected to each other?" These are difficult questions to answer yet foundational to moving the movement forward. While explaining the nitty-gritty details of American democracy is unlikely to be a strong political mobilizer, getting stuck in the weeds is not required. A Green New Deal is a primary example of how connecting a political vision to the lives of everyday Americans can be an incredibly powerful tool for activists. Thus, when strengthening the focus on addressing antimajoritarian mechanisms in the movement's vision, organizers can learn from the people-centric focus of a Green New Deal. The power of antimajoritarian mechanisms is in their invisibility. The goal of activists seeking to dismantle them is to first make them visible.

Lastly, the third lesson centers on expanding the grassroots force of the climate movement. Far too many organizations are still willing to prioritize the 'knowledge is power' pathway at the expense of the 'people are power' approach. These are vestiges of the first phase

of the climate movement. The movement does need a few organizations that prioritize the 'knowledge is power' approach as it makes the movement identity more dynamic, yet these organizations should be accountable to the grassroots activists of the movement.

Additionally, a renewed dedication to community building is required as the movement moves into its next phase. This is crucial to building a movement from the ground up, one that is reflective of the collective aspirations of its participants, and essential for long-term grassroots involvement. As Gamson reminds us, "The best long-run guarantor of democratic participation in a movement is a collective identity that incorporates the idea of people as collective agents of their own destiny, and adopts a practice that encourages them to be active and collaborative" (Gamson 1991). My findings from this research into the climate movement and my previous research confirm Gamson's insight into collective identity. Thus, building people up is the first and most important task to movement organizing. The movement must never take the grassroots for granted, lest they hope for a repeat of the Waxman-Markey disappointment.

Combined, these three lessons gleaned from the movement's recent history provide one approach for guiding the movement forward. At the start of this thesis, I set out to produce movement-relevant theory and insights. I hope I have achieved this goal by centering activist voices as I mapped the political shifts and impacts of the climate movement since 2008. Ultimately, that will be up to the activists to decide. From my conversations with activists throughout the years, concepts of social movement spillover and collective identity resonate with their experiences, yet they often use different language to describe these phenomena. By taking an activist-scholar approach, I attempted to bridge some of these language divides throughout this thesis.

Overall, I find shifts climate movement's identity, along with the development of key organizational identities, have been integral to altering the movement from one focused on access to elites, with little sense of grassroots power, to a powerful political force within the Democratic Party. Yet, the climate movement must continue to reckon with its shortcomings and institutional barriers. As the Inflation Reduction Act displayed, the movement has accrued enough political power to force climate action, yet not enough to do so in line with the movement's vision and the urgency of the crisis. It will need to become even more powerful to reach the future that we deserve, that future generations deserve. By continuing to learn from and with other movements, make visible the antidemocratic mechanisms preventing progress, and building grassroots momentum, the climate movement has the power to achieve a Green New Deal.

A Final Glimpse into a Future:

It's January 18th, 2037, days before a new President of the United States is inaugurated. Yet the climate crisis was not a top focus of this election. Movement efforts pressuring candidates to focus on the climate crisis in the 2020 elections are being inked into history books. No politician would dare run against a Green New Deal in this election, fearing punishment at the polls. The political commonsense has fully shifted. New political issues dominate this cycle; there are always new visions to create a better future. We can and should always be doing more. Yet, this new President propelled into the White House by a myriad of movements reflecting the hopes and dreams of the majority of Americans. This was the fourth election cycle since January 6th, 2021, when our nation's Capitol, our democracy, was attacked. In each of these four cycles, our nation has recommitted itself to the values of democracy. The climate movement, along with

its allies throughout the progressive political world, unified behind the project of renewing American democracy. Some of the antimajoritarian barriers that were used for decades to hinder the will of the people have been removed. This empowered politicians to implement the will of the people or face the electoral consequences at the polls. No longer could politicians hide behind wealthy donors, gerrymandered districts, or antiquated Senate procedure.

At the same time, the movement takes this day as a time for reflection and remembrance. After grabbing a quick dinner on my way home from work, I walked to the park across from my apartment, where a vigil is being held by local climate leaders. This day marks fourteen years since the police fatally shot 26-year-old Manuel Esteban Paez Terán, a forest defender who preferred to be called Tortuguita. Along with hundreds of others, they were protesting "Cop City", a massive, proposed police training complex that would destroy a forest on the outskirts of Atlanta throughout 2022 and 2023 (Radde 2023). They died unjustly to the guns of a system that failed to see the humanity within our society, particularly within marginalized communities.[3] The climate movement must always make space to remember the sacrifices, including and especially the unjust ones, that have been made on its behalf. In 2037, the decade of a Green New Deal has transformed the policing system, as climate activists united with police reform activists to begin demilitarizing police throughout the country. While there is more work to be done, in many ways, our society looks unrecognizable to the one that accepted the murdering of activists by the state.

The next day, I wake up to the birds chirping, the morning commuters on their way to work and school. A profound sense of gratitude washes over me, my community, city, state, and

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[3] Tortuguita was murdered by police while I was conducting this Honors Thesis. This research is dedicated to them and the thousands of activists across the country who fight every day to better our society, despite society constantly neglecting, marginalizing, and attacking them.

nation are finally living up to their democratic duties. The climate crisis, and the intersecting crisis of democracy, have been addressed in a manner that truly meets their scale. I am grateful for the social movement activists who dedicated themselves to building this better world, one that many could not even imagine at the time these activists started organizing. One of the most important impacts of a social movement is its ability to create a radically different vision for the future. As one activist shared with me in the pre-GND days, the future is not just our own. Their vision back then was for a world "in which my children get to play in clean soil, swim in clean water, and breathe fresh air. Where they get to go to schools that teach them the real science of the climate crisis and teach them how we solved it; with organizing and building powerful social movements." Somewhat uniquely, social movements allow us to dream about a better world and at their best they show us how to build it ourselves. As I walk up to my window to greet the day, the voice of Representative Ocasio-Cortez, the original sponsor of a Green New Deal in the US House of Representatives pops into my head, *"And the first big step was just closing our eyes and imagining it. We can be whatever we have the courage to see."* (The Intercept 2019).

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APPENDIX

Semi-Structured In-Depth Interview Questions
- Stage-setting:
    1. Background, research purpose, and context
- Questions:
    1. How long have you been involved in climate activism? Is this the first organization you have been working with?
        - If yes, why did you choose to begin your activism with this organization?
        - If no, how many and which organizations have you been a part of? Why did you choose to work at this organization?
            - Have you received training for your activism? If so, who has trained you?
        - Have you participated in other social movements, if so, which?
    2. What drew you to get involved in the climate movement? What motivates you to continue to work in this space?
    3. Have other social movements influenced your activism?
        - If yes, which social movements have been most impactful on your activism?

I study social movements, but I am especially interested in the ways in which the social movements generate political impacts through strategic decision-making and social movement organizations. I am going to switch gears a little and ask you about your experiences within [ORGANIZATION].

4. How does your organization envision political change?
    - The theory of change?
    - Where do you see your organization fitting in the larger climate movement?
        - Who are the primary targets when your organization attempts to create change?
        - Was this strategy influenced by previous or other current social movements?
5. How does your organization navigate the differences between the climate movement and the climate justice movement?
    - Does your organization ally with environmental and climate justice organizations?
6. Does your organization focus on one of the following aspects of social movement organizing more than the others or do you focus on each of them equally?
    - Organizational...
        - Structure
        - Identity
        - Strategy
        - Tactics

7. How does your organization's structure impact your ability to make change?
    - How are decisions made at your organization?
8. How would you describe the identity of your organization?
    - Define organizational identity – Look back at my past research and share that definition
9. What tactics does the organization engage in to generate change?
    - Which ones have had the most success? The least?
        - Why do you think the organization gravitates towards these tactics? What does this say about the organization's identity?
10. How would you describe your organization's influences on climate politics over the last handful of years?
11. Coalitional work plays a relatively notable role in climate activism. How does your organization view and approach coalitional work?
    - Which organizations do you most frequently collaborate with?
    - Does this approach differ when collaborating with other climate organizations vs. other social movement's organizations?

Now, I would like to shift gears again to focus on your understanding of the larger climate movement. I am defining the climate movement as...

12. How would you describe the climate movement using three adjectives? Explain each.
13. How would you describe the relationship between the movement and other political actors?
    - How would you describe the relationship between the movement and the media?
    - Do you feel like the climate movement was influenced by prior movements? How so?
        - If no, were there other factors that influenced the movements development?
14. If you were to tell the story of the climate movement, what moments or events would be integral to the story?
    - What impacts do you see that the climate movement has made or is making?
15. How would you describe the identity of the climate movement over time?
    - Is there a difference between newer climate organizations and older organizations? If so, what?

Bonus: Where do you see the future of the climate movement going?

Conclusion:
16. Is there anything you would like to share that has not been prompted by a question?
    - Next steps, future debriefing, etc.

Climate crisis Google Trends Data:

Climate crisis: (United States)