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From Divided to United:

The Paradoxical Effects of Mobilizing Structural Networks

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by

Rajkamal Singh

Committee in charge:

Professor Amit Ahuja, Chair

Professor Bruce Bimber

Professor Pradeep Chhibber, University of California, Berkeley

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The dissertation of Rajkamal Singh is approved.

Pradeep Chhibber

Bruce Bimber

Amit Ahuja, Committee Chair

August 2023

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VITA OF Rajkamal Singh
August 2023

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Political Science, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA. (Summer, 2023)
Dissertation: From Divided to United: The Paradoxical effects of Mobilizing Structural Networks
Dissertation Committee: Amit Ahuja (UCSB), Bruce Bimber (UCSB), and Pradeep Chhibber (UC Berkeley)
M.A. Political Science, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA (Spring 2023)
M.A. Liberal Studies, Ashoka University, India. (2016)
B.Tech. Electrical & Electronics Engineering, I.T.S Engineering College, India. (2012)

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Protests and Social Movements, Ethnic Mobilization, Political Organizations, Political Communication, South Asian Politics.

ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS

1. Singh, Rajkamal, Rahul Hemrajani, and Amit Ahuja. 2023. "Preventive Repression: Protest Policing in New Delhi." Journal of Urban Affairs. Link
2. Ahuja, Amit, and Rajkamal Singh. 2023. Identity in Protests: Comparing Dalit and Upper Caste Agitations. In Dalits in the New Millennium, ed. Sudha Pai, Shyam Babu & Rahul Verma, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
3. Singh, Rajkamal, and Garima Goel. 2019. "Organizing a Victory: A Review Essay on the BJP's 2014 Electoral Success." Studies in Indian Politics, 7(2), 274-280. Link
4. Singh, Rajkamal, and Rahul Hemrajani. 2018. "Concentric Clientelism: A Case Study of Rural Saharanpur." Studies in Indian Politics, 6(2), 247-266. Link

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2. Singh, Rajkamal. (2020). "When Modi govt came to power, farmer protests increased 700% -- the three bills are its result." *The Print.in.* Link
3. Ahuja, Amit, and Rajkamal Singh. (2020). "Why electorally secure Modi govt cracked down on CAA protesters so brutally." *The Print.in.* Link
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10. Prasath, Venkat, Rajkamal Singh, and Gilles Verniers. (2015). "How the Grand Alliance swept Bihar: 18 charts that explain the electoral verdict." *Scroll.in.* Link
11. Singh, Rajkamal, Gilles Verniers, and Neha Yadav. (2015). "Six charts that tell you what's different about the New Delhi assembly." *Scroll.in.* Link

CONFERENCE & WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS

1. Singh, Rajkamal. (August 2023). "How the Divided Organize Collectively: A Study of Coalition as a Collective Action Strategy among Indian Farmers." American Sociological Association, Philadelphia, USA.
2. Singh, Rajkamal. (August 2023). "How the Divided Organize Collectively: A Study of Coalition as a Collective Action Strategy among Indian Farmers." American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, USA.
3. Singh, Rajkamal. (June 2023). "How the Divided Organize Collectively: A Study of Coalition as a Collective Action Strategy among Indian Farmers." Mobilization Conference, San Diego State University, USA.
4. Singh, Rajkamal. 2023. "How the Divided Organize Collectively: A Study of Coalition as a Collective Action Strategy among Indian Farmers." Political Communication Working Group, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA.
5. Singh, Rajkamal. 2022. "How the Divided Organize Collectively: A Study of Coalition as a Collective Action Strategy among Indian Farmers." Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA.
6. Singh, Rajkamal, Rahul Hemrajani, and Amit Ahuja. 2021. "Preventive Repression: Protest Politics in New Delhi." American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Seattle, USA.
7. Singh, Rajkamal, and Amit Ahuja. 2020. "Color of Power: Differences between Elite and Public Skin Color in India." South Asia Colloquium, UC Berkeley, USA.
8. Singh, Rajkamal, 2019. "Organizers of Large-scale Farmers' Protests in India: Past and Present." University of California, Irvine, USA.
9. Singh, Rajkamal, and Rahul Hemrajani. 2017. "Concentric Clientelism: A Case Study of Rural Saharanpur." Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA.

10. Singh, Rajkamal. 2016. “Political Economy of Zilla Parishad.” University of Namur, Brussels, Belgium.
11. Singh, Rajkamal. 2016. “Politics of Zilla Parishad.” London School of Economics, London, UK.
12. Singh, Rajkamal. 2015. “Shifting Alliances and Resurgence of OBCs in Bihar.” Sciences Po, Paris, France.

WORK EXPERIENCE

1. Teaching Assistant, Department of Political Science, University of California Santa Barbara, CA, USA.
   1.1. Globalization and Politics (Summer 2021)
   1.2. Political Communication: Comparative and Historical Perspective (Winter 2020)
   1.3. Politics of the Military (Fall 2019 and Fall 2020)
   1.4. Introduction to Comparative Politics (Summer 2020)
   1.5. Democracy and the Internet (Spring 2020)
   1.6. Ethical Issues in International Relations: Just War (Winter 2020)
   1.7. Media and Comparative Political Communication (Winter 2019)
   1.8. Comparative Ethnic Politics (Fall 2018)
   1.9. Politics of Developing Countries (Spring 2018)
   1.10. Politics of South Asia (Winter 2018)
2. Graduate Student Researcher, UC Berkeley, CA (2021- 2022)
3. Projects Coordinator and Research Fellow, Trivedi Centre for Political Data, Ashoka University, India (2014-2017)
4. Business System Analyst, Syntel International Ltd., Chennai, India (2012-2014)

AWARDS

1. Summer Centennial Center Research Grant, APSA (2023)
2. Manzer-Wesson Award for Best Published Paper, UCSB (2023)
3. Graduate Division Dissertation Fellowship, UCSB (2023)
4. Dept. of Political Science Research Grant, UCSB (2020-22)
5. Adams-Lee Distinguished Teaching Award, UCSB (2021)
6. Humanities and Social Science Research Grant, UCSB (2020)
7. Manzer-Wesson Award for Best Seminar Paper, UCSB (2018)

FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE

India: Karnataka, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Maharashtra.

Abstract

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Coalitions are important mobilization tools that can help build powerful movements and help achieve political outcomes. However, coalition formation is not equally feasible within all social movements. Indeed, existing studies show that intergroup antagonisms stemming from identity-based differences, power asymmetries, and legitimacy concerns impede collaboration within structurally divided movements. What conditions facilitate coalition formation within structurally divided movements? To answer this question, this project examines coalition formation in a particularly hard case, namely the Indian farmers movement. The deep-seated caste, class, and ideological divisions have historically impeded coalition formation within the movement. Yet, in the recent past, large, diverse coalitions have emerged despite the persistence of structural divisions. Drawing on extensive fieldwork (200+ interviews and participant observation of 19 key events) and secondary sources, I argue that mobilizing structural networks have a paradoxical effect on inter-organizational collaboration. A high capacity to mobilize structural networks help organizations attain their objectives, while also exacerbating divisions by giving them the ability to threaten each other's interests and assert their identity. Conversely, a reduction in the capacity to mobilize structural networks creates greater space for alternative strategies and actors and modify inter-organizational dynamics to make structural divisions

less pronounced. Specifically, in the Indian case, the declining capacity made the broader movement environment conducive for coalitions by reducing power asymmetries, delegitimizing structural identities as viable frames of mobilization, and creating more space for new organizations that mobilized beyond structural identities and used collaboration from the very outset. This enabled organizations to first engage with each other on ad-hoc basis, which in turn had a reinforcing effect leading to ties among disparate movement actors. These interconnected organizations coalesced into large, diverse coalitions to confront an oppressive and negligent government. Ultimately, this study sheds light on a potential collective action paradox inherent in divided movements. It reveals that factors enhancing the collective action capacity of individual organizations may simultaneously impede collective action between organizations. As exemplified by the Indian case, this study also underscores that coalitions are a powerful mobilization tool that authorities cannot dismiss as routine opposition, especially so for divided groups.

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1 Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation seeks to understand coalition formation within a divided movement by conducting a within-case analysis of a highly difficult case - the Indian farmers' movement. Historically, this movement has been characterized by deep-seated divisions rooted in caste, class, and ideology, resulting in fragmentation and a distinct lack of unity among organizations. However, despite these divisions, two large, diverse coalitions have recently emerged, in a remarkable turn of events. The central argument of this dissertation, which draws upon extensive fieldwork and secondary resources, is that the mobilization of structural networks paradoxically impacts collaboration within divided movements. The capacity to extensively mobilize structural networks enables organizations to find success in achieving their goals. However, this same capacity exacerbates divisions within the movement, which can be attributed to the increased means of organizations to assert their identities and pose threats to each other's interests. Conversely, a low mobilization capacity makes securing individual victories more challenging. But this reduced capacity also creates a localized, segmented competitive environment where divisions are less prominent and discernible. This shift in dynamics cultivates an environment that is conducive for coalition formation. In the following sections of this introductory chapter, I elaborate upon the Indian case, introduce the empirical questions, and provide an overview of the subsequent chapters. The aim is to offer a clear roadmap for the investigation that unfolds in the pages to follow.

1.1 The Indian case

The farmers' struggle in India is a story of several distinct mobilizations shaped by structural factors that pervade the Indian countryside.[1] Specifically, the farmers' movement is irrevocably interwoven with the Indian caste system. The latter is an extremely heterogeneous and hierarchical order that classifies social groups based on occupation and shapes the nature of village settlements, inter-group relations, land ownership, division of labor, and politics within the broader rural society.[2] Consequently, the farmers' mobilizations have been divided, with varied benefits being sought for distinct castes, classes, and ideological groups. This has led several scholars to argue that the Indian countryside is fundamentally constrained in its ability to build a unified farmers' movement because of the self-limiting nature of the caste system that incentivizes conflicting "multiple rural selves" (Varshney, 1998, p. 5; Moore, 1993).

Nonetheless, the Indian farmers' mobilizations have a long and hallowed history. During the colonial days, farmers' initiated several protests and resistance movements against the British colonial state's oppressive and extractive policies and the subjugation by the feudal landlords (Gough, 1974; Guha, 1983; Shah, 2004). These mobilizations gradually became integrated with the Indian independence movement in the 1920s-30s. In fact, it was as a result of farmers' movements in Champaran, Bardoli and Kheda that Mahatma Gandhi and

[1] I borrow the plural form of mobilizations from Roth (2010), which is used to denote mobilizations of distinct feminist groups during the second wave of feminism in the United States.

[2] In addition to the caste system, there are other factors such as the wide variety of agro-climatic zones and local political economy contexts, which structure Indian agriculture and productivity in one region very distinctly from the other. However, in terms of mobilization, the most important role is that of the caste system because it provides the basis for who can be mobilized and to what extent.

several other leaders of the Indian independence movement rose to prominence (Hauserfest, Walter, & William, 2008). Even after India became independent, the legacy of colonial farmers movements continued. However, in the 1950s and 60s, they were typically small-scale, localized and led by small farmers and landless laborers (Shah 2004) against their oppressive feudal landlords as well as local governments (Guha, 1983; Desai, 1986; Chatterjee, 1982; Hardiman, 1992).[3]

In the 1970s, farmer mobilization in India took a new turn, when large scale protests seeking policy concessions were organized against the state and central governments (Varshney, 1998). During this period, the mobilizations were still led by distinct organizations at different points of time. However, the scale and the timing of the mobilizations coupled with the presence of common targets - state and central governments - provided farmers' struggle with an overarching connection. Some scholars have referred to this phase as the beginning of the "democratic peasant mobilization" in India, a type of collective action distinct from the violent and disruptive revolutions and routine resistance typically conducted by farmers (Varshney, 1998). I refer to it as the first phase of Indian farmers' movement, which marks the starting point for the examination of inter-organizational dynamics, which is the focus of this dissertation.

1.1.1 Disjointed and fragmented: Phase 1 of the Indian farmers movement

[3] On a few occasions, these movements turned violent, for instance, the Naxalbari movement of the 1960s (Banerjee, 1980; Brass, 1991), and the Tebhaga movement in the 1940s and 1950s (Dhanagare 1976).

In the 1970s and 80s (henceforth referred to as Phase 1), farmers' mobilizations in India took a new turn. Unlike the highly localized, small-scale mobilizations of the past, Phase 1 was characterized by large-scale protests led by several organizations and widespread across various states (Varshney, 1998). The movement originated in the southern state of Tamil Nadu in the late 1970s and culminated in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh in the late 1980s. Once the protests began, the movement peaked in Karnataka, Punjab, Gujarat, and Maharashtra at different points in time. (Nadkarni, 1989; Lindberg, 1994; Gupta, 1997). During this period, farmer organizations were spearheaded by relatively prosperous "Bullock Capitalists," who had benefited from the land redistribution policies and the Green Revolution of the 1950s and 60s (Frankel, 1978; Nadkarni 1987). These farmers were "small to medium sized, self-employed independent agricultural producers," primarily hailing from the backward castes, the largest agrarian caste bracket in India (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987, p. 50).

Despite the overarching connection, the farmers' movement of Phase 1 remained largely disjointed. Organizations conducted protests independently in their respective districts or nearby areas, and there existed a limited association between organizations or regions (Omvedt, 2005). Even in the few instances wherein protests were organized at state capitals or the national capital, such as the 1984 protest in Chandigarh and the 1988-89 protests in Boat Club grounds in New Delhi, individual organizations spearheaded these events without any explicit ties with others.[4] Omvedt (2005, p. 186) captures the overall character

[4] Some scholars as well as my fieldwork suggests that activists from different organizations on some occasions were part of events organized in state and national capitals. For instance, farmer organizations in Punjab while generally in conflict with each other, several of them were present in Chandigarh in 1984. Similarly, Shetkari Sangathan activists from Maharashtra attended protests in Chandigarh, Karnataka, and

of the movement aptly, "[farmer] organizations were regionally based, using themes and rhetorical imagery drawn from regional cultures, primarily at home in the vernaculars, yet always seeking the elusive national alliance."

The disjointed nature of the movement in Phase 1 can be attributed to the caste system and its spillover effects on class and ideological divides between organizations and farmers (Nadkarni 1987; Banaji, 1994; Varshney 1998; Gupta 1997; Omvedt 2005).[5] Most farmer organizations relied heavily on caste networks to mobilize support for protests and other activities. This led them to establish and foster strong associations with specific caste identities, creating antagonisms due to caste-based rivalries and competition, which in turn made it challenging for organizations to find a common ground (Alexander, 1980; Nadkarni 1987; Banaji, 1994; Lindberg, 1994; Varshney 1998; Gupta 1997; Omvedt

Gujarat. However, such events were rare, but most importantly, these events did not entail any form of partnership between organizations, only one organization led and set the agenda of the overall event. Leaders of other organizations came to these events mainly in their individual capacity or to show solidarity in the context of police or state repression.

[5] Traditionally, the Indian caste system is divided into five groups which are arranged in a hierarchical manner. At the top of the hierarchy are Brahmins (Educated and Priestly group), followed by Kshatriyas (Ruling and Warrior groups), Vaishyas (Business groups), Shudras (engaged in menial jobs and agriculture), and Dalits and Tribal groups respectively. The traditional classification also has a legal equivalent, which is what I use to refer in the current text. The legal categorization has four broad groups: Upper Castes (UCs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Scheduled Castes (SCs). The legal categories broadly overlap with the categories in the traditional hierarchical system: The UCs comprise of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas combined, OBCs comprise of the Shudras, SCs comprise of Dalits, and STs comprise of the tribal groups. Two important points should be noted about how caste system operates within the agricultural community. First, while the traditional caste system has a strict criterion based on occupation, it does not fully apply across contexts in India. There are Brahmins, Vaishyas, and Kshatriyas who also engage in agriculture, primarily as land owning cultivators. The Shudras, Dalits, and Tribal groups comprise a mix of land owning cultivators and agricultural laborers alongside several castes within groups who engage in non-agricultural activities. Second, the caste system plays an important role in shaping the class structure of Indian farmers. The UCs are primarily land owning farmers with medium to large landholdings (2 hectares and above). The SCs and STs are primarily agricultural laborers with marginal landholdings (less than 1 hectare). The OBCs are primarily self-cultivating farmers with a considerable variation in their landholdings.

2005).[6] The divisive effect of caste-based mobilizations was not ameliorated even in instances where organizations from the same region worked toward similar goals. For instance, in Western Uttar Pradesh, despite sharing many similarities in the form of crops, agroclimatic region, and demands, various caste groups (e.g., Dalits, Jats, Sainis, Tyagi, and Gujjars) sought representation from distinct competing organizations (Gupta, 1997; Singh, 1992; Bentall & Corbridge, 1996; Ramakumar, 2017).

The movement was also divided according to class-based cleavage into organizations representing landowning farmers and those representing agricultural laborers and marginal farmers (Banaji, 1994; Omvedt 2005). This was further exacerbated by caste and ideological differences, which were highly interlinked. Thus, class-based power asymmetry was juxtaposed with caste-based hierarchies, with landowners typically hailing from Other Backward Classes or Upper Castes, while labor organizations mainly represented farmers from Scheduled Castes (Herring 1983; Nadkarni 1987; Byers 1988; Banaji, 1994). The rift between landowning farmers and labor organizations further widened due to their ideological divides. Specifically, the majority of labor organizations were either officially affiliated or ideologically aligned with left-wing political parties (Alexander, 1980; Gupta, 1997, Gill & Singhal, 1984). Previous case studies document

[6] Caste-based mobilization was the most dominant mode of mobilization across organizations. For instance, the Kerala Krashaka Federation was dominated by farmers from Ezhavas and Nair castes (Alexander, 1980). The Tamil Nadu Agriculturalists Association mainly comprised Kammas and Vellalas (Alexander, 1980; Harriss, 1981). Bharatiya Kisan Union in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab was primarily dominated by Hindu and Sikh Jats (Gupta, 1997; Gill & Singhal, 1984). Shetkari Sangathan in Maharashtra was dominated by Marathas (Arora, 2001; Dhanagare, 2015). Khedut Samaji in Gujarat was mainly led by the Patidars (Shah, 1976), and Karnataka Rajya Ryotha Sangha in Karnataka was led by Vokkalingas and Lingayats (Assadi, 1994). Given that the majority of the caste groups associated with organizations were historically landowning cultivators, the caste networks also came to represent specific class interests (Banaji, 1994; Nadkarni, 1987, Gupta, 1997).

several instances in which farmer organizations representing landowning farmers deliberately undermined the efforts of labor organizations seeking land redistribution policies and farm wages (Gill & Singhal, 1984; Nadkarni, 1987).

Another ideological difference stemmed from the fact that certain organizations associated with political parties or elites while others took an ideological, "apolitical" stance (Dhanagare, 2015). For example, in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra, the fraternization of any organization with politicians or parties was met with public denouncement and opposition of such alliances from other organizations (Nadkarni, 1987; Gupta, 1997; Dhanagare, 2015). Finally, in this social movement culture, wherein mobilizations were facilitated by organizations through their structural identities and networks, organizations that went against the grain were marginalized (Omvedt, 2005).

Organizations in Phase 1 failed to collaborate with each other due to the challenges posed by structural divisions, and any attempts to forge unity did not attain the desired results. As Nadkarni (1987) noted, during Phase 1, the movement was marked by "a competition for domination, more than coordination" (p. 100). In a notable instance, an organization in Uttar Pradesh attempted to create a coalition across various castes and religions under a common umbrella, but it quickly disintegrated into smaller identity groups (Joshi, 2017; Rana, 1994). Similarly, in the 1980s, two attempts to guide the movement through the formation of national committees were also rendered unsuccessful (Dhanagare, 2015; Omvedt, 2005).[7] First, only large organizations representing wealthy or dominant-caste

[7] In 1981, Narayanaswami Naidu from Tamil Nadu Agriculturalists Association suggested the formation of an overarching pan-India organization, but such an organization never materialized due to the existing

farmers were invited, while organizations representing small and marginal farmers, agricultural laborers, and those that worked on environmental issues were left out (Omvedt, 2005). Second, even these large organizations couldn't maintain a partnership over a long period of time; they organized meetings and tried to resolve conflicts (Rana, 1994), but hopes of unity evaporated when activists from two powerful organizations engaged in a physical altercation during a joint rally in the national capital in 1989 (Rana, 1994; Omvedt, 2005). Subsequent mobilizations occurred at small scales, by individual organizations within their own regions (Pai, 2010), and the overall movement slipped into abeyance for nearly 25 years.

1.1.2 Scattered but united: Phase 2 of the Indian farmers' movement

In 2014 (henceforth referred to as Phase 2), there was a resurgence of the farmers' movement and until 2016 a 700% increase was recorded (628 to 4837) in contentious events organized by farmers across the country.[8] Between 2016 and 2019, 225 protest permit applications were submitted by farmers' organizations just in the national capital region, which also witnessed the culmination of weeks-long marches from different parts

differences between farmer organizations. In 1982, Sharad Joshi of Shetkari Sangathan (Maharashtra) proposed the idea of forming a coordination committee between organizations across states (Omvedt, 2005; Rana, 1994). This committee largely remained non-functional. An attempt was made to revive it again in 1987-88, however, the second event that it conducted after this revival led to the clash of two powerful organizations and it became defunct again. Also, it should be noted that in both instances of forming national committees, the most powerful organization that began its initiations were more interested in forging mergers than coalitions (fieldwork notes).

[8] Singh, R. (2020a, September 25). When Modi govt came to power, farmer protests increased 700%—The 3 bills are its result. *ThePrint.in* https://theprint.in/opinion/modi-govt-saw-farmer-protests-increase-700-the-3-bills-are-its-result/509392/

of the country.[9] Most importantly, in this period, there were several instances when organizations collaborated with each other. For instance, a group of 25-30 organizations, under the banner of Bhoomi Adhikar Andolan [Land Rights Movement], participated in several protests against the Land Acquisition Bill in 2014. In Delhi, 40 small organizations merged together to initiate a joint campaign called Jai Kisan Aandolan [Hail Farmers Movement] in 2015. In Maharashtra, two networks– Jan Aandolan Sangharsh Sambandhit Samiti [People's Movement Struggle Related Committee] and Sukanu Samiti [Steering Committee] – organized protests and public meetings encompassing several organizations between 2014 and 2016. In fact, by early 2017, collaboration became the dominant mobilization strategy across the movement. Organizations within and across states began to informally coordinate their protest activities through meaningful partnerships.[10] As such, the movement in Phase 2 depicts an unprecedented degree of interconnectedness within the Indian farmers' movement.

During Phase 2, the most remarkable form of unity emerged through the formation of two diverse and large-scale coalitions– the All India Kisan [Farmers] Sangharsh [Struggle] Coordination Committee in 2017 and Samyukta Kisan Morcha [United Farmers Front] in 2020. These coalitions were composed of hundreds of organizations hailing from over 20

[9] Singh, R. (2020b, December 5). In 20 yrs, farmers featured in just around 5% of BJP and Congress' Lok Sabha questions. *ThePrint.in* *h*ttps://theprint.in/opinion/in-20-yrs-farmers-featured-in-just-5-of-bjp-congress-lok-sabha-questions/557602/

[10] For instance, a group of 30-40 organizations from Punjab, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh joined those that had already collaborated under the Land Rights Movement to coordinate their protest activities. This alliance was tentatively called All India Kisan [Farmers] Coordination Committee. Similarly, an alliance of 65 organizations named Rastriya Kisan Mazdoor Mahasangh [National Farmers and Laborers Federation] (RKMM) was formed by organizations from Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, and Jammu and Kashmir.

of the 28 states, representing distinct castes, classes, and ideological groups, including a few organizations with members cutting across structural divisions.[11] Right from their inception, these coalitions organized and initiated multiple activities and addressed issues on behalf of the movement, attaining significant success in line with their objectives and enabling the farmers' movement to pose a formidable challenge against a negligent and repressive Indian state.[12] Specifically, they were instrumental in initiating a large scale mobilization by employing varied tactics such as Kisan Panchayats [Farmers' Council], Bharat Bandh [Shut Down India], tractor marches, public meetings, and women farmers' parliament, padyatras [long marches], and by organizing protest camps on the borders of the national capital. They also acted as effective conduits between farmers and the political elites, setting an agenda pertaining to farmers' issues and leveraging it to successfully negotiate with the Indian government.

Indian farmers' coalitions were characterized by a unique organizational structure, combining both formal and informal features. Unlike traditional hierarchies that are governed by a single leader, these coalitions were steered by a group of organizations

[11] Since none of the coalition keeps an official record of its own members, it is difficult to assess the exact number of organizations within each coalition. However, the data that I collected through fieldwork indicate that the numbers are upwards of 200 organizations for each of the coalition. Newspaper reports show that All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) comprises more then 200 organizations. Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) is a supra coalition that comprises more than 400 organizations including those present in AIKSCC. Further, based on the list of organizations that I collected through fieldwork, I was able to code the constituency that organizations represent using their names. I find that around 53 (15%) organizations represent agricultural labor and marginal farmers and the remaining majority of the organizations represent small to medium farmers (Hindustan Times, 2020; Bhattacharya, 2021).

[12] Singh, R. (2020a, September 25). When Modi govt came to power, farmer protests increased 700%—The 3 bills are its result. *ThePrint.in* https://theprint.in/opinion/modi-govt-saw-farmer-protests-increase-700-the-3-bills-are-its-result/509392/

known as the Working Group, which maintained a horizontal relationship with all coalition members. The Working Group's responsibilities included liaising with the state and media elites and overseeing the internal workings of the coalitions. A formal selection process was not employed to make decisions regarding membership in the Working Group. Instead, they were made by the founding members who focused on enhancing the movement's unity and scope.[13] Additionally, there were no formal policies dictating who can or cannot join the coalitions, and membership was voluntary. When questions arose regarding a specific organization's membership or activities, an ad-hoc committee was formed by the Working Group to resolve any conflicts. While the coalitions were initially established to work on a set of demands, their objectives evolved over time to address other emerging issues.[14] In effect, AIKSCC and SKM represent enduring and deep coalitions between organizations that are divided by caste, class, and ideological differences.

[13] Some of the working group members are those that were part of the initial group that founded the coalition. Others are those that were incorporated to cover as much geographic, class, or any other important dimension necessary to enhance the scope and unity of the movement. A working group member's position was more privileged than just a member of the coalition because of direct access to media and political elites, so in some cases, this position was given to accommodate powerful organizations who could potentially create fissures within the broader movement.

[14] Through collective deliberation and outreach programs, each coalition's scope of work was decided right at the time of their inception– AIKSCC was mandated to work on finding ways to attain fair remuneration of agricultural produce and to make farmers debt free, and SKM was mandated to work towards getting the anti-farmer laws repealed. However, through the course of the movement, these coalitions engaged for a little while on several other issues. For instance, SKM has engaged on issues such as crop insurance payment, relief for family of those farmers who were killed in police firing or by suicide, reversal of court cases against protesting farmers, electricity, etc.. It should be noted that these issues were picked by collective deliberation within each coalition. One other important informal feature of these coalitions is how meetings are conducted. Most meetings of these coalitions have a different set of presiding officers regardless of whether they are working group members or not. These officers are nominated on the spot during the meeting, and organizational leaders can self-nominate themselves. However, if any member raises objection to any presiding officer's nomination, the working group members informally step in to make the decision.

The formation of large and diverse coalitions and the high degree of collaboration within the Indian farmers movement is puzzling for various reasons. In addition to Indian farmers remaining ethnically heterogeneous and hierarchically divided along caste, class, and ideological lines,[15] several events illustrate the intensity and continuance of inter-group conflict in the Indian countryside along the lines of caste and class. The National Crimes Records Bureau reports demonstrate that between 2016 and 2020, there were 13,942 agrarian and 4,984 caste-based conflicts in India.[16] Several instances of large-scale intergroup conflicts resulted in loss of life such as the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots between Jats and Muslims, the 2007 clash between Gujjars and Meenas over dam waters, the Sonbhadra Massacre of 2019 in which landed elites killed 10 people to usurp land from the landless, the 2016 clashes between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu farmers over water rights, and the enduring conflict between Punjab's Dalits and Jats over labor and land rights.[17] Despite the continued prevalence of structural divisions, intergroup conflict, and power asymmetries, several forms of partnerships have emerged, including coalitions. The formation of coalitions in such a deeply and historically divided movement, highlights the

[15] Make up of Indian farmers caste and class wise: The paucity of systematic data on caste and occupation of individuals makes it difficult to assess the composition of each caste group among farmers or the changes in composition that have taken place over time. The recent estimates from a nationally represented survey of Indian farmers in 2013 suggest that the share of each caste group within farmers is as follows: UCs (27.9%), OBCs (40.3%), STs (11.9%), and SCs (19.8%). Source: CSDS Farmers Study, 2013. According to the 2010-11 Census, 67% of Indian farmers possessed less than 1 hectare of land, 27.9% possessed somewhere between 1-4 hectares, and only 5% possessed 5 hectares and above. The land distribution is further skewed when considering geographic variation. For instance, the average land holding in the south Indian state of Kerala is merely 0.4 hectares compared to the north Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab where the average land holding is 0.76 and 4 hectares respectively.

[16] Kapoor, A. (2016, October 19). Agrarian Riots and Rural Distress: Is India's Countryside Burning? The Wire. https://thewire.in/agriculture/is-the-countryside-burning

[17] Safi, M., & Doshi, V. (2016). Angry clashes in Karnataka as India's water wars run deep. *The Guradian.* https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/sep/15/india-angry-clashes-karnataka-water-wars-run-deep-tamil-nadu.

extraordinariness of the recently formed farmers coalition and underscores the value of studying the factors that facilitated this initiative.

1.1.3 Research questions

To summarize, in Phase 1 (the 1970s and 80s), caste, class and ideological divides kept the Indian farmers' movement fragmented and deterred collaboration between organizations. However, in Phase 2 (2014-2022), a remarkable degree of unity emerged among Indian farmer organizations. In addition to several informal collaborations, there emerged two large, diverse coalitions– All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) and Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM)– representing hundreds of organizations with distinct caste, class, and ideological affiliations. The formation of these coalitions is surprising since structural divisions based on caste, class, and ideology, continue to exist within the movement. The collaborative nature of the Indian farmers movement in the second phase raises several questions: *What conditions facilitated coalition formation among disparate Indian farmer organizations in Phase 2, and how did organizations overcome the challenges resulting from their caste, class, and ideological divisions? Moreover, what does the Indian case indicate more generally about the conditions that facilitate coalition-formation within structurally divided social movements?*

1.2 Organization and summary of the dissertation

The subsequent chapters (Chapters 2-7) are structured to progressively unravel the answers to the aforementioned questions. In Chapter 2, I delve into the theoretical foundations

necessary to understand coalition formation within divided movements. I commence with a discussion on social movement coalitions, emphasizing their significance. Next, I underscore the challenges faced by structurally divided movements in forming coalitions. I also summarize past literature, highlighting key factors that can facilitate coalitions, while also addressing their limitations. I conclude the chapter by proposing a new theoretical framework that can explain coalition formation in the context of structurally divided movements. Here, I argue that mobilizing structural networks has a paradoxical effect on inter-organizational collaboration. A high capacity to mobilize structural networks might help attain various objectives, while also exacerbating structural divisions by giving organizations' the ability to threaten each other and assert their identity. Conversely, a reduction in the capacity to mobilize structural networks can create more space for alternative strategies and actors and modify inter-organizational dynamics to make structural divisions less pronounced. This, in turn, can set the stage for a more successful coalition formation. Ultimately, along with the primary proposition –paradoxical effects of mobilizing structural networks–, I test five factors – political threats, political opportunities, alignment along common interests, formal organizational structure, and presence of high material resources– suggested in the literature as plausible explanations for the Indian case. It is worth noting that the existing literature suggests two other factors –social ties and alignment along identity and ideological lines– as explanations for coalition formation. However, given that the Indian farmers' movement represents a divided context, the theoretical plausibility of such factors is not anticipated by definition.

In Chapter 3, I re-introduce the research questions and set the theoretical expectations more concretely within the Indian context. The methodology adopted for this project is also discussed –a within-case design– supplemented by a comparative analysis between the two phases of the Indian farmers' movement. Process tracing is proposed as the primary analytical tool to rule out alternative explanations and trace changes over time. Since a systematic measure is absent, I propose three empirical indicators - the size of the organization, the scale of protests, and connections with political elites - as diagnostic evidence to assess the potential decrease in organizations' ability to mobilize their structural networks. Lastly, I present the various data collection methods used, including interviews, participant observations, and secondary resources.

In Chapter 4, I evaluate the role of five factors (alternative explanations) suggested in the literature as sufficient explanators of coalition formation among Indian farmers. Specifically, I test whether political threats (police repression and adverse economic policies) and opportunities (openness of the government and elites as allies), alignment on common interests, the presence of formal organizational characteristics and the presence of high material resources lead to coalition formation in the Indian context. My analysis reveals that factors such as political opportunities, common interests, formal organizational structures, and high material resources among organizations were absent prior to the formation of the coalitions. Furthermore, despite the presence of political threats, the initiation of coalition formation among Indian farmers predated the emergence of temporally proximate political threats, and such threats have been consistent over time.

Ultimately, I find that none of the existing theories independently explain the formation of Indian farmers' coalitions on their own.

In Chapter 5, I test the primary proposition, according to which a decline in social movement organizations' ability to mobilize structural networks would foster conditions conducive to coalition formation. In the case of the Indian farmers movement, this thesis would suggest that a decline in farmer organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks between Phase 1 (1970s and 80s) and Phase 2 (2014-2022) of the movement could explain the coalitions that emerged in Phase 2. Drawing on fieldwork data and secondary sources, I find that there has been a dramatic shift in farmer organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks in Phase 2 when compared to Phase 1. Most farmer organizations in Phase 2 are small, have lost the capacity to conduct protests at a scale akin to those in Phase 1 and have little to no associations with or influence over political elites. Moreover, all the large farmer organizations active during Phase 1 fragmented into several smaller organizations, restricting their influence and scope to local areas. While the main objective here is to understand coalition formation as opposed to the factors that led to the decline, I also contextualize the decline for further analytical clarity by tracing it to two exogenous factors: the advent of caste politics and the economic distress endured by farmers. The rise of caste politics stirred a competition between farmer leaders and political elites, leading to the gradual dominance of the latter as more viable representatives of farmers. At the same time, escalating economic tribulations within the agricultural sector amplified the divide between farmer leaders and farmers, with organizations failing to address farmer needs.

In Chapter 6, I delve into the relationship between coalition formation among Indian farmer organizations and the decline in organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks. I first demonstrate that this decline resulted in a more open and inclusive environment across the movement. As such, diverse organizations experienced a more balanced distribution of power, localizing potential conflicts and the scope of influence, serving as a safeguard against encroachments by powerful entities. To enhance their chances of success and regain legitimacy, organizations had to prioritize openness and inclusivity while de-emphasizing their structural identities. These dynamics also created space for new types of organizations that mobilized beyond structural identities. Furthermore, the less constrained movement environment, coupled with organizations' waning influence, motivated several organizations to adopt ad-hoc engagements as a way to increase their chance of success. These engagements reinforced and facilitated the development of connections and a shared understanding among a wide array of organizations within the movement. This process ultimately led to the coalescence of inter-connected organizations into large, diverse coalitions, working together to combat an oppressive and negligent government.

In Chapter 7, I provide the summary of key objectives and findings followed by the implications of studying coalitions within divided contexts. The main contribution of this study is that it sheds light on a potential collective action paradox inherent in divided movements. It reveals that factors enhancing the collective action capacity of individual organizations may simultaneously impede collective action between organizations. Specifically, there may be many factors operating as double-edged swords within a divided

movement, including key resources such as structural networks, strategies like building ideological and identity-based congruence, and seemingly favorable environments where political elites act as allies. While these factors enhance the ability of organizations to succeed individually, they have the potential to accentuate divisions and deter collaborations within the broader movement. Nevertheless, the study underscores that coalitions, on their own, remain a powerful and vital mobilization tool. As exemplified by the Indian case, coalitions play a crucial role in achieving concrete political outcomes and building a formidable movement that authorities cannot dismiss as routine opposition.

2 Chapter 2: Theoretical Context: Coalition Formation within Structurally Divided Movement

In this chapter, the theoretical backdrop for understanding coalition formation within divided movements is presented. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section introduces the concept of social movement coalitions and underscores their importance. The second section spotlights the challenges confronted by structurally divided movements when forming coalitions. The third section reviews past research, highlighting six factors posited to play a role in coalition formation. The limitations of these existing factors are also discussed in this part. The final section of the chapter presents a novel theoretical framework for explaining coalition formation in the context of structurally divided movements. Here, I suggest that the mobilization of structural networks can have a paradoxical impact on inter-organizational collaboration. While a high capacity to mobilize structural networks can be advantageous in achieving objectives, it can also exacerbate structural divisions. Conversely, a lower capacity to mobilize structural networks can create incentives for adopting coalitions, and simultaneously make the movement more amenable to coalitions by reshaping inter-organizational dynamics.

2.1 Social movement coalitions

Almost every social movement entails a partnership between its constituents, with varying degrees of interaction and coordination (Van Dyke & Amos, 2017; Diani, 2013). In fact, scholars consider partnerships (e.g., coalitions, networks) to be one of the defining characteristics of social movements (Diani, 2013). Notably, coalitions are a specific form of partnership wherein two or more "distinct activist groups mutually agree to cooperate

and work together towards a common goal" (McCammon & Moon, 2015, p. 327; Fox, 2010; Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010). Coalitions are different from other forms of partnerships, such as networks or mergers. Networks are structures that organizations leverage to loosely connect with each with "some information exchange but little or no actual purposive, collaboration action" (McCammon & Moon, 2015, p. 2) whereas coalitions entail entities working together towards shared goals. Further, mergers and coalitions are also distinct from one another, with the former involving a collaboration of various organizations to form a single entity under a shared structure while in the latter, each organization maintains its distinct identity (Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010; McCammon & Moon, 2015).

In the context of social movements, coalitions can take a variety of forms (McAdam, 1999; Staggenborg, 1986). They can be short-lived, wherein organizations come together only for a specific event or task, or they can be enduring, engaging to address multiple issues over a long period (Brooker & Meyer 2019). The extent of formalization is also a key distinguishing factor between coalitions, where some adopt explicitly predefined rules, decision-making processes, and structure for coordination and communication, while others only partially rely on such mechanisms, as needed (Obach, 2015). Recent studies suggest a more substantive classification of coalitional partnerships based on two dimensions– congruence of ideology and collective identity.[18] As per Whittier (2018),

[18] See Whittier (2018) for more detailed classifications. I should note, however, that Whittier's main classification deals with when partnerships occur between two or more movements. Further, Whittier defines collaboration between movements that do not share similar ideology or collective identity as Collaborative Adversarial Movements in contrast to the traditional classification, cross-movement coalitions. However, first, this classification can also be used for within movement partnerships since actors within a movement also vary on ideological and identity dimensions (Staggenborg, 1986; Okamoto, 2010; Bevacqua, 2008;

coalitions can be formed between actors who share a common ideology or identity, as well as those who may not agree with each other but collaborate, nonetheless. Further, coalitions can also vary on the basis of whether movement actors work with each other on ad-hoc basis or under the gamut of certain meaningful considerations (Tattersall, 2005). Ad-hoc coalitions involve engagement on loosely defined tasks without any commitment to the broader collective. "Deep coalitions" are those wherein organizations demonstrate explicit commitment towards undertaking "coalition work", which entails "both the formation of coalitions and the subsequent maintenance and activities of coalitions" (Staggenborg, 1986, p. 375; Tattersall, 2005).

2.1.1 Significance of social movement coalitions

Coalitions are considered a pertinent tool of mobilization across social movements (Van Dyke & Amos, 2017). They enable organizers to pool resources and engender greater levels of mobilization by drawing in new participants (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Gerhards & Rucht, 1992; Lee, 2011). As coalitions are typically built by bridging differences, they also make movements more sustainable (Guenther, 2010; Williams, 1999; Gawerc, 2020). Moreover, coalitions function as a united, powerful front, making them a challenge that authorities cannot dismiss as routine opposition (Obach, 2015). They also help achieve concrete political outcomes by enhancing the strategic repertoires of movement actors (Bandy & Smith, 2005; Ganz, 2000; Jenkins & Perrow, 1977; Stearns & Almeida, 2004). Further, coalitions can strengthen the organizational structure of the movement, which

Reese, 2005). Second, collaborative adversarial movements are also a type of coalition even if it comprises organizations that do not share ideology or collective identity because in here as well organizations work towards common tasks.

helps safeguard movements from repression, cooptation, and further fragmentation (Gerlach & Hine, 1970).

Coalitions have played a particularly crucial role in movement success in the case of structurally divided movements[19] – those in which organizations mobilize support using networks based on race, ethnicity, class, or other structural identities (Gawerc, 2016; Borland, 2010). With the help of coalitions, divided organizations can come together to make a "powerful statement", broaden the scope of conflict, and bridge societal divides (Gawerc, 2019). In fact, there are several historical examples that illustrate the power of coalitions within structurally divided movements. For instance, studies have demonstrated that when feminist organizations representing diverse classes or racial groups collaborate, they can present a more powerful challenge to their targets as opposed to separate mobilization or streamlined focus on issues specific to individual racial groups (Staggenborg, 1986; Reger, 2002; Roth, 2010). Similarly, the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum when organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Congress of Racial Equality, and Southern Christian Leadership Conference overcame differences based on race, class, and religion to work together (Morris, 1984; Luders, 2010). Conversely, a lack of coalitions in the environmental movement has impacted its success rate as organizations struggle to overcome racial and socio-economic differences (Lewis Jr. et. al., 2021).

[19] Some scholars refer to such movements as diverse movements.

2.1.2 Challenges to forming coalitions within structurally divided movements

While coalitions are especially crucial for structurally divided movements, coalition formation is generally assumed to be unlikely when structural divisions such as race and ethnicity become salient among organizations (Roth, 2010; Gawerc, 2019). Specifically, structurally divided movements face three significant challenges in forming coalitions (Gawerc, 2019, 2020; Staggenborg, 2015; McCammon & Moon, 2015). The first challenge stems from identity-related obstacles, which entails identifying a common umbrella to unite various organizations. Structural identities typically reflect status-based differences between organizations and shape how "grievances are identified, causes framed, adversaries understood, and…potential allies approached and collaborations sustained" (Beamish & Luebbers, 2009, p. 652). Thus, divided organizations may struggle to find a common ground in terms of their interest, identity, or ideological lines (Gawerc, 2019). Moreover, structural identities may reinforce existing divisions and conflicts, thereby increasing competition and hindering collaboration (Bandy & Smith, 2005; Tilly, 1973; Roth, 2010; Barkan, 1986; Diaz Veizades & Chang, 1996; Gerhards & Rucht, 1992; Bystydzieński & Schacht, 2001).

The second challenge arises from power asymmetries (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). Resource distribution is typically unequal between organizations within movements, which impedes collaboration because highly resourceful organizations may mistreat under-resourced ones and powerful organizations may sideline smaller entities (Bystydzieński & Schacht, 2001; Cole & Luna, 2010; Einwohner et al., 2016; Bob, 2005; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Seidman, 2007). These power asymmetries are further exacerbated when structural

divisions come into play due to extant rivalries and distrust between organizations (Bystydzieński & Schacht, 2001; Bandy & Smith, 2005). Moreover, organizations representing powerful structural identities are typically highly resourceful, which further deteriorates the existing identity and power-related challenges (Bystydzieński & Schacht, 2001; Cole & Luna, 2010; Edwards, McCarthy, & Mataic, 2019).

The third challenge stems from the fact that in structurally divided movements, mobilizing along structural identities is often seen as the only legitimate and appropriate approach (Roth, 2010). Drawing from the notion that the cultures of social movements determine the mobilization strategies that are considered acceptable (Jasper & Polleta, 2018; Tilly, 1999; Ray, 2000), strategies transcending structural boundaries, such as collaboration, may be viewed as illegitimate or discouraged (Roth, 2010; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Moreover, social movement organizations are required to maintain legitimacy amongst their members and the broader environment (Gillham & Edwards, 2011), which can further reinforce the extant movement culture and hinder collaboration. There may also exist only limited space for new entrants that seek to mobilize the movement beyond structural identities or collaborate with others due to concerns about legitimacy and reputation (Whittier, 2018).

Despite the aforementioned challenges, in some extraordinary circumstances, coalitions emerge within structurally divided movements. For instance, ethnic differences were overlooked when organizations collaborated in the labor movements in Hawaii (Jung, 2006), electoral reform movement in Malaysia (Selvanathan et al., 2020), anti-mining movement in Jordan (Fioroni, 2019) and peace movement in Israel-Palestine (Gawerc,

2016). Similarly, mitigating class and racial differences in the women's movement (Reger, 2002; Staggenborg, 1986) and the civil rights movement, (Morris, 1986; McAdam, 1999) coalitions were formed among disparate groups to work towards common goals. Such instances of successful coalition formation within divided movements raises the following question: *What conditions facilitate coalition formation within structurally divided movements, and how do they help overcome identity-related obstacles, power asymmetries and legitimacy concerns?*

2.2 Past research on social movement coalition formation

The literature highlights six factors that facilitate coalition formation between social movement organizations. First, studies demonstrate that political threats emerging from the broader political environment can facilitate coalition formation between social movement organizations by invoking a shared sense of common enemy or de-prioritizing existing differences (Staggenborg 1986; Brooker & Meyer 2019; Corrigall-Brown & Meyer, 2010; Almeida, 2019; McCammon & Van Dyke, 2010). These threats can come in the form of state or police repression (Chang, 2008), closing of the political system (Della Porta 1995), war (Reese, Petit, & Meyer 2010), or economic losses through policy changes (Almeida 2010; Obach 2010). For instance, in Argentina, women groups were able to overlook class and identity-based differences when faced with a combination of political and economic threats (Borland, 2010).

Second, some scholars argue that organizations join hands when they perceive a high chance of success in the face of new political opportunities (Diaz-Veizades & Chang, 1996;

Obach, 2004; Van Dyke, 2003). However, in contrast, other studies find that favorable political opportunities reduce organizations' need for collaboration, thereby deterring coalition formation (Heaney & Rojas, 2015). Some other scholars point out that political opportunities are not sufficient determinants of coalition formation; rather, it is their interaction with threats that sometimes facilitates coalition formation (Almeida, 2010; Dixon & Martin, 2012; Staggenborg, 1986). For instance, in Latin America, coalitions between opposition parties and movements began with the increasing threats from neoliberal policies and the emergence of new political opportunities for activists through democratization (Almedia, 2010).

Third, scholars have drawn multiple connections between resources and coalition formation. Some argue that when organizations possess abundant material resources, they are willing and able to leverage a portion of them for coalition work (Van Dyke & Amos 2017; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Van Dyke, 2003). However, others argue that when some organizations have more material resources than others involved in the movement, the unequal distribution of resources impedes coalition formation (Bandy, 2004). In the same vein, some scholars argue that when organizations lack material resources, they turn inwards to safeguard their resources for their own use and often compete with others in the broader social movement sector, thereby deterring any chances of coalition formation (Cullen, 2005; Staggenborg, 1986; Zald & McCarthy, 1980; Khagram, 2018).

Fourth, certain organizational characteristics of movement actors can facilitate coalition formation (Van Dyke & Amos 2017; McCammon & Moon, 2015). For instance,

organizations with well-defined division of labor are particularly likely to collaborate with others because of their ability to make decisions more easily than those with participatory decision-making practices (Arnold, 1995; Borland, 2008). In the same vein, organizations with hierarchical structures, formal processes for internal coordination, and strict membership criteria form coalitions more often than those with informal structures because of easy decision-making processes (Brooker & Meyer 2019). Similarly, some studies suggest that organizations that have multiple issues on their agenda or pursue broad goals are more likely to enter into coalitions than those with a focus on singular issues or a narrow agenda (Heany & Rojas, 2014; Borland, 2008). This can be attributed to the fact that organizations with broad issues straddle multiple identities and interests that may overlap with other organizations, thereby mitigating differences that generally hinder collaboration (Van Dyke, 2003).

Fifth, alignment on identity, interest, or ideological lines can also facilitate coalition formation (Bandy et al., 2005; Di Gregorio, 2012; Park, 2008). Some argue that ideological alignment or congruence is one of the primary factors facilitating coalition because of the shared values and goals among movement actors (Brooker and Meyer, 2018; Cornfield & McCammon, 2010). Studies also demonstrate that framing processes can help bridge gaps across organizations by either facilitating a collective identity (Van Dyke & Cress, 1996) or master frames of shared interests or ideology (Haydu, 2012; Bandy et al., 2005; McCammon & Campbell, 2006; Ganz, 2009). Conversely, Roth (2010) argues that an emphasis on organizing one's own identity-based networks makes it difficult to collaborate on a collective level, therefore discouraging coalitions across racial and ethnic lines.

Sixth, social ties and history of interaction between organizations enable coalition formation (Bystydzieński & Schacht 2001; Obach, 2004; Rose, 2018). Scholars focusing on interethnic relations also suggest social ties as explanators for cooperation between conflicting groups (Dionne, 2015; Fearon & Laitin, 1996). The establishing of ties between individuals across organizations plays an important role through the process of "cause-affirmation" and "co-development" of commitments (McCammon and Moon 2015, p. 4), facilitation of free spaces of interaction (Polleta, 1999), leveraging past collaborations (Reese, Petit, & Meyer, 2010), and by acting as "brokers" or "bridge-builders" (Brooker & Meyer 2019, Van Dyke & Amos 2017), which help connect disparate groups and enable coalition formation.

2.2.1 Limitations of past research

While the existing literature offers important insights into coalition dynamics, most theories do not adequately explain coalition formation within divided movements. As highlighted earlier, structurally divided movements face three unique challenges– identity-based differences, power asymmetries, and legitimacy concerns– in forming coalitions. Thus, any theory explaining coalition formation among divided organizations must also explain how these challenges are mitigated. In the presence of structural divisions, coalition formation requires conscious and deliberate efforts to make identity, power, and legitimacy-related challenges less salient (Oliver, 2017; Cole & Luna, 2010). Existing literature does not sufficiently explain how these challenges are overcome. Moreover, most explanations pertain mainly to coalitions wherein members fall within an overarching

unifying ideological or partisan ambit even if identities and interests are dissimilar. Furthermore, little attention is paid to elucidate the conditions under which a particular factor or a combination of factors facilitate coalition formation. Below, I evaluate each of the existing theories' ability to explain coalition formation within divided movements, and the following chapter presents an empirical analysis demonstrating that the existing theories do not explain coalition formation among Indian farmers.

First, theories linking political threats and opportunities cannot sufficiently explain coalition formation in divided movements. Studies making this claim take for granted that when threats or opportunities arise, disparate movement actors perceive them in similar ways. In contrast, organizations within divided movements typically compete with each other and thus, may choose to prioritize their individual interests over collective action, especially if the threat does not directly affect their specific cause or constituency. At the same time, an opportunity for one organization may be a threat for another (Zajak & Haunss, 2022). In such contexts, threats and opportunities may accentuate existing differences and lead organizations to focus inwards to build on their strength rather than reach out to others. Divided groups may also lack shared resource infrastructures, which are crucial for forming coalitions when threats and opportunities emerge (Almeida, 2019). Additionally, forming coalitions solely for these purposes can compromise the legitimacy and identity of organizations, which may be a higher priority over collective interests for divided organizations (Lichterman, 1995). Further, for organizations to form a coalition when threats and opportunities arise, they still need to overcome their distrust of one another (Bystydzieński & Schacht 2001; Gawerc, 2016).

Studies linking high levels of material resources to coalition formation fail to explain how the barriers stemming from structural divisions can be mitigated. Moreover, there is also no clarity concerning the motivation behind divided organizations choosing to collaborate when they possess high levels of material resources, particularly when the movement culture is centered around mobilizing particular structural networks and identities. In fact, it is equally plausible that organizations with high levels of material resources may use them to further expand their own organizations. Moreover, in divided contexts, even the slightest differences in resources can accentuate existing divides, limiting the role of material resources in mitigating competition (Bandy & Smith, 2005). Given that organizations in divided movements rely on their respective identity networks for resources (Edwards, McCarthy, & Mataic, 2019), competition and conflict can prevent resource sharing among organizations if they represent dissimilar identity groups, constraining organizations' strategic choices and hindering collaboration.

Organizational characteristics such as formalization and employing a well-defined division of labor are often cited as factors facilitating coalition formation, but these theories fail to address how structural divisions can be overcome. More importantly, it is unclear why such organizational characteristics would motivate organizations to bridge their differences. These factors may, however, smoothen the coalition formation process by improving organizations' decision-making capabilities once organizations decide to form a coalition. It is noteworthy that claims linking formal and hierarchical organizations with improved coordination and communication have recently come under intense scrutiny (Earl &

Kimport, 2011). Studies suggest that Information and Communication Technologies can facilitate efficient organizing through non-bureaucratic modes of organizing (Bimber et. al, 2005; Bennet & Segerberg, 2013), which may be especially beneficial for divided groups to negotiate their differences (Staggenborg, 2015).

Theories highlighting the presence of a certain degree of alignment between organizations and social ties also have notable limitations in explaining coalition formation within divided movements. Although shared identity, interest, or ideology can facilitate coalition formation, these factors are often absent in divided movements. Framing processes may not always be successful in bridging gaps if organizations have vastly different goals or strategies, and emphasizing identity-based networks may hinder coalition building across structural divisions. Similarly, while social ties and history of interaction can lead to coalition formation, these are either non-existent or may be strained due to past conflicts in divided movements. The role of brokers or bridge-builders in coalition formation is also limited, particularly if extant barriers to coalition building remain unaddressed. Past collaborations may also be futile if organizations have divergent priorities or if previous collaborations ended in conflict. In light of the above stated reasons, social ties and alignment are inadequate on their own in explaining coalition formation in divided movements. These factors may precede coalition formation, but their role is likely to be limited as enablers, rather than primary drivers.

The existing literature has overlooked the limiting effects of mobilizing large structural networks in shaping inter-organizational dynamics. While large structural networks can

help organizations mobilize in a more potent manner, they may also limit the scope of organizing by preventing collaboration. Large structural networks may manifest and reinforce structural divisions, which in turn may make inter-group antagonisms salient, increase power asymmetries, and entrench movement culture that discourages collaboration. To understand why and how coalitions occur within divided movements, we need to look more closely at the extent to which organizations have the capacity to mobilize structural networks. Going forward, I explicate the role of structural networks in shaping inter-organizational dynamics and present a tentative theory that accounts for the role of structural networks in facilitating collaborations within divided movements.

2.3 Theoretical framework: The paradoxical effects of mobilizing structural networks

Social movement organizations typically work toward three objectives: influencing governments, persuading the public, and maintaining resources (Brooker & Meyer, 2019). While organizations draw on multiple sources of power to fulfill these goals, the number of people they mobilize remains their primary indicator of strength (Tilly, 2008; Tarrow, 2011; Edwards, McCarthy, & Mataic, 2019), which in the case of divided movements amounts to the extent to which organizations can mobilize their structural networks.

2.3.1 High mobilization capacity: Effective but divided

When organizations are able to mobilize their structural networks on a large scale, they are more likely to achieve their objectives. This is because large-scale mobilization allows organizations to independently pressure governments and gain media traction, helping

them reach a wide audience and set the agenda on their own terms (Lipsky, 1968; McCarthy, McPhail, & Smith, 1996; Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012). Furthermore, mobilizing at scale enables organizations to collect more resources from their own constituents and a broader audience, which are crucial for sustaining and maintaining their power (Edwards, McCarthy, & Mataic, 2019; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Similarly, their connections with political elites depend on their ability to shape electoral dynamics via their constituents (McAdam & Tarrow, 2013), which means that organizations controlling larger networks can build more robust material and political resources. Simply put, in divided movements, organizations' power and their ability to fulfill objectives depend on their capacity to mobilize structural networks (Bartolini & Mair, 1990).

However, organizations' ability to mobilize structural networks at scale can also have significant downsides for movement-level dynamics. As scholars have noted, structural divisions between political actors become salient when organizations that mobilize groups from different structural positions wield the power to impact social and political aspects of life (Bartolini & Mair, 1990; Chhibber, 2001). When organizations have power to influence outcomes, structural differences in the movement can increase and, more importantly, anchor the movements' interorganizational dynamics along structural lines (Gawerc, 2020). Further, when organizations hold power through their structural networks, competition between them may lead to homogeneity across the movement because ''organizational environments elaborate rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy'' (Meyer & Scott, 1983, p. 149). Additionally, powerful ones can influence strategies of other organizations

through coercion or persuasion, by acting as role models, and through imposition of normative considerations around who can legitimately mobilize, be mobilized, and what strategies are appropriate for mobilization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

The scope of these downsides depends on the extent of an organization's power and its ability to influence socio-political dynamics. For instance, if powerful organizations within divided movements can influence national level policies, they may be able to shape movement-level dynamics at a national level, sometimes by forcing the majority of organizations in the country to mobilize along structural lines and thereby constraining their mobilization strategies. In sum, when even a few organizations are able to mobilize their structural networks and possess the power to influence socio-political dynamics, mobilization around structural identities is likely to be the dominant strategy across the movement, which might eliminate the chance of collaboration because of heightened inter-organizational differences, delegitimizing of collaborative strategies and actors who do not mobilize around structural identities (Roth, 2010).

The limiting effects of large structural networks can also be observed at organizational and interorganizational levels. When organizations can fulfill their objectives by mobilizing large networks, their motivation to adopt alternative strategies of mobilization, such as coalitions, may be low. Powerful organizations may also benefit from disrupting collaboration among smaller organizations as it enables them to maintain their own hegemony and legitimacy within the movement. More importantly, links with larger structural networks may influence how organizations perceive themselves and how they

are perceived by others (Gawerc, 2020). For example, the larger an organization's structural network, the stronger is its association with the corresponding structural identity, the greater is its ability to assert this identity within the movement, and the more visible is this identity to others (Bandy & Smith, 2005). In other words, a greater capacity to mobilize structural networks may cause organizations to manifest and reinforce existing structural divisions, thereby making inter-organizational differences salient and deterring collaboration with other organizations. Moreover, strong links between organizations and their core constituents can limit the scope to address new issues and implement new strategies, which further hinders collaboration with other organizations (Baldassari & Diani, 2007). Simply put, organizations' ability to leverage structural networks for their objectives is crucial for entrenching or loosening inter-organizational differences.

2.3.2 Low mobilization capacity: Ineffective but less constrained

In contrast, when organizations within divided movements lack the ability to activate their structural networks at scale, it may lead to inter-organizational dynamics that make the overall environment more conducive to partnerships. First, as divided organizations' mobilization capacity decreases, their ability to threaten each other's interests and assert their identity within the movement will also reduce (Jha, 2022). Furthermore, an organization's power that is derived from structural networks is either location contingent (Beamish & Luebbers, 2009) or based on its ability to influence governments or political elites (Ray, 2000), both of which reduce with the decline in its ability to mobilize structural networks. Thus, the competition within the movement gets localized and segregated. Organizations located in different geographic locations may share a detente relationship

with each other while only those located proximal to each other may compete more intensely (Okamoto, 2003). Similarly, organizations may be able to build partnerships on issues that are beyond their sphere of influence. For instance, if an organization's influence is restricted within a district, it may be open to collaborating over a common issue on a state or a national level.

Second, a loss in an organization's ability to mobilize large networks, through a reconfiguration of power across the movement, would create a multi-cultural space wherein there is no single dominant mode of mobilization (Baldassari & Diani, 2007; Fligstein & McAdam, 2011). Organizations that mobilize beyond structural identities may then find more prominence and space since previously powerful organizations can no longer sanction or threaten each other (Ray, 2000). Further, organizations that do not mobilize on structural identities may then act as bridge-builders and legitimize collaboration within structurally divided movements.

Finally, a decline in an organization's ability to mobilize its structural network also increases its likelihood of collaborating. When organizations lose their ability to mobilize structural networks, they may struggle to fulfill their objectives, including influencing governments, which can create dissatisfaction and legitimacy problems internally (Hutter, Kriesi, & Lorenzini, 2019; Ghaziani & Kretschmer, 2019). This decline in capacity may motivate them to seek alternative mobilization strategies to enhance their influence (McAdam, 1983). While it is plausible that organizations choose to double down their efforts to mobilize their own identity-based structural networks, this approach may be

ineffective and may threaten their chances of success and survival, forcing them to make the hard choice of adopting alternative strategies including collaborating with others to increase their influence.

2.3.2.1 Potential mechanisms

The factors described above may collectively create an environment that favors collaboration among organizations. In such an environment, individual organizations may no longer be constrained by powerful organizations or movement-level dynamics and may be able to effectively exercise their agency. Organizations motivated to collaborate may engage in ad-hoc collaborations, which are generally low-risk and low-commitment strategies (Baldassari & Diani, 2007), or they may coordinate their actions with other organizations without direct engagement, by conducting events on the same date (Diani & Kousis, 2014). These low-risk approaches allow organizations to selectively coordinate on some issues while maintaining autonomy over their handling of other issues of core constituents (Obach, 2015). Through these efforts, organizations can learn about one another, build new connections, and exhibit solidarity, and set precedents for more concerted collaborations in the future, all while overcoming identity, culture, and power-related obstacles (Baldassari & Diani, 2007).

In an environment favorable for collaboration, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) may also help organizations build their collaborative capabilities. Digital infrastructure can help organizations work toward collective action and enhance their communication and coordination abilities (Bimber et al., 2005; Flanagin et al., 2006;

Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Chadwick, 2017; Karpf, 2012). By using ICTs, organizations can access reliable information about other organizations and identify potential partners, which can help build trust before actual collaboration (Van Dyke, 2013; Gawerc, 2020). They can create free spaces (Tufekci, 2017), informational networks (Khazaraee & Novak 2018), and increase opportunities for repeated interactions (Pavan, 2014), which are vital to shaping inter-organizational relationships. Moreover, compared to the past, when organizations relied on newspapers to gain knowledge about each other (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), ICTs enable organizations to produce and influence their own content, creating real-time accountability and enabling smaller organizations to monitor powerful ones (Cammaerts, 2012).

2.3.2.1.1 Mobilization capacity thesis

To summarize, large-scale mobilization allows organizations to achieve their objectives but also creates internal and external constraints that may hinder collaboration. Losing the ability to mobilize networks can lead to a reduction in inter-organizational differences and the emergence of a movement culture that favors collaboration, and simultaneously increases organizations' motivation to seek alternative strategies of mobilization. Organizations may engage in low risk collaborations, which can then pave the way for more formal and enduring coalitions. Based on this, an empirically testable proposition can be formulated as follows: *A decline in the capacity of organizations to mobilize their structural networks increases the likelihood of coalition formation within divided movements by restructuring inter-organizational relationships and sources of power.*

3 Chapter 3: Research Strategy and Data Sources

This chapter lays out the research methodology and data collection process used to address the objectives of this study. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section introduces the research question and delineates the theoretical expectations in the Indian context. The second section of this study outlines the research and analytical strategy, which involves a within-case design supplemented with comparative analysis focusing on Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Indian farmers' movement. The third section shows that this study utilizes process tracing as the primary analytical technique to rule out rival explanations and track temporal changes in a within-case design. Additionally, three empirical indicators - organization size, scale of mobilizations, and connections with political elites - are introduced as proxies to assess the decline in organizations' capacity to mobilize structural networks. In the fourth section, various data collection methods are discussed, including interviews, participant observation, and the use of secondary resources, which have been employed for this project.

3.1 Research question and theoretical expectations

Studies show that social movement coalitions are unlikely to arise in structurally divided movements due to intergroup antagonisms caused by identity-based differences, power imbalances, and legitimacy concerns. However, the Indian farmers' movement presents a remarkable opportunity to understand coalition formation within divided contexts. Specifically, in Phase 1 (1970s and 80s) of the Indian farmers' movement, divisions based on caste, class, and ideology fragmented the movement, impeding organizational

collaboration. Yet, in Phase 2 (2014-2022), a notable level of unity emerged among Indian farmer organizations. Despite the continued presence of structural divisions, two significant coalitions, the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) and Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), comprising hundreds of organizations with diverse caste, class, and ideological affiliations, materialized. This emergence of large and diverse coalitions within the Indian farmers' movement in Phase 2 challenges expectations and raises crucial questions: *What conditions facilitated coalition formation among disparate Indian farmer organizations in Phase 2, and how did organizations overcome the identity-related obstacles, power asymmetries, and legitimacy concerns produced by their caste, class, and ideological divisions? Moreover, what does the Indian case indicate more generally about the conditions that facilitate coalition-formation within structurally divided social movements?*

The primary proposition theorized suggests that mobilization capacity, defined as organizations' ability to mobilize their structural networks, plays a crucial role in explaining coalition formation within divided movements. Large-scale mobilization of structural networks offers opportunities and challenges for organizations, enabling them to achieve their goals while also creating constraints that hinder collaboration. When organizations experience a decline in their mobilization capacity, it can lead to a reduction in differences between them, promoting a more open and collaborative movement environment and motivating the exploration of alternative mobilization strategies. In the Indian context, the ability of Indian farmer organizations to establish a unified movement, despite existing structural divisions and historical collaboration failures, can be

comprehended by examining the evolving role of organizations' mobilization capacity. *Specifically, it is hypothesized that the formation of large-scale and diverse coalitions, such as the AIKSCC and SKM, can primarily be attributed to a decline in organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks over time.*

Building on the existing literature, five other propositions (alternative explanations) are considered as plausible explanations of coalition formation. These include the role of political threats and opportunities, alignment on interest lines, formal organizational characteristics, and the availability of high amounts of material resources. It is important to note that factors such as social ties and alignment along identity and ideological lines may be plausible explanations for coalition formation. However, within the context of a divided movement, the plausibility of such factors is not theoretically anticipated. By definition, organizations within a divided movement are divided on identity and ideological lines. Moreover, if social ties and alignment on identity and ideology indeed contribute to coalition formation in the case of Indian farmers' movement, their roles are likely limited to as enablers. The primary drivers of coalition formation are most likely to be factors/conditions that facilitated the emergence of social ties or alignment along in the first place. Ultimately, through a comprehensive analysis of each of these six propositions, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the conditions and dynamics driving coalition formation within divided movements.

3.2 Research design: Within-case and comparative analysis

Since the study focuses on a single case, namely the Indian farmers' movement, the analysis is conducted at the social movement level, employing a within-case analysis design. This design enables a thorough investigation of the factors that influence coalition formation, including the ability to observe changes over time and understand the underlying processes that contribute to the development of complex outcomes such as Indian farmers' coalitions (Simmons & Smith, 2021; George & Bennett, 2005). Furthermore, employing a within-case design supplemented with comparative analysis provides valuable insights to study coalition formation within the Indian farmers' movement. The chosen period for this analysis, spanning from the late 1970s to 2022, holds particular significance. Termed as Phase 1, the 1970s and 80s marked a critical period when farmer organizations in India initiated direct demands for policy concessions related to their livelihoods from the state (Varshney, 1998). Farmer organizations representing diverse castes and classes mobilized during this period across Indian states using non-violent tactics such as protest campaigns and large rallies. This period closely parallels Phase 2, which encompasses the recent years from 2014 to 2022, characterized by similar levels and nature of protest mobilizations.

By focusing on the two phases, we can make meaningful temporal comparisons. Prior to the 1970s, farmer mobilizations took on a different nature. They primarily targeted the extractive policies of the British colonial state and the oppression of feudal landlords (Guha, 1983; Gough, 1974; Shah, 2004), or were armed rebellions against the newly independent Indian state (Desai, 1986; Chatterjee, 1982; Hardiman, 1992). These early movements were predominantly led by small farmers and landless laborers (Pai, 2010).

The distinct nature of these mobilizations before and after the 1970s creates fundamentally different contextual conditions and critical junctures and leave us with very little room for direct comparison. Ultimately, by employing a within-case and comparative design to trace changes over time, we can delve into the intricate dynamics involved in coalition formation within the Indian farmers' movement.

3.3 Method of analysis

The primary analytical technique employed in this study is process tracing, which is well-suited for a within-case and comparative analysis (Bennett, Fairfield, & Soifer, 2019). It allows for a flexible utilization of evidence to establish the sequence of events leading to the main outcome (Collier, 2011; Mahoney, 2012). This approach involves collecting and analyzing different types of evidence to compare and contrast multiple plausible explanations. Consequently, to determine the proposition that best explains coalition formation within the Indian farmers' movement, it is essential to not only demonstrate its presence but also juxtapose it with other propositions to evaluate the level of confidence in its explanatory power. Specifically, in this study, I aim to test the primary proposition (mobilization capacity thesis) as the most plausible explanation by first ruling out alternative explanations (Chapter 4). Subsequently, I will examine whether there has been an actual decline in organizations' capacity to mobilize structural networks (Chapter 5), and finally investigate the mechanisms and process through which this decline influences inter-organizational dynamics within the Indian farmers' movement (Chapter 6).

It is important to note that given the absence of systematic measures and data to directly assess the capacity of organizations to mobilize their structural networks, three empirical indicators serve as useful proxies: organization size, the scale of mobilizations (such as protests and rallies), and connections with political elites. These indicators are justified by their direct correlation with structural network mobilization and the understanding that larger networks increase the likelihood of establishing links and exerting influence over political elites. Moreover, these indicators align with prior knowledge of Indian farmers' mobilizations, supporting their role as diagnostic evidence within the process tracing framework (Collier, 2011). Consequently, the empirically testable proposition can be restated as follows: *the formation of large and diverse coalitions, exemplified by the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) and Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), within the Indian farmers' movement is primarily driven by a decline in organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks, as evidenced by decreasing organization size, scale of mobilizations, and connections with political elites.*

3.4 Data sources

To test the propositions, I utilize multiple data collection methods. Over a period of five years, I conducted 207 interviews with a diverse range of participants, including farmer leaders, farmers, civil society members, and politicians. Additionally, I engaged in participant observation, actively attending and observing 19 significant events associated with the farmers' movement. These events encompassed in-person meetings, both public and private events organized by farmer organizations, and protest events held across various regions in India. To augment my findings, I also incorporated secondary resources,

such as scholarly works and newspaper articles, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving context surrounding the Indian farmers' movement. The subsequent sections provide detailed accounts of each data source and the specific procedures employed during their collection.

3.4.1 Interviews

In order to conduct interviews for my research, I utilized multiple approaches to connect with farmer leaders and other interviewees. Initially, I reached out to them through popular social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. To expand my pool of interviewees, I employed a snowball sampling technique, which involved leveraging existing connections to identify leaders from diverse organizations. Over time, I established a rapport with office bearers of specific farmer organizations, who graciously facilitated introductions to leaders and members of other organizations through established WhatsApp and Facebook networks. Additionally, these office bearers extended invitations for me to attend their organizations' meetings and coalition events. This allowed me to compile an extensive list of farmer leaders and organizations from across India. Using information from newspaper sources, social media, and personal contacts, I also reached out to various professionals such as journalists, civil society activists, politicians, and bureaucrats that engaged with the farmers' movement. The interviews of these individuals were crucial to gain a wider viewpoint on the movement and to corroborate my findings.

Compiling a comprehensive list of farmer leaders required a multi-faceted approach. This involved gathering the names of farmer leaders who participated in the third annual

convention of AIKSCC in 2019 and the initial meeting of Rashtriya Kisan Morcha (National Farmers Front) in August 2021.[20] Furthermore, by analyzing WhatsApp messages and newspaper reports, a list of SKM affiliated organizations engaged in policy negotiations with the government in 2020-2021 was collected. Additionally, a separate list was compiled using police archives, consisting of organizations that had submitted applications for protests at Jantar Mantar between January 2016 and August 2019. Through meticulous utilization of these sources, a comprehensive list was created, encompassing nearly 600 leaders representing over 150 organizations from 21 states across India. The selection of interviewees was conducted with great care, ensuring a diverse range of farmer leaders to capture temporal and cross-sectional changes. Emphasizing leaders who were active in coalitions was crucial in gaining insights into the processes and events that contributed to the formation of these coalitions.

During the interviews, I maintained an informal and conversational approach, fostering an atmosphere of openness and ease. However, I employed pre-determined broad prompts to ensure comprehensive exploration of key aspects. This included assessing the organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks, considering factors such as protest history, interactions with broader caste groups, geographic scope, membership size, and relationships with politicians. Furthermore, I utilized broad prompts to address factors identified in the literature, such as political threats, opportunities, alignment with other organizations, availability of resources, and organizational characteristics. I also gathered information on leaders' personal involvement in their organizations and coalitions, as well

[20] Rashtriya Kisan Morcha was a coalition in making, but then the plans were dropped to work on a coalition around Minimum Support Prices.

as significant events and strategies implemented. Notably, it was essential to focus on the leaders' perspectives regarding temporal changes, particularly concerning inter-organizational dynamics and the influence of farmer organizations. I aimed to achieve a nuanced understanding of the evolving landscape within the farmer movement context. In instances where language posed a barrier, I relied on research assistants to assist in conducting the interviews, ensuring effective communication with interviewees. Moreover, discussions with journalists, activists, politicians, and bureaucrats broadened the perspective on the farmers' movement changes and validated the findings from my farmer leader interviews.

Between July 2018 and April 2023, I conducted 207 interviews either in person (N=135) or over the phone (N=72). Of these, 109 were with farmer leaders, 61 with farmers, 23 with civil society members including journalists, academics, and movement volunteers, and 14 with politicians and bureaucrats. The 109 farmer leaders interviewed represent 40 distinct organizations from 12 different states,[21] and a substantial number of them have been active in farmers' organizing for nearly a decade.[22] These leaders come from a diverse set of caste backgrounds including Upper Castes, Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Religious Minorities. Of the 40 organizations, 11 represent medium to large farmers, 19 represent small to medium farmers, and 10 represent marginal farmers

[21] Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Delhi, and Rajasthan. A few of the organizations are spread across multiple states even though they are small in size, for instance, All India Kisan Sabha, All India Kisan Mahasabha, All India Kisan Khet Mazdoor Sangathan.

[22] For example, leaders from Bharatiya Kisan Union-Tikait, All India Kisan Sabha, Tamil Farmers Association, Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan, Karnataka Rajya Ryotha Sangha, and Bharatiya Kisan Sangh.

and agriculture laborers.[23] When considering the duration of the interviews, over half extended to a length of 60 to 90 minutes. The remaining interactions were notably shorter, typically lasting between 20 to 30 minutes. During my interviews, I found that most of the organizations I spoke to had chosen to align themselves with either the AIKSCC or SKM coalitions. This is understandable considering the large size of these Indian farmer coalitions, with SKM alone comprising over 400 organizations, and the voluntary nature of membership. However, due to the absence of a systematic database of all farmer organizations, it proved difficult to identify those that had not joined these coalitions. As part of my interviews, I specifically asked if they were aware of any organizations in their respective areas that had not affiliated with either coalition. Through this process, I managed to identify only six such organizations. When I contacted these six organizations, four of them expressed their support for the coalitions despite not officially being members. Interestingly, all four had even participated in activities organized by SKM or AIKSCC.

3.4.2 Participant observations

In addition to conducting interviews, I engaged in participant observation at 19 significant events occurring between July 2018 and March 2023 to collect additional data. My involvement with the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) began in the summer of 2018 when it was newly formed. Working closely with the chief

[23] It is important to note that the class characterization provided here may not be universally applicable in India. Various factors such as land distribution, irrigation availability, and regional climatic conditions can significantly influence the class classification of farmers in a specific context. However, for the purpose of our analysis, this sample should suffice. It encompasses organizations that advocate for the interests of both landowning cultivators and agricultural laborers. Considering the historical context, this division aligns with a more realistic representation of class distinctions.

convener provided me with an insightful understanding of the dynamics within this coalition. Further, this relationship facilitated my access to various events, both public and private, conducted by farmer organizations and coalitions. Moreover, it enabled my integration into online networks involving numerous other organizations. As a result, I was able to observe five in-person meetings that involved multiple farmer organizations, a public event organized by civil society organizations in support of farmers, and numerous protest events staged by organizations and coalitions in regions such as Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.

Specifically, in 2021, I made multiple journeys to the protest camps stationed on the outskirts of New Delhi and along a national highway in the state of Haryana. These sites included the Singhu and Ghazipur borders, and the Panipat and Gharaunda toll plaza protest camps. Among these, the Singhu protest camp was the most significant, being the largest of all and serving as the central hub for the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) coalition. This encampment housed a myriad of organizations from various Indian states, particularly those allied with the SKM and the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC). Furthermore, several villages and caste-based groups from nearby areas, and several media and movement volunteers had set up their camps here. Through engaging conversations with a wide variety of individuals at the protest site, I gained further insights into the intricate dynamics within the coalitions. The Singhu border protest camp, in essence, mirrored the wider farmers' movement, embodying its vibrant diversity and complex relationships. The blend of direct conversations and participatory observation

at this particular site offered a comprehensive understanding of the various elements that constitute the larger farmers' movement.

My activities during these events revolved around gathering data on several aspects. I focused on understanding the participants' backgrounds, evaluating the communication strategies employed, noted the nature of interactions between different organizations, dissecting the coalition structure, and assessing leaders' perceptions of political elites and media. This multifaceted data collection was achieved through various means including writing detailed field notes, conducting brief interviews with participants on-site, and taking pictures to document the various processes that unfolded during these events. Moreover, I was able to obtain primary materials such as publications released by the organizations and coalitions for internal distribution or public dissemination. This multifaceted approach provided me with a well-rounded understanding of the complex dynamics at play within the farmers' movement.

3.4.3 Secondary sources

I also utilize information from secondary sources including newspaper articles, academic publications, and publicly accessible protest event databases like the Armed Conflict Location Event Data Project (ACLED). These resources played a pivotal role in delineating the chronological progression of events and processes. More importantly, they were integral in substantiating findings gathered from other sources, thereby promoting a more well-rounded comprehension of both temporal and cross-sectional changes observed throughout the course of this movement.

4 Chapter 4: Ruling Out Alternative Explanations

In this chapter, the validity of existing theories is tested against the process of coalition formation among Indian farmers. The literature suggests that the presence of (a) political threats, (b) political opportunities, (c) alignment on identity, interest, and ideological lines, (d) formal organizational characteristics, and (e) high material resources facilitate coalition formation. Utilizing data collected from my fieldwork and secondary sources, I investigate whether any of these factors was in play preceding the formation of the Indian farmers' coalition. If they were, I evaluate how these factors have changed over time and how they influence inter-organizational differences. The findings of my analysis indicate that several factors – political opportunities, alignment, formal organizational structures, and the uneven distribution of material resources among organizations - were not present before the coalition was formed. Furthermore, although political threats were present, the process of coalition formation among Indian farmers started before the appearance of temporally proximate political threats, and they have remained constant over time. Thus, I contend that none of the existing theories are sufficient on their own in providing a comprehensive explanation for the formation of farmer coalitions in the Indian scenario. In the next sections, each of five alternative explanations will be discussed in detail.

4.1 Political threats

The literature suggests that political threats emerging from the broader political environment can facilitate coalition formation by invoking a shared sense of common enemy or minimizing existing differences (Staggenborg 1986; Brooker & Meyer 2019;

Corrigall-Brown & Meyer, 2010; Almeida, 2019; McCammon & Van Dyke, 2010). These threats can come in the form of police repression (Chang, 2008), closing of the political system (Della Porta 1995), war (Reese, Petit, & Meyer 2010), or economic losses through policy changes (Almeida 2010; Obach 2010). In the case of the Indian farmers' movement, there were two types of political threats– police repression and adverse economic policies– that immediately preceded the formation of coalitions. The temporal proximity of these events warrants investigation as plausible factors in the Indian context.

4.1.1 Police repression

Studies suggest that police repression such as use of violence, detainment, or arrests can motivate organizations to set aside their differences and rally against a common enemy by forming coalitions (Chang, 2008). In the Indian context, the AIKSCC was founded following a shocking incident in 2017 where six farmers were killed by police during a protest in Mandsaur, Madhya Pradesh.[24] Concerns about police repression also emerged in interviews with some farmer leaders. One leader said, "what is the point of going [to protests] and getting beaten up [by police]. It is better to do meetings inside a room or say things on Facebook".[25] Harassment by the police was detailed by several other leaders. For instance, a leader from Tamil Nadu mentioned that over 10 cases had been lodged against him despite his protests being peaceful and relatively small.[26] Another leader from Uttar

[24] Singh, R. (2020a, September 25). When Modi govt came to power, farmer protests increased 700%—The 3 bills are its result. *ThePrint.in* https://theprint.in/opinion/modi-govt-saw-farmer-protests-increase-700-the-3-bills-are-its-result/509392/

[25] Interview with AC

[26] Interview with AY

Pradesh added, "we face double problems now. One, we have to pay so much to clear our names from police cases. Second, our demands are not being met."[27] Such fears were found even in relatively powerful organizations. As one close associate of BKU-T in Uttar Pradesh mentioned, "Tikait Sahab [Mahendra Singh Tikait] was chased by the police so many times. Once he cried in front of his followers because of the fear of police firing… last year [2018] BKU people were beaten by police at the Ghazipur border."[28]

Even though some of these instances of police repression immediately preceded AIKSCC's formation, my analysis suggests that repression did not lead to its formation. Specifically, I find that even before the Mandsaur incident took place, three different groups of farmer organizations had begun mobilizing efforts to build national level unity within the movement. In fact, two of these initiatives joined hands to form the initial group of AIKSCC. For instance, an idea for a unified movement was floated by a few Left organizations and civil society members in 2014-15 right after the mobilization against the Land Acquisition Bill under the banner of All India Kisan [Farmers] Coordination Committee.[29] In this meeting, select farmer organizations from Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh participated. While several of these organizations consider land acquisition as a central problem, they represent a wide array of caste groups across India. A leader of this initiative explained,

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[27] Interview with TPS

[28] Interview with RSM

[29] Interview with AK

> In 2014, when the Land Acquisition Ordinance was passed, All India Kisan [Farmers] Sabha took initiative to build the farmers' platform. We called many organizations but these organizations had little relation with the Kisan [farmers] movement. They were mainly organizations that worked with forest workers as NGOs, and then there was Medha Patkar's Narmada Bachao Andolan. Many organizations joined us then. We were united under the banner of Bhoomi Adhikar Aandolan. After this, we went around the country and conducted padyatras [long marches on foot]. One from Chennai to Kanyakumari, one from Calcutta to Jammu Kashmir, one from Assam to North-East states. These padyatras crossed India in 23 days and covered more than 20 thousand kilometers. We then organized a big rally at Ramlila Maidan in Delhi in 2016…As a result of our united struggle, several farmer organizations started to raise demands similar to ours. Most of these organizations were small, but then, BKU [large organization in Uttar Pradesh] also started to raise issues, so did people in Madhya Pradesh who were associated with those killed by the police in June 2017. Since we were already working towards building unity among farmers, after the killings, we went to Mandsaur to show solidarity with the farmers. There, we met other farmer leaders. We all then collectively decided to make an All India movement to pressurize the government.[30]

Another meeting, held at the end of 2016 between 7-8 farmer leaders in Usha Institute in Delhi, also provides evidence that farmers' efforts to form a national level coalition preceded Mandsaur.[31] In this meeting a decision was made to host a farmer's convention in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh in January 2017, about five months before the Mandsaur incident. Nearly 65 farmer organizations participated in the convention under the banner

[30] Interview with HM

[31] Interview with AK

of Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Mahasangh (RKMM). One of the leaders engaged in building unity explained that in 2014,

> Every farmer's organization independently criticized the land acquisition ordinance. Seeing this, some people tried to build unity. Even I participated in those efforts. We made a case that farmers organizations are gaining little because we are fighting separately, so we should become united... These early efforts created a very loose unity, I can't call it a tight unity or good unity, like today's. But a basic unity emerged that brought several farmer organizations together to organize a big movement…some organizations from Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, and UP came with us to form Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Mahasangh.[32]

In 2017, prior to Mandsaur, three leaders from different states (Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh), were in talks of inviting organizations from across India to form a national coalition.[33] Eventually, these leaders became instrumental in organizing a trip of farmer leaders to Mandsaur to pay tribute to the farmers who were killed. One of the leaders, who later on became the chief convener of AIKSCC, explained that it was a coincidence that AIKSCC came into existence right after the Mandsaur incident, "prior to that, we had already planned to send invitations to organizations to join hands under a common platform."[34] He further added,

> Within a week of 6th of June 2017, which is when the boys in Mandsaur died, I wrote letters to everybody. And prior to this, maybe 15 days before, Ayyakannu came with about 20 people from Tamil Nadu to meet me…He [Ayyakannu] should be given credit because he initiated this process in a way. He came to me and said that I should take the lead and try to bring farmer organizations together. I knew many leaders individually, so I said okay let's give it a shot. I gave an open call, and about 30-40 organizations got together at Gurudwara Bangla Sahib. We moved

[32] Interview with AK

[33] Interview with VMS and AY

[34] Interview with VMS

> the venue later because we wanted more space. Later that evening, Dr. Sunilam said that he would also like to join. I told him that he is most welcome. Then, he [Dr. Sunilam] said that Yogendra Yadav had mentioned that he wasn't invited. I said that this is not my daughter's wedding for which I'd send individual invitations to everyone. Everyone can join.[35]

Notably, the initial AIKSCC group included the All India Kisan [Farmers] Coordination Committee and a group of organizations closely associated with three leaders from Tamil Nadu (Ayyakannu), Maharashtra (Raju Shetty), and Uttar Pradesh (VM Singh). This further corroborates the point that the Mandsaur incident may have provided farmers with an opportunity to unite but its direct role in AIKSCC's formation is limited.

My conversations with several farmer leaders bolstered the claim that police repression is not sufficient for creating a motivation to collaborate on their own. For instance, through my interviews with Dr. Sunilam, a Working Group member of AIKSCC from Madhya Pradesh, revealed that despite facing severe police repression in 1998 in a protest organized by his organization in the same state as Mandsaur, farmer organizations did not unite then. He saw incidents like Mandsaur or Multai (the location of the 1998 incident of repression) as important opportunities for collaboration, but he emphasized that emergence of collaboration ultimately depends on the leaders' motivation and willingness to collaborate. He explained,

> Events like that in Mandsaur, Multai or Puntamba [in Maharashtra] can be seen as opportunities for people to come together, but only if they want to come

[35] Interview with VMS

> together…There was a similar opportunity that arose in Multai in 1998 during my protest. Twenty people were killed and hundreds went to jail. After that, several big leaders visited Multai. They went on stage and gave speeches about unity and power, but at that time no leader actually made efforts to bring everyone together.[36]

Importantly, some leaders note that farmer leaders' fear of repression stems not from an increase in the prevalence of repression but because they have a small following, alluding to the mobilization capacity thesis. As one leader explained, "When you don't have many people backing you, police can easily put cases on you or even lathi-charge [beat you with rods] if they think this will deter the protesters."[37] Another noted, "when you can bring a large number of people or when the police know that some leader of a big organization like VM Singh or Tikait is going to be present in your rally, police generally hesitate to use force. They know if they fire at you, more protests will occur. But when you are small, it is easy to scare you and send you back home."[38] When I asked what has made relatively large organization such as BKU-T fearful of police repression, a leader previously associated with the organization mentioned,

> BKU-T leaders for a long time have overestimated their power. Old generation of leaders lived in the glory of the past. Previously politicians recognized your [referring to Mahendra Singh Tikait] varchasva [status/power] and gave you

[36] Interview with DS

[37] Interview with RR

[38] Interview with AC

> respect. Ministers also knew you personally. They took you seriously as a farmer leader…Everyone knows farmers are now small and divided.[39]

Another crucial piece of evidence that rules out the possibility of police repression explaining the formation of farmers' coalitions is that repression has historically been quite common against farmer organizations. During Phase 1, when no coalitions occurred, scholars note that "The most common reaction [of governments towards farmers' protests in 1970s and 80s] has been repression by the police and military, and the peasant movements now count their martyrs in hundreds" (Lindberg, 1994, p. 97). More specifically, Nadkarni (1987) documents several incidents of police repression across Indian states. For instance, in 1981, in Maharashtra 10 farmers were killed and hundreds were injured in police firing during a protest organized by Shetkari Sangathan (SS); five farmers were killed and 120 injured in 1984 in a protest organized by Peasants and Workers Party in Maharashtra; 20 people were killed in 1980 in protests organized by Karnataka Rajya Ryotha Sangha (KRRS), the leading farmers organization in the state of Karnataka. Similarly, in North India, Hasan (1989) shows that police killed farmers on two occasions (six in Aligarh and two in Karmukheda) in the state of Uttar Pradesh in 1987. That same year, 10 farmers were killed and 150 injured in police firing on activists of Bharatiya Kisan Sangathan in Gujarat.[40]

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[39] Interview with RSM

[40] Menon, R. (April 15, 1987). BKU Stir in Gujarat: 10 dead, over 150 injured in mob violence and firing. *India Today*. https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/indiascope/story/19870415-bks-stir-in-gujarat-10-dead-over-150-injured-in-mob-violence-and-firing-798728-1987-04-14

Police repression against farmers' organizations continued even after Phase 1. For instance, in 1998, more than 20 farmers were killed by police in Multai, Madhya Pradesh during their protest to seek compensation for damaged crops.[41] Notably, even though Mandsaur and Multai are located within the same state and the Multai incident demonstrated a higher level of violence than the Mandsaur one, coalitions did not form in the aftermath of the Multai incident. Further, four farmers were killed in Sriganganagar, Rajasthan in a protest organized to seek water for irrigation in 2004,[42] four farmers were killed in Pune, Maharashtra during the protest against closing of a water pipeline in 2011,[43] two people were killed in Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh in a protest against acquisition of land for a water plant in 2010[44], four jute farmers were killed in Assam for demanding better remuneration of their produce in 2011,[45] and two farmers were killed in Noida, Uttar Pradesh in 2011 during a protest against land acquisition.

Similarly, police repression has been present since the beginning of the Phase 2 (2014 onwards) of the Indian farmers' movement. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, police injured

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[41] Outlook India. (1998) Massacre at Multai. https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/massacre-at-multai/204967

[42] Parashar, V. (November, 30, 2004). Farmers' uprising in Rajasthan. *Down to Earth.* https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/farmers-uprising-in-rajasthan-12129

[43] PTI. (August 9, 2011). Four killed in police firing on protesting farmers in pune. *Times of India.* https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/four-killed-in-police-firing-on-protesting-farmers-in-pune/articleshow/9541795.cms

[44] PTI. (July 15, 2010). Police firing on farmers rocks AP assembly. *The Hindu.* https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh//article61765452.ece

[45] (November 8, 2011). First Peasant Movement of Assam. *Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation website.* https://www.cpiml.net/liberation/2011/11/first-peasant-movement-assam

more than 30 farmers during their protest to seek fair remuneration for their acquired land.[46] In Punjab, 12 farmers were injured by police in Patiala in 2015[47] and 40 were injured when police lathi-charged them before they could reach Chandigarh to protest in 2016.[48] In Jharkhand, police fired on protesters on three occasions in 2016 which led to the death of six farmers.[49] That same year, conflict occurred between farmers from the state of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and one person was shot dead and several others were injured in police firing.[50] Moreover, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) data shows that prior to the formation of AIKSCC in June 2017, police had to intervene using force in more than 50 protests organized by farmers. The continued prevalence of repression juxtaposed with the rareness of instances of coalitions suggests that repression cannot explain the formation of AIKSCC.

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[46] Rai, R. (November 2, 2014). Compensation Row: more than 30 injured as farmers clash with policeman in Mathura. *India Today.* https://www.indiatoday.in/india/north/story/mathura-protest-farmer-police-clash-lathicharge-compensation-issue-gokul-barrage-upsrtc-225489-2014-11-01

[47] (September 5, 2016). Police lathicharge injures 40 farmers; blank shots fired too. *Hindustan Times.* https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/police-lathicharge-injures-40-farmers-blank-shots-fired-too/story-M8pQn6M7qnHReBEELlnAlL.html

[48] (September 5, 2016). Police lathicharge injures 40 farmers; blank shots fired too. *Hindustan Times.* https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/police-lathicharge-injures-40-farmers-blank-shots-fired-too/story-M8pQn6M7qnHReBEELlnAlL.html

[49] (October 22, 2016). Jharkhand: tribal farmer killed in police firing in Khunti. *Scroll.in.* https://scroll.in/latest/819720/jharkhand-tribal-farmer-killed-in-police-firing-in-khunti
(October 1, 2016). Six killed in Jharkhand after police fire at farmers protesting land acquisition. *Down to Earth.* https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/mining/six-killed-in-jharkhand-after-police-fire-at-farmers-protesting-land-acquisition-55884 (October 10, 2016). Hazaribagh police firing- Jharkhand government waged war on its own people. *Countercurrents.org.* https://countercurrents.org/2016/10/hazaribgh-police-firing-jharkhand-government-waged-war-on-its-own-people/

[50] PTI. (September 13, 2016). Cauvery row cripples Karnataka, Tamil Nadu; 1 killed in firing in Bengaluru. *Rediff.com* https://www.rediff.com/news/report/sc-modifies-cauvery-order-amid-attacks-on-kannadigas-in-tn/20160912.htm

4.1.2 Adverse economic policies

Studies show that disparate organizations can overlook their differences when faced with a threat of economic loss due to government policies (Borland, 2010). In the case of the Indian farmers' movement, the SKM came into existence shortly after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government passed three controversial farm bills in 2020, perceived by many as a threat to the farmers' livelihood (Narayanan, 2020). Could these bills have prompted organizations to minimize their differences and work together on a common goal?

I find that adverse economic policies had little to do with coalition formation in the Indian farmers' movement. While the formation of SKM came after the introduction of the controversial farm laws with the repeal of these laws being the primary demand of the coalition, conditions conducive to coalition formation were already in existence before the introduction of the three farm laws. Specifically, AIKSCC, a coalition of over 200 organizations, already existed since June 2017, three years before the farm bills were introduced as ordinances in June 2020. AIKSCC had been actively involved in the farmers' movement, leveraging various strategies to advocate for farmers and striving to reconcile differences among other farmer organizations.[51] It had already organized several large rallies across India and brought nearly 200 organization on a common platform. It had also sought the support of 22 political parties in writing to support the demands of farmers in

[51] Singh, R. (2020a, September 25). When Modi govt came to power, farmer protests increased 700%—The 3 bills are its result. *ThePrint.in* https://theprint.in/opinion/modi-govt-saw-farmer-protests-increase-700-the-3-bills-are-its-result/509392/

the Indian parliament.[52] Furthermore, SKM is an overarching coalition that includes AIKSCC. As such, the introduction of the farm laws primarily served to offer an additional impetus for AIKSCC and other networks to form a more robust coalition, rather than being the primary reason for coalition formation.

Moreover, the argument that potential economic losses from the three farm laws can drive coalition formation is complicated by the fact that these laws would not impact all farmer organizations within these coalitions equally. This differential effect further diminishes the potential of these laws to create incentives for a significant number of organizations to join the coalition. For instance, the central criticism of these laws was that they might undermine government-regulated markets (Mandis), potentially leading to the abolition of the Minimum Support Price (MSP). However, only a small subset of farmers, namely 13% of paddy and 16% of wheat growers, actually use Mandis to sell MSP qualifying crops (Gupta, Khera, & Narayanan, 2021).[53] Further, the prevalence of Mandis and the government-based procurement of paddy and wheat vary widely across states, introducing a diverse set of political and economic conditions (See Figure 1).[54] For instance, while Chhattisgarh sees a substantial 38% of government-based procurement, in states such as

[52] Singh, R. (2020a, September 25). When Modi govt came to power, farmer protests increased 700%—The 3 bills are its result. *ThePrint.in* https://theprint.in/opinion/modi-govt-saw-farmer-protests-increase-700-the-3-bills-are-its-result/509392/

[53] Not all crops can be sold on MSP. The government of India allows only 23 crops to be sold on MSP, but it procures only Wheat and Paddy of these 23 crops on its own. Mishra, U. (March 3, 2022). Explained: What are MSPs and how are they decided? *Indian Express.* https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/everyday-explainers/farmers-crops-price-msp-explained-7789563/

[54]For spatial variation of Mandis by states and districts. Sivasubramanian, B. (August 5, 2021). Mapping Mandis: A spatial exploration of agricultural markets in India. *Tata-Cornell Institute* https://tci.cornell.edu/?blog=mapping-mandis-a-spatial-exploration-of-agricultural-markets-in-india

Tamil Nadu, Bihar, and West Bengal, the figure drops to less than 1% (Gupta, Khera, & Narayanan, 2021). Despite this, farmer organizations from these latter states have been active participants in SKM and AIKSCC. Thus, potential economic losses from the farm laws alone, which appear to directly impact only a section of farmer organizations, cannot fully account for the widespread participation in these coalitions.

Figure 1: Mandi distribution across India

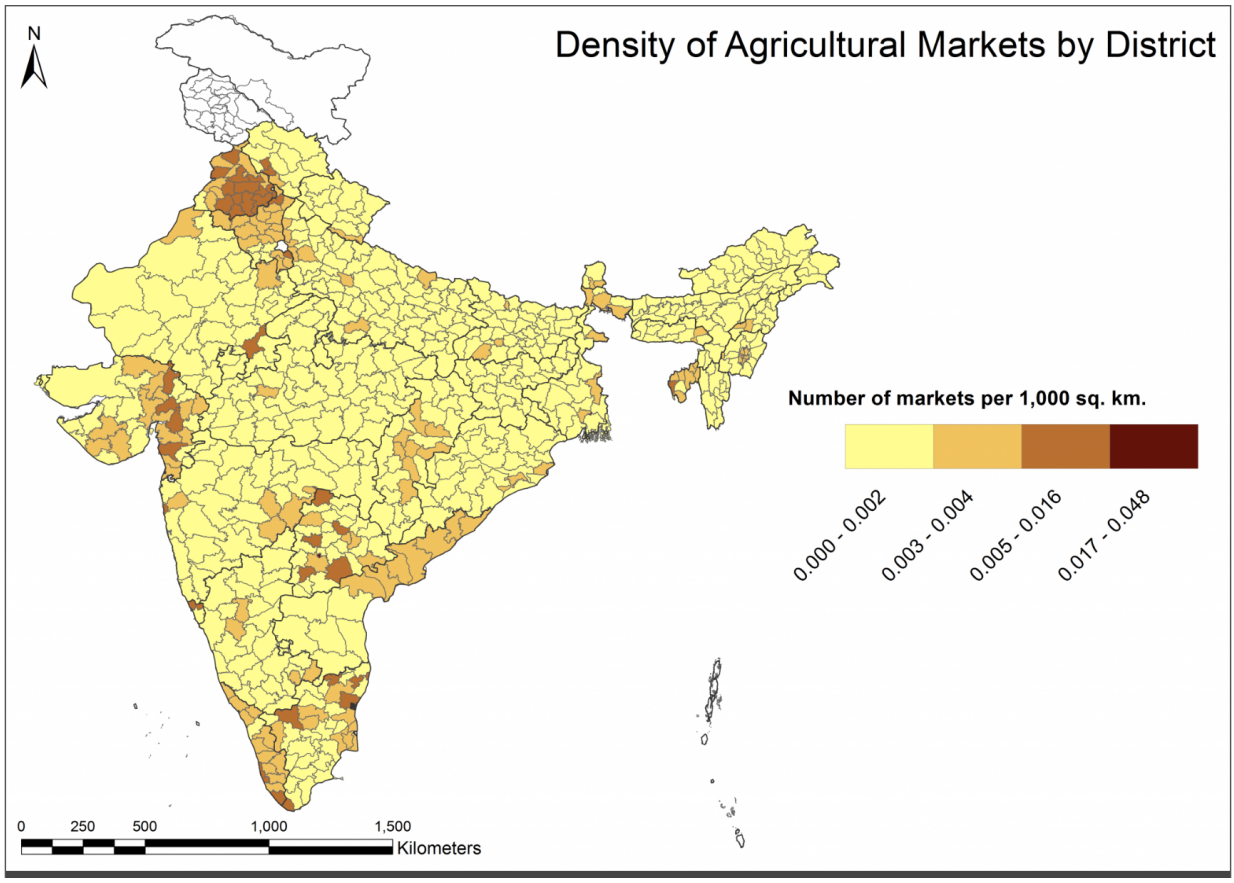
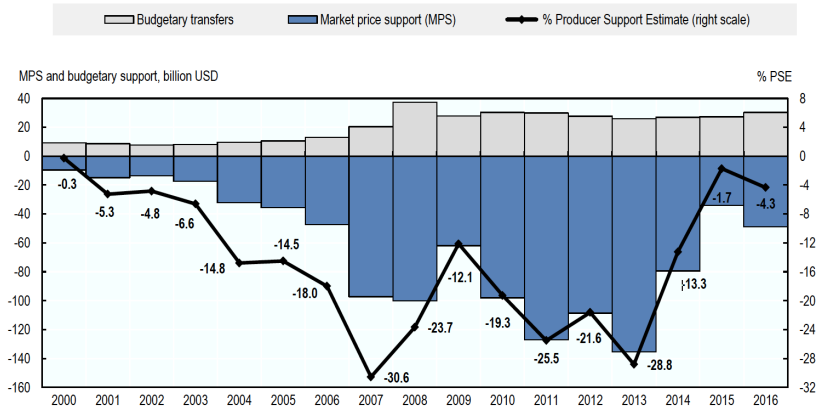


Figure 2: Producer Support Estimates in India 2000-16

Figure 1.2. Level and composition of Producer Support Estimate in India, 2000-16



Source: OECD (2017c), "Producer and Consumer Estimates", *OECD Agriculture Statistics Database*.

The long-term prevalence of economic difficulties faced by Indian farmers further complicates the possibility that adverse policies facilitated coalition formation. A recent report from an international development agency highlight that, regardless of the political party in power, successive Indian governments over the past two decades did not succeed in guaranteeing fair pricing for agricultural products (see Figure 2).[55] In fact, government policies have negatively impacted output prices, leading to financial losses for farmers since 2000. Further, the escalating rates of suicide and the continual decrease in income due to unfavorable policies and challenging climatic conditions since the 1990s (Vaidyanathan, 2006) serve as stark reminders of the persistent threat of economic loss. Despite these enduring economic adversities, the formation of influential and lasting coalitions like AIKSCC and SKM didn't take place until 2017.

[55] Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development report titled Review of Agricultural Policies in India (July 2018)

Additionally, it is unclear how threat from economic policies would help organizations overcome caste, class, and ideological divisions that generally divide farmer organizations. While such policies can temporarily create shared interests, they do not alter how organizations perceive and treat each other from caste, class, or ideological standpoints. In fact, my interviews reveal that since agriculture is a state subject and a large number of policies are mainly implemented by the state governments, economic policies tend to accentuate divisions between farmer organizations. One leader explained the case of sugarcane farmers,

> Sugarcane is present across states, but there is no single sugarcane farmer organization in India. Even in my own state of Maharashtra, there are multiple sugarcane organizations. This is because each state tries to influence prices on its own and farmers have different problems based on their area, caste, and other local factors…for each state you need to work on different problems at the same time to bring everyone together, otherwise it is very difficult.[56]

To be clear, some farmer organizations have occasionally united to protest specific economic policies, but these efforts have typically centered around a few select policies and involved a limited number of organizations. For example, since the late 1990s, a handful of organizations have joined under the umbrella of the international coalition La Via Campesina to protest against Free Trade Agreements and World Trade Organization policies.[57] Similarly, issues such as forest land rights and land acquisition instigated joint

[56] Interview with RS

[57] Bhattacharya, S. (December 12, 2021). Farmers Protests: After Historic Win, SKM Wants To Increase Its Footprint In States. *Outlook India.* https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/farmer-protests-after-historic-win-skm-wants-to-increase-its-footprint-in-states/404636

action from a small number of organizations representing tribal and small farmers in 2013 and 2014-15.[58] However, these collaborative efforts tend to focus on isolated issues and engage only a few organizations. Indeed, several farmer leaders contend that farmers are not even aware about issues raised by La Via Campesina. As one civil society activist from Punjab who works closely with several farmer organizations explained,

> Farmers need immediate solutions to their problems. These issues are mainly about better prices and debt. If you have to talk to them about issues such as GM crops, chemical fertilizers, and such, they will listen to you but not participate in protests so much…a large number of farmer organizations do not engage on such issues because they know their farmers have a different agenda for themselves.[59]

In sum, while political threats such as police repression and adverse economic policies were certainly present, they do not explain the formation of coalitions in the Indian case. This suggests that factors other than political threats could have been instrumental in their formation.

4.2 Political opportunity

Political opportunity scholars suggest that a shift in the political landscape that causes the state to become more attuned to challengers' demands may prompt organizations to form

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[58] Groups associated with La Vie Campesina were also involved in organizing collective protests against the Land Acquisition Bill in 2013. (March 20, 2023). India, massive protests to stop land grabbing and defend agriculture. *Laviacampesina.org.* https://viacampesina.org/en/india-massive-protests-to-stop-land-grabbing-and-defend-agriculture/

[59] Interview with PMS

coalitions, thereby enhancing their chances of success (Staggenborg, 1986; Diaz-Veizades & Chang, 1996; Obach, 2004; Van Dyke, 2003). This shift can happen either when governmental decisions seem to lean towards the challengers' favor, or when organizations successfully form alliances with influential political figures capable of influencing governmental actions. Could political opportunities have been a catalyst for coalition formation among Indian farmer organizations?

4.2.1 Openness of the government

Despite vigorous opposition from farmer organizations against certain policies, some have claimed that the BJP government has taken active steps towards improving farmer welfare. For instance, they implemented schemes related to water irrigation, soil health, and crop insurance in an attempt to improve productivity.[60] In 2016, Narendra Modi, the face of the BJP and the Prime Minister of India, publicly vowed to double farmers' income by 2022.[61] In 2019, the BJP government also launched a flagship scheme that provides Rs. 6000 (~$75) annually to small farmers and marginal farmers.[62] Given these developments, it is plausible that the BJP government's apparent openness towards addressing farmers'

[60] Swaminathan, M.S.. (May 26, 2015). One year of Narendra Modi government: farmer awaits achche din. *Indian Express.* https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/one-of-narendra-modi-government-farmer-awaits-achche-din/

[61] Kirankumar, V. (February 5, 2022). A Grim Future: What happened to promise of doubling farmers' income by 2022? https://thewire.in/agriculture/a-grim-future-what-happened-to-the-promise-of-doubling-farmers-income-by-2022

[62] (February 1, 2019). Govt. announces Rs 6000 direct cash transfer to small farmers under pm kisan scheme in budget 2019. *Outlook India.* https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/business-news-govt-announces-rs-6000-direct-cash-transfer-to-small-farmers-under-pm-kisan-scheme-in-budget-2019/324679

concerns may have stimulated various organizations to unite and push for additional benefits.

While the BJP government expressed an openness towards farmers' issues, I find that this factor has little bearing on the formation of coalitions among farmers' organizations. Contrary to the ideal conditions postulated by political opportunity theorists, a pervasive perception prevails among farmer leaders that the BJP government is more amenable to corporations than to farmers.[63] This is evidenced by numerous interviews across states revealing deep-seated suspicion owing to BJP's close ties with influential business houses. A leader who is part of an organization that is run by a former Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) member noted, "Even before 2014, we saw what the Gujarat model [BJP government's development model] did to farmers. Farmers and all the rural people were marginalized. Cities and businesses have all the power."[64] Another added, "State and corporations--these are the two biggest exploiters of agricultural laborers and marginal farmers. As one farmer leader summarized it,

> The BJP government has always been anti-farmers and pro-corporations. This time, they began with the Land Acquisition Bill so that corporation can easily take our land. When that failed, they tried to demolish MSP [Minimum Support Price] by bringing Shanta Kumar Committee recommendations. The crop insurance scheme was for Anil Ambani's company…This government is mainly for big rich

[63] Vaishnav, M. (October 11, 2018). What is the secret to success of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)? *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/10/11/what-is-secret-to-success-of-india-s-bharatiya-janata-party-bjp-pub-77477

[64] Interview with AK

> corporations like Adani and Ambani. I have even coined a term that captures the nexus between corporates and BJP…I have coined the word Modani. Mo stands for Narendra Modi, and Dani stands for Gautam Adani [the richest person in India who has been investing heavily in agricultural logistics for the last two decades].[65]

Moreover, farmer leaders perceive the governments' openness to mean little in substantive terms, diminishing chances that this factor motivated organizations to collaborate. As one leader from Tamil Nadu explained, "I want to say one thing. During the elections all political parties say that farmers are the backbone of India, but after the elections, they think that we are the slaves of India. All political parties. Not only BJP, but also Congress."[66] This sentiment seemed common among several leaders. Another leader from Haryana equated BJP and the Congress party similarly. He explained,

> Just like the BJP now, the Congress government during Manmohan Singh [2004-2014] was also trying to be pro-farmers…They gave loan waivers. Increased MSP a bit. They even called MS Swaminathan [renowned agricultural scientist] to lead the National Commission on farmers. But they did nothing after that. They never implemented any recommendation that MS Swaminathan gave to them. If they had done anything for the farmers, we wouldn't have to protest now…We know BJP is also not going to do anything. This is why we have to continue our fight on our own.[67]

[65] Interview with DS

[66] Interview with AY

[67] Interview with PSG

Another leader, from Maharashtra, who has been active in electoral politics for nearly two decades noted,

> After we have got a full movement in place all on our own, Congress is supporting us, after all this time. But governments, all kinds, care little about farmers. Farmers' issues are not on their agenda at all. Which government do you think has ever invested in infrastructure, technology, or any pro-farmer policies? Most of them don't even understand the issues. There is no proper import-export policy. There is no way to connect farms to the market, producers to the consumers.[68]

Concurring with the farmer leaders, journalists, and agrarian economists, while acknowledging the government's pro-farmer rhetoric, also highlight the failures of politicians to enact beneficial policies for farmers. One journalist from Uttar Pradesh who has been actively promoting government schemes to spread awareness among farmers mentioned that "on paper every party is pro-farmer. It is just when it comes down to putting forward policies for farmers, politicians fail."[69] Another journalist added, "despite rolling out a plethora of schemes for farmers, the overall terms of trade have deteriorated for the agricultural sector during the BJP regime. I have written about this. This clearly shows how little the government is open to farmers compared to corporations.[70]

Furthermore, if the political climate were indeed advantageous for farmers, we would anticipate a government that actively engages with them. However, this has not been the

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[68] Interview with RS

[69] Interview with HS

[70] Interview with RK. Kishore, R. (June 2, 2019). Farm policy's 3 dilemmas. *Hindustan Times.* https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/oped-farm-policy-s-3-dilemmas/story-lWl3GNkJANDebnFY1JfKhP.html

case with the Modi administration, which has seldom initiated dialogues with farmer organizations. It has overlooked farmers' protests, even by those closely associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) – the ideological parent of both Modi and the BJP.[71] Moreover, Rakesh Tikait, a farmer leader from Uttar Pradesh who in the past had close ties with the BJP echoed a similar sentiment. He said, "Governments of the past used to talk with farmer organizations…We sat down together to decide on the strategy…This government is not ready to listen at all."[72] Further, the BJP's legislative actions in the Indian parliament regarding farmers' issues do not suggest a supportive stance. Despite grand assertions, the proportion of farmer-related queries addressed by the BJP has been a mere 5.6 per cent in the last 20 years.[73] Such converging evidence that the government is neither truly open to farmers nor is it perceived as such rules out the possibility that political opportunity arising from the state's openness led to the formation of the farmers' coalitions.

4.2.2 Political elites as allies

Since the beginning of the farmers' movement in 2014, political elites, especially from the opposition parties have shown keen interest in supporting farmers' demands either in the

[71] (August 24, 2021). Rss-affiliate bharatiya Kisan Sangh warns of nationwide agitation from september 8. *Deccan Herald.* https://www.deccanherald.com/national/rss-affiliate-bharatiya-kisan-sangh-warns-of-nationwide-agitation-from-september-8-1023045.html Alavi, M. (September 11, 2017). Tamil Nadu farmers protesting at Jantar Mantar eat own excreta threaten to eat human flesh. *Hindustan Times.* https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi-news/tamil-nadu-farmers-protesting-at-jantar-mantar-eat-own-excreta-threaten-to-eat-human-flesh/story-tMOsu6Og6EBN3eADCCkapO.html

[72] Interview with RT

[73] Singh, R. (2020b, December 5). In 20 yrs, farmers featured in just around 5% of BJP and Congress' Lok Sabha questions. *ThePrint.in* https://theprint.in/opinion/in-20-yrs-farmers-featured-in-just-5-of-bjp-congress-lok-sabha-questions/557602/

parliament or on the streets.[74] It is plausible that this apparent support from political elites prompted diverse farmer organizations to collaborate and increase their chance of seeking concessions from the BJP government.

In contrast, I find that allying with political elites paradoxically hinders the formation of coalitions among Indian farmer organizations. During Phase 1 (1970s and 80s), several organizations enjoyed links with political elites, but these connections accentuated the ideological conflict between and within farmer organizations (Dhanagare, 2015). Farmer leaders who emphasized being apolitical campaigned to discredit those that work with political parties in their public rallies (Nadkarni, 1987; Gupta, 1997; Dhanagare, 2015), thereby deterring any possibility of collaboration between organizations. Indeed, I find that farmer leaders refer derogatorily to organizations working with political parties as "sarkari unions" [Government's stooge]. Additionally, my interviews with bureaucrats and journalists show that political elites have on several occassions tried to break farmer organizations either through cooptation or through repression. The farmer leaders across states also strongly concur with this point of view. As a farmer leader from Uttar Pradesh mentioned, "having strong and credible farmer leaders is not in the interest of politicians. They know if farmers' issues become prominent, we [farmer leaders] will lead the movement. The public hardly trusts politicians on farmers' issues. This is why they [politicians] never want us to succeed. They are always trying to divide us.[75]

[74] Singh, R. (2020b, December 5). In 20 yrs, farmers featured in just around 5% of BJP and Congress' Lok Sabha questions. *ThePrint.in* https://theprint.in/opinion/in-20-yrs-farmers-featured-in-just-5-of-bjp-congress-lok-sabha-questions/557602/

[75] Interview with VMS

Moreover, I find that with time, the distance between farmer organizations and local politicians has increased, leading to a situation where there are minimal or no ties between them. My interviews reveal that politicians, for the most part, have little incentive to collaborate with farmer organizations. This is due to the significant role of caste politics in elections and the institutional support politicians receive. These factors allow politicians to portray themselves as more effective and resourceful representatives within their caste networks compared to farmer leaders. I provide substantial evidence to corroborate these points in the following chapter.

I also find that farmer organizations, in an effort to maintain their credibility and legitimacy, are often wary of forging ties with political elites. One of the leaders noted that while farmer organizations want political parties to listen to their demands, if they work too closely with political parties or contest elections to better represent farmers, their own members lose trust in their leaders.[76] This point has been true historically across states. Dhanagare (2015) shows that farmer organizations in Maharashtra, especially Shetkari Sangathan (SS), lost trust among their own constituents because of entering politics. Another leader added that "over time, farmers have been robbed so much by political parties that farmer leaders who work with parties are generally distrusted".[77]

In sum, despite the BJP government's various initiatives ostensibly aimed at farmer welfare and public declarations of doubling farmers' income by 2022, the formation of coalitions among farmers' organizations does not appear to be associated with the perceived political

[76] Interview with PS

[77] Interview with RR

openness of the government. Farmer leaders hold a deep-seated suspicion of the government's intentions and view the state's policies and measures as empty gestures that fail to bring substantive changes. Lack of direct government engagement with farmer leaders bolster this perception. Ironically, links with political elites hinders coalition formation due to ideological conflicts and fears of manipulation. Additionally, farmer organizations fear that close ties with political elites may lead to loss of trust among their own constituents, further discouraging coalition building.

4.3 Alignment on common interests

Studies show that alignment on identity, interest, or ideological lines can also facilitate coalition formation. In particular, framing processes can foster unity among organizations by promoting a shared identity or establishing overarching themes of shared interests or ideology (Van Dyke & Cress, 1996; Haydu, 2012; Bandy et al., 2005; McCammon & Campbell, 2006; Ganz, 2009). In the context of the Indian farmers' movement, the existence of structural divisions such as caste, class, and ideology make identity and ideological alignment are unlikely. However, assessing any potential alignment on specific demands might still prove insightful. Especially, when on initial observation, the Indian farmers' movement appears unified, suggesting a potential alignment of demands among organizations For example, AIKSCC and SKM have displayed a consistent adherence to clearly defined agendas throughout the movement.

On delving further, I find that farmer organizations have little to no alignment on interests. Rather, the agendas for AIKSCC and SKM were developed post their inception,

contradicting the notion that these coalitions were formed on the basis of a pre-existing common agenda. For instance, in the initial phase of AIKSCC's formation in July 2017, over 60-70 organizations were consulted about their top five demands.[78] Upon consultation, two overarching objectives were identified as AIKSCC's goals – legislative changes to enable freedom from indebtedness and the right to fair remuneration. Consensus on these two objectives was further sought by AIKSCC Working Group members during the four padyatras [long march] they conducted across India in the latter half of 2017. Similarly, SKM's principal demand – the repeal of farmer laws – was strategically adopted after its formation. Prior to SKM's formation, AIKSCC's primary focus was advocating for the legal guarantee of a Minimum Support Price (MSP) for farm produce, whereas the other networks such as that of Punjab and Haryana organizations were protesting to get the three laws repealed.

I also find that there is a considerable divergence in organizations' demands, which continue to be pivotal even when they engage in coalition work. For instance, leaders from Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra prioritize issues such as compensation for crop damage due to unpredictable weather and corruption within Mandis and sugar mills. Farmers in Tamil Nadu chiefly advocate for the linking of the Cauvery River for improved irrigation and better output prices.[79] Even within a single state, such as Uttar Pradesh, the interests of organizations showed noticeable disparity. In a brief survey involving 20 farmer organizations from the state, leaders expressed a variety of principal demands for their

[78] Interview with HM, AS

[79] Interview with RR, RS, PS, and DS

organizations, encompassing land rights, lowering of electricity prices, implementation of the Swaminathan Commission recommendations, better output prices for crops including paddy, wheat, sugarcane, and potatoes, problems associated with stray cattle, and debt issues.

In the same vein, my interviews revealed that not only do farmer leaders have differences in goals, they disagree also on tactics to employ. For example, during SKM's meetings, organizations continuously debated tactics to be used for public action. Some demanded aggressive tactics such as *rasta-roko* (road blockade) or tractor rallies, while others argued in favor of more symbolic actions such as conducting vigil or foot marches.[80] In a meeting of more than 20 farmer organizations of Uttar Pradesh that I attended in Delhi, the issue of tactics for public action was quite prominent. Through the meeting, some farmer leaders made explicit references to how their own activities should differ from that of BKU-T, who according to them gets in conflict with the police and creates problems for farmers. Some of these organizations also refused to work with BKU-T when it joined SKM along with AIKSCC.[81]

Considering the diversity and complexity inherent in Indian agriculture, the wide range of demands put forth by farmer organizations is not surprising. Factors such as diverse political economic conditions (see Figure 1), differing agroclimatic zones (see Figure 3), caste and class heterogeneity, as well as distinct interests and ideologies of organizational

[80] Interview with H and RM

[81] Uttar Pradesh Farmers Meeting in Delhi. Interviews with RSM, VMS, and several others during this meeting.

leaders, give rise to a broad spectrum of demands. This multiplicity is likely to create more divisions rather than unite these organizations, a point underlined by a farmer leader with pertinent examples. He stated,

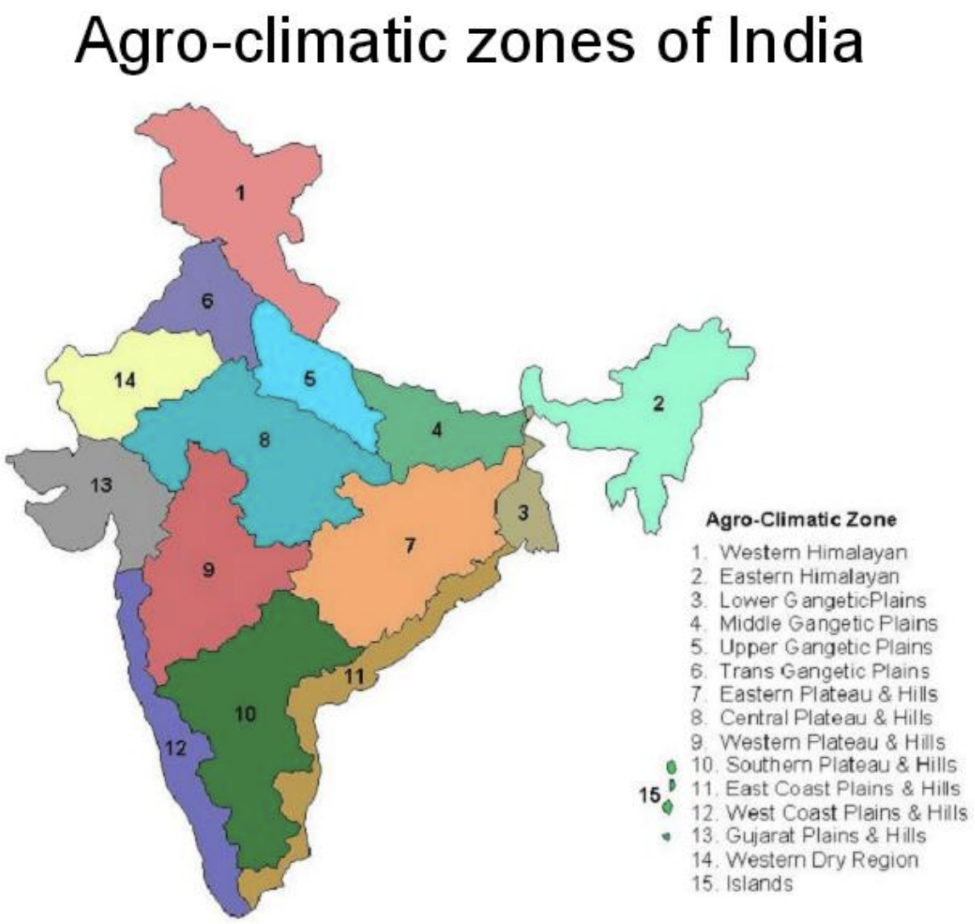
> Farmers are more different than similar. The cropping pattern makes so much difference. Now see, Mahendra Singh Tikait's focus crop was sugarcane, but Joginder Singh Ugrahan's focus crop is not sugarcane. While Tikait will be talking about sugarcane and will have a worldview through sugarcane, Ugrahan would have a worldview through wheat, through paddy. So, when Tikait gives 100% of his time to sugarcane, he cannot focus on paddy-related problems…Let's take an easy example related to electricity which has been a long-standing problem among farmer organizations…One organization would say that extracting groundwater is immoral, so we don't need electricity subsidy at all. One would say that we are food security warriors, we deserve to be pampered, we deserve to be given lots of incentives. They think that because they are using electricity for producing food, it should be free. Another will say that the rates are very high and it should be subsidized. Another will say the rate of subsidy should be lower than domestic consumption and should not be at par with commercial consumption because agriculture is not a commercial activity. Now when it comes to place demand before the government, obviously no common demand can be presented.[82]

Even demands that appear popular and common, such as fair compensation for produce, are unlikely to unify organizations owing to the unique challenges posed by distinct cropping patterns and intricacies of market and policy interventions. For instance, cereal and pulse farmers often advocate for an increase in Minimum Support Price (MSP), a policy decision, while farmers growing fruits and vegetables look towards market

[82] Interview with AS

dynamics as they lack direct governmental channels to raise output prices. Their main demands usually revolve around lowering input costs or enhancing market integration to improve profitability. Further, even within the ambit of government-regulated crops, differing demands persist. While organizations centered on wheat and paddy demand a raised MSP, those focusing on sugarcane argue for changes in the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP), both representing distinct mechanisms used by the central government to determine output prices.

Figure 3: Agro-climatic zones in India



In light of such diversity and complexity, farmer leaders don't anticipate convergence of values or interests as long as organizations can incorporate the coalition's agenda within their individual scopes of operation. In fact, many leaders view differences among organizations as both inherent and essential. One veteran farmers' leader, who has spent over three decades organizing small farmers and laborers across multiple states, underscored this point, "There are different types of farmers… isn't it only natural that farmer organizations are different from each other. Farmers come from different castes, classes, ideology, and have a different set of problems based on area [geography], climate conditions, politics, and policy."[83] Similarly, a farmer leader from Punjab remarked, "If we were not different, there would be no need for so many organizations. We could simply have one."[84] Another experienced leader concluded, "we have come together despite the fact that there are huge differences between us. Now if someone thinks that just because we came together, we all are similar or we all have become Left [in ideology], that is not true.[85]

In sum, the formation of AIKSCC and SKM's agendas occurred post establishment of these coalitions, challenging the idea that pre-existing, shared objectives led to their formation. Farmer organizations express a broad spectrum of demands and goals, reflecting the vast diversity within India's agricultural sector. These divergent demands result from differing political, agroclimatic, and socio-economic conditions that influence each organization.

[83] Interview with HM

[84] Interview with BSR

[85] Interview with PSG

Moreover, some farmer leaders consider inherent differences not just a reality, but a necessary aspect of their operations, viewing diversity as critical for the individual and unique operational scope of each organization. These reasons suggest that theories of alignment cannot explain coalition formation among Indian farmers.

4.4 Formal organizational structures

Studies show that organizations that are formal and have a clear division of labor within them are more likely to join coalitions than those that are informal and have no proper mechanisms of internal coordination (Arnold, 1995; Borland, 2008; Brooker & Meyer 2019). Contrary to this, I find that Indian farmer organizations differ drastically from what is expected in the literature. The informality and ad-hoc nature of farmer organizations has been consistent across time (Harris, 1980; Nadkarni, 1987, Lindberg, 1994). With the exception of a handful of organizations, most organizations do not have any written constitution or vision statement (Gupta, 1997). When I asked about membership details, the majority of leaders disclosed that their organizations do not maintain formal membership records, and that participation fluctuates depending on the events conducted.[86] Only a few could provide approximate numbers.[87] Additionally, I found that a significant number of farmer organizations are not formally registered and lack designated office spaces. Instead, they operate from leaders' homes or communal spaces in the villages.[88]

[86] Interview with AS, AC, H

[87] Interview with HM, AM

[88] Interview with BB, VMS, GSC

Furthermore, many organizations depend on temporary village committees to manage protests, exhibiting little formalization in their organizational structure. In fact, even those organizations that exhibit relatively formal aspects including processes for inducting office bearers and internal decision-making, acknowledge the necessity for informality and adaptability in mobilizing farmers. As articulated by a leader from a left-leaning organization, "farmers don't get mobilized on their own. It is utopian to believe so. We need to constantly evolve with the situation and make decisions on the spot sometimes."[89] This mix of formal and informal characteristics has even been historically common among organizations. For instance, Lindberg, (1992) notes,

> Some of the movements [organizations within each state] have a formal structure of village, district and state organization with chairmen, secretaries, and treasurers at all levels. At the same time, they quickly involve peasants who are not members. The charismatic leaders do not always have formal leadership positions but wield enormous influence. Thus, there is a dynamic interplay between mobilization and organization, which is so characteristic of growing movements (Lindberg, 1992, p. 24).

Notably, informality is a dominant feature across organizations, fulfilling different organizational objectives, but ultimately has no connection with coalition formation. For example, a few farmer leaders revealed that they operated under various banners for a long time, which allowed them to highlight their issues more concretely. One of them said that he had to settle for a stable name only in 2020 so that he can easily be recognized as an

[89] Interview with HM

"organization leader" within SKM.[90] Some strive to maintain a semblance of formal structure through informal practices, a point emphasized by a leader who works with agricultural laborers and marginal farmers across states. He said,

> The main functional aspects of the organization are mainly based in districts. There are no centralized headquarters. To have a centralized office or headquarter is not possible for us because we don't have that kind of resources. We have a central executive committee which has 25 members, who come from various states. We have a president, four vice presidents, one general secretary who is me and four secretaries. The remaining members are executive members. The central executive committee gives directions to districts for all kinds of activities. So, centralized decision making is there without centralized headquarters.[91]

Additionally, I find that relatively formal organizations are less likely to engage in collaboration than informal organizations, further undermining the link between formal organizational structure and coalition formation. For instance, BKU-EU, an organization that has a formal and a clear division of labor, has only reluctantly joined coalitions.[92] My interviews from Punjab reveal that given the highly formalized structure and disciplined cadre, "Ugrahan [BKU-EU] is not too trusting of other organizations."[93] One other person added, "They [BKU-EU] don't take seriously those who do not have an ideology or an

[90] Interview with BB

[91] Interview with AM

[92] Interview with AS, RM, H

[93] Interview with H

organizational structure."[94] I also find that BKU-EU generally prefers to have a separate space for itself even though it is part of SKM. As one leader mentioned, "BKU-EU was one of the last organizations to join SKM. It led its own Morcha at the Tikri border while being associated with SKM. Leaders of BKU-EU would come to SKM meetings but will always say they will get back with their answers after internal discussions."[95]

In sum, contrary to theoretical expectations, coalitions between Indian farmer organizations have occurred despite informal and ad-hoc structure of organizations.

4.5 High material resources

Studies show that when organizations possess abundant material resources, they are willing and able to leverage a portion of them for coalition work to enhance their power (Van Dyke & Amos 2017; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Conversely, some argue that coalitions become unlikely when there is a large disparity in material resources between organizations or when organizations lack resources (Bandy, 2004; Cullen, 2005; Staggenborg, 1986). Contrary to the theoretical expectations, the formation of coalitions among Indian farmer organizations has occurred despite a majority of these organizations not having an abundance of material resources, coupled with the prevalence of asymmetrical resource distribution among them.

[94] Interview with AC

[95] Interview with AS

My interviews show that most farmer organizations do not have formal processes of fund raising, which made it difficult to examine the material capacity of organizations. Most organizations did not even record the amount of material resources and the different types of assets they possess. So, I began to look at individual leaders' material capacity. I find that most farmer leaders' personal financial capacity is limited in even maintaining their own organizations, let alone keeping some additional resources for coalition work. Several leaders struggle to generate funds on their own, and sometimes have to rely on friends and family to fund their organizational activities. As one farmer leader from Uttar Pradesh mentioned, "sometimes we do not even know where the money comes for our events. We leave it to the local people to figure out on their own."[96] Another from Madhya Pradesh added, "people say elections are expensive. Farmers' politics is expensive too. Even if I just cover the Bhopal district. It takes 50,000 to be able to take care of car, driver, and fuel expenses per month."[97] When I asked him how he can sustain given the high cost, he said that he relies on family and friends to fund whenever they can. "My wife is a government teacher, so she takes care of the family. I also have some small piece of land. The rest comes from friends and a few people who call me to their events."[98] A farmer leader from Haryana mentioned that he has a group of "friends who work in corporate houses. They donate a fix amount of their salary to support me because they know farmers need help."[99] A leader from Tamil Nadu added, "We used to own land, but now my brothers own it. I

[96] Interview with RSM

[97] Interview with RR

[98] Interview with RR

[99] Interview with AK

used to be a lawyer and my wife is a government advocate. It gives us a decent income. And because we have no children, we are left with some money to help others.[100]

Even though a few leaders command substantial personal wealth, they also have difficulties maintaining their organizations single-handedly and have to rely on others. Consider VM Singh, widely recognized as one of the richest farmer leaders currently active in the movement.[101] When I asked him about his funding sources for organizational activities, he remarked, "I can't take money from farmers. I don't possess government contracts or petrol pumps. I fund my own travels. When I'm invited somewhere, I let the hosts handle those events. I can't continually bear all costs myself."[102]

To mitigate resource-related difficulties, leaders sometimes delegate financial responsibilities of organizational activities to others, as alluded by VM Singh and other interviewees. Specifically, in Uttar Pradesh, this approach is known as "program lena" (taking up a program). The essence of "program lena" is that a local organizer initiates a public event and invites a farmer leader as the chief guest. The leader's presence draws attention to the farmer issues and the organizers themselves. Usually, these events are arranged by farmers, local notables, or those acquainted with farmer leaders, with the aim to highlight their concerns and challenges. The responsibility for providing transport, food,

[100] Interview with AY

[101] Rahman, Y. (December 16, 2020). Fact check: Viral claim of VM Singh being Congress leader, holding assets worth 631 crores is misleading. *The Logical Indian.* https://thelogicalindian.com/fact-check/vm-singh-25497

[102] Interview with VMS

and other logistical requirements of the event is assigned to the local invitee, which serves as an effective cost-offsetting strategy for organizations. Additionally, farmer leaders use these events to conduct outreach activities or convene their organization's members for internal meetings and discussions, thus efficiently utilizing these events to further their cause without incurring additional costs. The practice of "Program lena" is common across various regions, including states like Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh. This wide prevalence indicates that it's a strategy commonly employed to tackle the widespread challenge of resource scarcity among most farmer organizations.[103]

Furthermore, I find that Indian farmers coalitions exist despite there being considerable uneven distribution of material resources between organizations. For instance, organizations from wealthier regions like Haryana, Punjab, and West UP cater primarily to medium to large farmers, and they have access to more resources for mobilization, such as cars and tractors. In contrast, organizations representing the majority of small to marginal farmers from states like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Chhattisgarh typically have fewer resources. While systematic data on the wealth of individual leaders is unavailable to fully elucidate economic disparities between organizations, fieldwork observations highlight considerable diversity in the personal wealth of these leaders. Some leaders possess extensive assets including more than 10 hectares of land, cars valued over 20 lakh rupees (~$25000), high-tech agricultural machinery like tractors and combine harvesters, and additional urban residences. On the other hand, other leaders have modest assets, such as small to medium land holdings (1-4 hectares). They rely on rented tractors

[103] In these areas, such practice is common even among politicians and party officials. However, the politicians arrange such events through their own intermediaries, especially during election campaigns.

and other machinery for farming, generally possess two-wheelers, and have homes in villages that may be too small for the entire family. Despite these disparities, these leaders are able to come together to work towards common goals.

Considering the continually deteriorating economic conditions of Indian farmers, it is not surprising to observe a general lack of resources within farmer organizations. Since the 1990s, economic crises have led to a decline in their incomes while escalating debts (Vaidyanathan, 2006). This financial downturn is compounded by an issue of land fragmentation that reaches extreme levels, severely hampering the farmers' material capacity (Chakravorty, Chandrashekhar, & Narapraju, 2016). Specifically. the most recent Indian census (2010-11) shows the land situation further: 67% of Indian farmers possess less than 1 hectare of land, 27.9% possess between 1-4 hectares, and a minute proportion of 5% hold 5 hectares and above. Geographical variation adds another layer of complexity to this issue. For example, in the southern state of Kerala, the average landholding is a mere 0.4 hectares, in stark contrast to the northern states of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, where the average landholdings are 0.76 and 4 hectares, respectively. In the face of such limited resources, farmer organizations face formidable challenges. Not only do they struggle to amass enough resources for their own mobilization efforts, but their ability to contribute resources to broader coalition work is also significantly compromised. This paints a picture of an agricultural sector under strain, where resource scarcity is the norm rather than the exception.

5 Chapter 5: Testing Mobilization Capacity Thesis: Organizations' ability to Mobilize their Structural Networks

This chapter aims to test the mobilization capacity thesis which proposes that a decline in social movement organizations' ability to mobilize structural networks would foster conditions favorable for the formation of coalitions. In the case of the Indian farmers movement, this thesis would suggest that a decline in farmer organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks between Phase 1 (1970s and 80s) and Phase 2 (2014-2022) of the movement could explain why coalition formation occurred in Phase 2 but not Phase 1. Drawing on fieldwork data and secondary sources, I first examine two broader shifts in the Indian political and economic landscape– the rise of caste politics and economic stress in the Indian agricultural sector– that precipitated a decline in organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks. Following this, tracing three key empirical indicators of organizations' capacity to mobilize structural networks– organizations' size, scale of protests, and their links with political elites, I demonstrate that farmer organizations suffered a drastic decline in their structural mobilization capacity.

This chapter is structured into three main sections. The first section draws attention to the above-mentioned two plausible causes of the decline in farmer organizations' mobilization capacity. The second section traces changes in the three empirical indicators over time. Specifically, I first demonstrate that organizations' capacity to mobilize structural networks was considerably high during Phase 1. Following this, I demonstrate that relative to the established baseline level of mobilization capacity at Phase 1, Phase 2 is characterized by small organizational size and protests, and minimal links with political

elites. In the concluding section, in addition to summarizing the findings, I examine the consequences of cross-sectional variation in the decline of mobilization capacity.

5.1 Exogenous shifts impacting organizations' capacity to mobilize structural networks

Two broad shifts in the Indian political and economic landscape that occurred between the two phases of the movement provide reason to expect a disruption in farmer organizations' capacity to mobilize structural networks. First, the rise of caste politics in the 1990s likely fostered rivalry between farmer leaders and political elites, both vying for the support of the same constituents. The material resources, influential positions, and institutional backing enjoyed by political elites gave them a decisive edge, allowing them to better fulfill the needs of their constituents compared to farmer leaders. Second, the Indian agricultural sector has experienced significant economic stress post-India's economic liberalization in the 1990s. A confluence of factors such as climate change, land fragmentation, and lack of governmental assistance have aggravated farmers' economic predicaments, resulting in a higher opportunity cost for collective action. Continued economic stress has also driven farmers towards income diversification strategies, widening the gap between them and farmer organizations. Both of these broad political shifts exogenous to the farmers movement likely precipitated a decline in farmer organizations' ability to mobilize their structural networks.

In this section, I provide preliminary evidence for these shifts to contextualize the decline vis-a-vis external factors and provide a comprehensive understanding of temporal changes

that occurred within the farmers' movement. This also helps clearly discern the analytical value of the mobilization capacity decline as an explanatory factor that is driven by factors external to the farmers' movement. However, it should be noted that the primary objective of this dissertation is to explain coalition formation rather than delving into empirical investigation of the reasons for the downturn in the organizations' ability to mobilize structural networks because focusing on the latter will lead to the problem of infinite regress.

5.1.1 Emergence of caste-politics: Political elites vs farmer leaders as caste representatives

Caste has long been a fundamental aspect of Indian politics, but its explicit and organized presence became more pronounced in the 1990s (Jaffrelot, 2000; Chhibber, 2001). Subsequently, numerous Indian states experienced the emergence of caste-based political parties (Chhibber, 2001; Zigfeld, 2012).[104] Moreover, even parties not overtly aligned with caste-politics witnessed a diversification of their candidates based on caste considerations. Indeed, since the early 1990s, there has been a notable proliferation of political candidates from backward castes across state and national legislatures (Jaffrelot & Kumar, 2012). Furthermore, a new class of rural political elites has emerged since 1995, primarily as a result of the introduction of elections in the three-tier rural local governments (Jayal et al.,

[104] For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, there has been a rise of Samajwadi Party that represents Yadavs, Rashtriya Lok Dal that represents Jats, and Bahujan Samajwadi Party that represents Dalits. Similarly, in Maharashtra, there is Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party that caters to the interests of Marathas, and Republican Party of India that caters to the interests of Dalits. In Punjab, while Akali Dal began much before, its agrarian and religious identity fused primarily after the 1990s. Moreover, within states where National Parties such as the BJP and Congress still continue to be relevant players, the agrarian castes seem to be well inducted in the local cadres.

2006). These elections, held every five years, determine the presidents and ward members of each village (~ 250,000 presidents), sub-district (~ 6,000 presidents), and districts (approximately 750 district presidents). Nearly half of these positions are reserved for individuals from backward and scheduled castes and tribes.

The advent of caste-based politics in the 1990s created a direct rivalry between farmer leaders and political elites, as they both appealed to similar core constituents (Jaffrelot, 2000). In Phase 1 of the farmers' movement, various organizations garnered support from specific castes such as Jats in Uttar Pradesh, Marathas in Maharashtra, and Vokkalingas and Lingayats in Karnataka. Interestingly, political parties have also emerged in these states with their core social base comprising these aforementioned castes. Notable examples include the Rashtriya Lok Dal representing Jats in Uttar Pradesh, Shiv Sena and National Congress Party representing Marathas in Maharashtra, and Janata Dal (Secular) representing Vokkalingas in Karnataka. Furthermore, the political landscape has witnessed the emergence of parties such as the Bahujan Samaj Party, Lok Janshakti Party, and Republican Party of India, which have played a significant role in amplifying the political representation of Dalits, particularly those engaged in agriculture as laborers, tenants, or small farmers (Jaffrelot, 2000; Ahuja, 2019). In sum, a significantly large number of politicians from the agrarian castes across local, state, and national levels and farmer organizations vied for their respective structural networks for socio-political mobilization.

Political elites hold a distinct advantage over farmer organizations due to their stronger material capacity, positional authority, and institutional support, thereby significantly

enhancing their capacity to serve as effective representatives for farmers than farmer organizations. Parties and politicians not only legislate on caste matters but also wield substantial personal and institutional financial resources to cater to their constituents' needs (Jensenius & Chhibber, 2022). In rural India, the legitimacy of political elites extends beyond their ability to offer material benefits; they are increasingly assisting their constituents by facilitating interactions with local bureaucracies such as the police and courts, thereby reinforcing their standing over any other potential representatives (Singh & Hemrajani, 2018). Moreover, by focusing on affirmative action issues such as reservation and other social justice issues, political elites have succeeded in emphasizing caste dynamics within the electoral domain (Chhibber, 2001; Jaffrelot, 2000; Chandra, 2004; Chhibber & Verma, 2018; Ahuja, 2019). Farmer organizations, in contrast, face significant obstacles in their attempts to serve as effective representatives of farmers. Their primary strategy of pressuring political elites through mass mobilization is not only resource-intensive but also fraught with substantial risks for farmers, especially when compared to the benefits that politicians can offer. Such conditions are likely contributing to a decline in the ability of farmer organizations to effectively mobilize their structural networks.

Moreover, the presence of dedicated farmer wings within numerous political parties offers these political parties enhanced legitimacy in rallying around agricultural matters, in turn, further undercutting the mobilization capacity of farmer organizations. For instance, a politician who had previously worked with some farmer organizations explained, “parties are always looking to build social coalitions to win. Like they have a women’s or youth

wing, now they also have a farmers' wing."[105] He further added that the caste of most regional party leaders is often the same as the majority of the farmer leaders but that the legitimacy of the former is greater because "a lot of people think that farmer leaders act in their own self-interest."[106] Regardless of whether this skepticism towards farmer leaders is based on real concerns, it is clear from my discussions with local journalists that regional politicians have successfully earned legitimacy within the larger farmer community. This legitimacy is further substantiated by the significant turnout at recent rallies organized by politicians addressing farmer issues (see footnote for details on specific rallies).[107]

Furthermore, Indian politicians, typically known to disfavor dissent and protests, took deliberate efforts to undercut farmer organizations' mobilization capacity. As Chhibber (2013) contends, curbing dissent of civil society activists serves as one key mechanism for parties to centralize control under a single leader or family. Accordingly, politicians have engaged in cooptation and repression aimed at undermining the capacity of farmer organizations. The reasons for politicians to weaken farmer organizations range from

[105] Interview with SW

[106] Interview with SW. Parties have made deliberate efforts to break BKU-T in Uttar Pradesh. For instance, the Congress party attempted to sow discord within BKU-T through Rajesh Pilot (Singh, 1991), who was the leader of the Gujjar caste group that had briefly aligned with BKU-T. The Gujjar caste has a historical rivalry with the Jats, who are represented by BKU-T (Gupta, 1997).

[107] Leaders that are generally brought up in interviews are: leaders such as Balasaheb Thackeray, Sharad Panwar, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Nitish Kumar, Rajesh Pilot, Om Prakash Chautala, Ajit Singh, Prakash Singh Badal, and Babulal Marandi. See rallies organized by Shiv Sena (Marathas in Maharashtra): https://indianexpress.com/article/news-archive/farmers-will-get-free-power-at-any-cost-says-thackeray/, Indian National Lok Dal (Jats in Haryana): https://indianexpress.com/article/news-archive/chautala-to-show-off-farmer-power-at-delhi-rally/, Rashtriya Janata Dal (Yadavs in Bihar): https://indianexpress.com/article/news-archive/rjd-organises-boat-club-rally/, National Congress Party (Marathas in Maharashtra): https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/forty-years-ago-december-8-1980-farmers-strike-7095707/, and the United Progressive Alliance (Yadavs and Kurmis in Uttar Pradesh): https://indianexpress.com/article/news-archive/farmers-rally-unpa-gets-into-poll-mode/.

maintaining their own legitimacy and power to potential money-related conflicts. For instance, a senior bureaucrat from Punjab mentioned,

> I have no problem in saying that no political party wants strong [farmers'] unions. They want to keep them weak and subservient. And they have been successful in doing it regularly. Sometimes by giving leaders important positions, Akali Dal made Lakhowal [the leader of BKU-Lakhowal] the Mandi chairman for 10 years. If needed, they can also send police after the leaders. The police are the most important institution in Punjab …You will also notice another trend: Political parties do not like any type of unions [not just farmers' unions]. They basically want all protesting organizations to remain subservient to them. See what happened to the big student unions. They all split and are small because of political parties.[108]

A Jat politician in the state of Uttar Pradesh concurred. He said, "Politicians have strong interests in creating divisions between farmer leaders to protect their own interest…Farmer leaders keep looking for ways to protest, and politicians don't like protests."[109] A couple of politicians, however, claimed that while they want to help farmer organizations, it's the top level political leadership and bureaucrats who do not trust farmers organizations and want to weaken them.[110] Money-related problems between farmer organizations and politicians were highlighted by a bureaucrat from Punjab who works with the state's government-run farmer cooperatives. He said,

[108] Interview with KSP

[109] Interview with SI

[110] Interview with HK

> Money is the biggest problem in all of this. Political parties as well as farmer organizations need money. Farmer organizations protest against those who give political parties money, like sugar mills, factory owners, toll plaza companies. Politicians don't like this. But then farmer organizations need money to run their organizations. No leader has the ability to spend from their pocket and build a big organization on their own. So everyone is trying to protect their interests.[111]

My interviews show that it is relatively easy for politicians to create a dent in the capacity of farmer organizations to mobilize their structural networks. For instance, a farmer leader from Uttar Pradesh claimed that politicians exploit the vulnerability of farmer organizations easily. He said, "no farmer leader will admit this, but most of them want to be closer to politicians. By being close to politicians, you can get so many things like money, contracts. Some simply want a gunner [security guard] to show off in the village. Others want work done for their people. But once you are close to a politician, your legitimacy as a farmer leader gets questioned. Politicians exploit this and create problems for you and your organization when they see you becoming big."[112] Closeness with politicians as a factor that creates legitimacy crises for farmer organizations is well documented by Dhanagare (2015) in the case of Maharashtra. Moreover, given that politicians have control over the security apparatus, they easily use repressive tactics to weaken farmer organizations. Newspaper reports indicate that some politicians who were previously sympathetic to farmers issues employed police repression during farmers' protests. For instance, Om Prakash Chautala, the Chief Minister of Haryana, whose father had previously donated money and resources to BKU-T, directed police to charge at BKU

[111] Interview with MKFD

[112] Interview with AC

protesters in 2002. During this incident, one farmer was killed and several others sustained injuries.[113] Similarly, in Maharashtra, activists from SSS were killed in 2012 when a seemingly pro-farmer party (National Congress Party) was in the ruling coalition.[114] Politicians generally use such occasions to paint farmer organizations as violent actors to undermine their legitimacy. I also find that the use of police by politicians goes beyond direct repression during protests. As one leader explained, "once a politician has an eye on you, they will make sure that your name is involved in some local conflict."[115]

5.1.2 Transitioning agriculture: Divergent interests and rising opportunity costs for farmers

Since India's economic liberalization in the 1990s, the agricultural sector's prominence as the country's economic backbone has declined, posing serious economic challenges for farmers (Ramakumar, 2022). There has been a considerable decrease in the sector's employment share and its contribution to the national income; between 1990 and 2021, employment in Indian agriculture fell from 64% to 44%, and its share in the national income dropped from 27.6% to 16.8%. The agricultural growth rate within this period has also been extremely volatile, with a marked downtrend since the 1990s. Recent research highlights that farmers' income has increased by a paltry 1% in recent years (Chand, Saxena, and Rana, 2015). Furthermore, farmers' have been facing tremendous threats to

[113] Bharadwaj, M. (May 20, 2002). 1 killed in firing, cops held hostage as Chautala stokes farmers' anger. *The Indian Express.* https://indianexpress.com/article/news-archive/1-killed-in-firing-cops-held-hostage-as-chautala-stokes-farmers-anger/

[114] (November 12, 2012). Farmers protest in Maharashtra turns violent, one killed in police firing. *NDTV.* https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/farmers-protest-in-maharashtra-turns-violent-one-killed-in-police-firing-504443

[115] Interview with DS

their incomes due to climate change (Chuang, 2019), land fragmentation (Chakravorty, et., al, 2016), and lack of support from the Indian government (OECD, 2018; Bansal & Rawal, 2022; Sarkar, 2022). These changes have impacted laborers as well as farmers, albeit in different ways (Yadav, 2022; Datta, 2016).

The severe economic stress endured by farmers in India (Vaidyanathan, 2006) presumably posed significant challenges for organizations to mobilize on a large-scale (Das Gupta, 2016; Joshi, 2017). Protests generally impose considerable costs and risks on participants, and in the economically precarious situation of Indian farmers, these costs and risks are further heightened. Under these circumstances, my interviews indicate that the economic pressure on farmers has resulted in a situation of hopelessness that organizations have been unable to rectify over time. For instance, one leader working with small and marginal farmers in Maharashtra shared, "farmers feel that nothing is going to change. They are disheartened by all that is happening…It makes it impossible for us to convince them to join us…This feeling makes them believe that nothing is ever going to change." This sense of despair among farmers and their growing detachment from farmer organizations has been echoed by scholars studying different states in recent years (Gill, 2004; Joshi, 2017; Das Gupta, 2016). In Punjab, as an example of farmers' frustration due to increased debt and the perceived ineffectiveness of politicians and farmer leaders, Gill (2004, p. 2965) observed that farmers posted a sign outside their village that read, "This village is for sale". Similarly, another leader from Bihar mentioned that the "biggest challenge for us is to gain

trust and provide motivation to farmers to participate in the movement. It is when farmers gain confidence that the movement will benefit them will they come out to protest."[116]

The economic constraints faced by farmers create a vicious cycle for organizations, which further dents their ability to mobilize at scale. The execution of strategies promoting collective action requires considerable material resources; however, when farmers, the primary resource contributors, are economically constrained, organizations inevitably struggle to expand and attract new members. "Our biggest challenge is that we have limited facilities and finances", said one farmer leader from Rajasthan.[117] Another leader from Uttar Pradesh added, "The farmer communities we represent neither have the time nor the money for attending national movements or demonstrations; their attempts to speak their minds are limited to the village. The large farmers who have facilities don't need to organize movements. We represent marginal and poor farmers. We aren't able to conduct protests at the scale we wish to. If our farmers had more money, we would also organize big protests."[118] The link between economic resources and organizations' capacity to mobilize at scale becomes clearer when we take a closer look at the mobilization in Phase 1. During that time, mobilization was largely driven by caste groups that had recently benefited materially from the land redistribution policies and the Green Revolution of the 1950s and 60s (Frankel, 1978; Nadkarni 1987). In such a context characterized by high material resources, even ad-hoc donations from farmers enhanced organizations' capacity

[116] Interview with AM

[117] Interview with KM

[118] Interview with PH

for mobilization. As noted by (Gupta, 1988), "the rich farmers' movements have gained a lot of attention…because these farmers are more voluble and have greater staying power. They desist from merging with existing party formations, and the enthusiasm they generate is quite remarkable" (p. 2692).

Moreover, since Phase 1, to counteract economic difficulties, Indian farmers have pursued various income diversification strategies, which has widened the gap between farmers and farmer organizations. A large section of small and marginal farmers, and agricultural laborers have been migrating to urban and other rural areas for wage labor and salaried employment (Datta, 2016; Picherit, 2012). Within villages, farmers, across caste and class groups, have been venturing into non-cultivation activities such as livestock, poultry farming, small businesses, and wage labor (Chuang, 2019; Yadav, 2022; Das Gupta, 2016; Singh, 2016). These changes demand more time from farmers, raising the opportunity costs of participation in farmer organizations. As one farmer leader from Maharashtra succinctly summarized the problem, "injustice against farmers can come at any time, but farmers have to save their time. They cannot afford to protest all the time. Timing of farming is very important for them.[119] Similarly, another leader from Uttar Pradesh mentions, "Farmers' daily work is so high these days that they cannot participate in demonstrations every day or whenever a problem arises. They may participate in rallies or in panchayats or when we give a call against the government s. But even then, they want to be back as soon as possible because being away for long would make it difficult [economically] for them in the long

[119] Interview with PS

run."[120] Note that while the specific reasons may vary, economic precarity is common to all castes and classes of farmers.

The diversification strategies adopted by farmers have led to a broadening of the range of farmers' issues, many of which fall outside the scope of traditional farmer organizations. Indeed, recent studies point to the formation of a new class of farmers that has its interests more strongly tied to businesses (Das Gupta, 2016) and government-dependent activities (Singh, 2016), which is likely to bring them closer to politicians than to farmer leaders. A case study from Uttar Pradesh eloquently illustrates the evolving complexity, "There is a lot that concerns a peasant which falls outside BKU's [farmer organization] agenda, and there is a lot in BKU's agenda that no longer concerns a peasant. And therein lies one of the reasons why not only BKU but any organization in the region has been ineffective in organizing farmers as a social category even during the moments of crisis for the peasantry" (Joshi, 2018, p. 23).

5.2 Tracing the decline in farmer organizations' capacity to mobilize structural networks: A comparison of the two phases of the farmer's movement

During Phase 1, large farmer organizations emerged across Indian states. These organizations, mainly those representing numerically dominant castes, had a profound influence that extended over vast regions of states, and occasionally even across state borders. Their existence demonstrated a remarkable capacity for mobilization. They staged substantial and sustained protests, bringing their cause to the forefront and underlining their

[120] Interview with YD

potential for mass action. Their influence was not restricted to mobilization alone. These organizations also demonstrated an ability to influence policies and engage with political elites.

However, following Phase 1, there came a period characterized by a noticeable decrease in the capacity of farmer organizations to mobilize their structural networks. Large organizations, once instrumental in mobilizing the masses, splintered into several smaller entities. This fragmentation had considerable implications on the capacity for large-scale mobilization. Compared to Phase 1, these smaller organizations demonstrated a significantly reduced ability to conduct large protests. Similarly, their ability to draw links and influence with political elites diminished substantially. This section provides evidence for the decline in organizations' capacity to mobilize structural networks and an in-depth exploration of these dynamics.

5.2.1 From large to small organizations: fragmentation of structural networks

During Phase 1, since organizations fundamentally relied on their own caste networks, the geographical spread of these caste networks played a significant role in determining the organizations' scope. Across states, there existed large organizations that were associated with numerically dominant caste groups, and these organizations spanned large parts of their respective states (see Figure 4).[121] For instance, the Bhartiya Kisan Union-Punjab

[121] In addition to these large organizations, several small farmer organizations represented the interests of Dalits, Gujjars, Sainis, and Tyagis (Singh, 1992; Bentall & Corbridge, 1996; Gupta, 1997). The Kerala Krashaka Federation was dominated by farmers from Ezhavas and Nair castes (Alexander, 1980). Similarly, organizations that catered mainly to agriculture labor in Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Karnataka represented the interests of Dalits and other lower castes (Alexander, 1980; Singhal & Gill, 1988; Banaji, 1994). The size of these organizations directly overlapped with the spread of their caste networks.

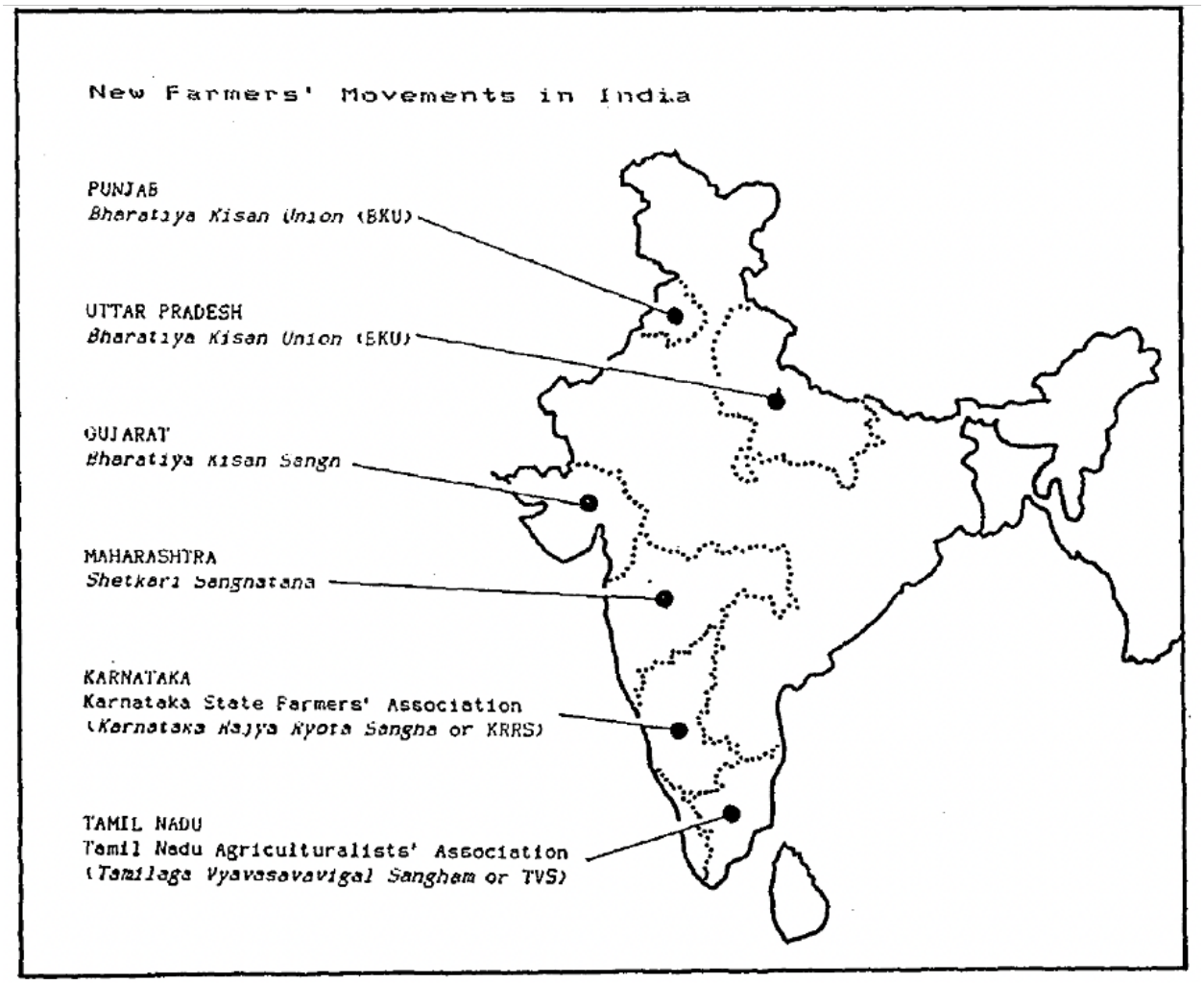
(BKU-PB)[122] in Punjab was largely composed of Sikh Jats, the most numerous agrarian castes in the state. The organization's wide reach, permeating most of the state's districts and predominantly centered around Ludhiana, mirrored the geographic distribution of the Sikh Jat caste (Mukherji, 1988; Gill & Singhal, 1988). Similarly, the Shetkari Sangathan (SS) in Maharashtra mainly represented Marathas, another large agricultural caste group. The organization's significance and widespread activity in the state's Western region, with Nashik and Pune as key operational centers, reflected the geographic concentration of the Marathas (Dhanagare, 2015; Omvedt, 1988; Arora, 2001; Dhanagare, 2004). Likewise, the Bhartiya Kisan Union-Tikait (BKU-T) in Uttar Pradesh extended its influence throughout western Uttar Pradesh and neighboring Haryana, coinciding with the geographic spread of the Jat networks, a dominant caste in the region (Gupta, 1997; Singh, 1991). The BKU-T's leadership, cycling among various sub-caste heads, exemplified the underlying caste network's diversity (Gupta, 1988).

Organizations in other states similarly benefitted from the spread of their numerically dominant caste networks. In Karnataka, the Karnataka Rajya Ryotha Sangha (KRRS) emerged as a significant organization, primarily focused on the western coastal belt of the state, with Shimoga as its protest hub (Nadkarni, 1987). The region largely overlapped with the Vokkalinga and Lingayat caste networks, which were closely associated with the KRRS (Assadi, 1994). The organization's influence was closely linked to the geographic spread of these caste networks, underscoring the vital relationship between caste-based

[122] The original name of Bharatiya Kisan Union-Punjab was Punjab Khetibari Zamindari Union. However, for a brief period this organization was merged with the one in While the name of the organization is the same as that in Uttar Pradesh, and this organization for a brief period was the parent organization of BKU-T, gradually it became an independent organization.

mobilization and geography. The Tamil Nadu Agriculturalists Association (TNAA) followed a similar pattern in Tamil Nadu. Centered in the Coimbatore district and extending its activities to bordering districts in Karnataka (Alexander, 1980), the TNAA primarily comprised Kammas and Vellalas (Alexander, 1980; Harriss, 1981), two groups concentrated in the Western part of the state. Like the previous cases, the TNAA's size and influence were directly proportional to the geographical spread of its constituent caste networks. Simply put, in Phase 1, farmer organizations enjoyed large structural networks, which is reflected in their size and spread.

Figure 4: Large Organizations in Phase 1 (1970s-80s)



(Source: Brass, 1993)

5.2.1.1 The decline in organizational size since Phase 1

Through my fieldwork across states and secondary sources, it became apparent that nearly all large organizations from Phase 1 split into several smaller organizations. While most of the numerically dominant caste organizations still exist, they cater to the interests of only a fraction of their previous caste networks. For instance, Gill (2004) notes that in Punjab,

the BKU-PB[123] fragmented into 10 smaller organizations, and All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), the largest labor organization in Phase 1, fragmented into three smaller organizations in the early 2000s (Gill, 2004).[124] My interviews and news reports published in the past two years[125] suggest that there are currently 32-34 active organizations in Punjab, of which the majority came into existence after breaking away from other organizations.[126] Of the 32 organizations, nearly 20 had previously been directly or indirectly associated with BKU-PB, and another 5-6 organizations had been associated with AIKS. Since Jat Sikhs, the group that BKU-PB mobilized in Phase 1, continued to lead the factions after splitting from BKU-PB, the traditional networks of Jat Sikhs became scattered across smaller organizations. The breakdown of All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), which used to mobilize non-Jat Sikhs, especially Dalit Sikhs, also indicates a fragmentation of Dalit and non-Jat Sikh networks (Gill & Singhal, 1984; Mukherji, 1998).

[123] The original name of Bharatiya Kisan Union-Punjab was Punjab Khetibari Zamindari Union. However, for a brief period this organization was merged with the one in While the name of the organization is the same as that in Uttar Pradesh, and this organization for a brief period was the parent organization of BKU-T, gradually it became an independent organization.

[124] Gill (2004) notes, "The BKU [in Punjab] had split in 1989 into two major factions, one was led by Bhupinder Singh Mann and Balbir Singh Rajewal and another by Ajmer Singh Lakhowal…in 1994…the BKU (Ekta) was born of the Lakhowal faction of BKU. BKU (Ekta) further split into two factions in 2003. One faction is led by Pishaura Singh Sidhupur and the other by Joginder Singh Ugrahan…The subdivision of the farmers' movement into 10 groups has made it quite weak" (Gill, 2004, p. 2964). Each of the leaders mentioned here come from the Jat Sikh community.

[125]Rahar, S. (november 21, 2021). 32 farm unions from punjab to meet at singhu border. *Hindustan Times.* https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/32-farm-unions-from-punjab-to-meet-at-singhu-border-today-101638126742298.html

[126] Interview with H and RM. There are approximately 8-10 organizations that primarily cater to the interests of agricultural laborers and marginal farmers (mainly from Dalit Sikh community) and the remaining organizations represent the interests of middle to rich farmers (mainly the Jat Sikhs).

In Uttar Pradesh, the BKU-T, which organized the largest farmers' rally in 1988, began to break up into smaller groups at its peak in the early 90s (Gupta, 1988; Singh, 1992). Several leaders in Uttar Pradesh attest to such factionalization, with one highlighting the presence of over 50 factions just in Uttar Pradesh.[127] Interestingly, 20 of the 30 currently active organizations in Uttar Pradesh were previously part of BKU-T, and of these, 9 are led by Jat leaders.[128] Because the BKU-T was previously primarily associated with Jats, the presence of 9 small Jat organizations is an evident marker of the fragmentation of Jat networks and a decline in BKU-T's capacity to mobilize the Jat caste networks. Moreover, several factions of BKU-T have now become defunct.[129] When I inquired about the changes in BKU-T's size, a Jat farmer leader who has been active in the movement since the 1970s explained, "BKU-T first began as a farmers' union in the 1980s, but soon turned into a full Jat union and then eventually a union of a single Khap (sub-caste) within Jats".[130] The transformation of BKU-T from a farmers' union to a Khap union depicts the decline in its capacity to mobilize broadly, and with respect to Jats in particular. The decline in the ability of BKU-T to mobilize its own caste is further corroborated by Ramakumar (2017) who notes that BKU-T's strength among Jats has been declining primarily due to the rivalry between the various *Khaps* within Jats, whose leaders have gone on to form rival farmer organizations or turned towards caste politics.

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[127] Interview with RSM

[128] Based on a brief survey of 30 organizations currently active in the state, 9 organizations led by Jat farmer leaders, and another 11 organizations led by leaders from non-jat castes were previously associated with BKU-T.

[129] Interview with VMS, RSM, YS, AS.

[130] Interview with RSM. Khap is a sub-caste within a caste. BKU-T's leadership, the Tikait family, is also the head of the Baliyan Khap.

In Maharashtra, Dhanagare (2015) identifies at least 10 leaders who were previously office bearers of Shetkari Sangathan (SS) but now lead their own separate organizations.[131] Of these 10 leaders, four are Marathas, the caste primarily associated with SS during Phase 1 (Arora, 2001).[132] My interviews with Maharashtra's farmer leaders attest to further factionalization of the SS and other organizations. As one leader who was previously associated with SS mentioned, "many people have their own separate organizations. There are more than 25 organizations active in Maharashtra, and most of them were previously part of SS."[133] She also suggested that in addition to the network fragmentation, Marathas – the main caste group associated with SS in Phase 1 – no longer align with farmer organizations to the same extent. She said,

> Marathas were the most active caste group during Sharad Joshi's time [Phase 1]. But they no longer show much interest in farmer organizations…Marathas believe that they can attain success at a faster pace by entering politics…You see, even the demands [of Marathas] have changed… They have demands for reservation, not agriculture.[134]

[131] Leaders who broke away from SS: Raju Basargekar, Raghunathdada Patil, Ramchandrabapu Patil, Raju Shetty, Anil Gote, Vijay Jawandhia, Chandrakant Wankhade, Vinay Hardikar, Pralhad Karad Patil, and Madhaorao Boraste.

[132] Arora (2001) also shows that Omvedt (1988, 1993, and 1994) had acknowledged that the main base of SS was marathas, but also included other castes (pp. 101-102).

[133] Interview with PS

[134] Interview with PS

Moreover, in the last few years, even Swabhimani Shetkari Sangathan [Self-Respecting Farmers Organization] (SSS) – one of the largest organizations in Maharashtra and which was previously part of SS – has factionalized several times, further increasing the dent in its capacity to mobilize Maratha networks.[135] When I asked the leader of SSS to comment on his ability to mobilize farmers at scale relative to that of his mentor Sharad Joshi, he admittedly said "things have changed now, [Maratha] farmers are now more divided than ever before", alluding to the divisions within the Maratha caste networks that were previously collectively mobilized by Sharad Joshi[136] He further added, "My own organization's influence is restricted to only a couple of districts though I have office bearers in several other districts."[137]

A similar pattern of division within caste networks associated with large organizations can be noted in other states as well.[138] For instance, in Karnataka, one of the farmer leaders mentioned that "after the death of the main leaders of KRRS, the organization has split into many factions that fight among themselves regarding local issues."[139] In recent years,

[135] (March 2, 2017). Swabhimani Shetkari Sangathana: Maharashtra premier farmer body set for another split. *The Indian Express.* https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/swabhimani-shetkari-sanghatana-maharashtras-premier-farmer-body-set-for-another-split/

[136] Interview with RS

[137] Interview with RS

[138] Mehta, Y.B. (July 11, 2011). Farmers meet in Bhrauch, aim to unite GKS. *Times of India.* https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/surat/farmers-meet-in-bharuch-aim-to-unite-gks/articleshow/9177453.cms

[139] Interview with NH

KRRS has further fragmented due to leadership rivalries,[140] especially those prevalent among the children of past leaders. The breakdown of KRRS into several smaller organizations marks the division of Vokkaliga and Lingayat networks associated with farmer organizations. Similarly, in Tamil Nadu, the Tamil Nadu Agriculturalists' Association (TNAA), which was the largest farmer organization in the state during Phase 1, splintered into more than 30 organizations.[141] One TNAA leader mentioned that "now the center of farmers' protests has shifted from Coimbatore to Trichy, Tanjore and Erode" indicating that the dominant Kamma and Vellala castes are not as active in farmer organizations as they were in Phase 1.[142]

Importantly, several farmer leaders suggested that the influence of political elites in fomenting internal discord within organizations is indeed significant and should not be underestimated. Local journalists and civil society activists, especially from Uttar Pradesh and Punjab concur with farmer leaders' point of view, pointing out that politicians regularly deliberately co-opt farmer leaders by offering them positions in their party or in the government in order to create infighting between organizations. One example from Punjab mentioned by several people was that of Ajmer Singh Lakhowal, a BKU-PB leader who

[140]Shivakumar, M.T. (April 16, 2015). KRRS splits; unhappy farmers form new group. *The Hindu.* https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/krrs-splits-unhappy-farmers-form-new-group/article7107672.ece

[141] Interview with B, M, SP

[142] Interview with B. Kammas and Vellalas mainly reside in the Coimbatore region.

was appointed the Mandi board chairman, which then led to multiple splits within BKU-PB.[143]

5.2.2 From large to small mobilizations: decreased ability to conduct large protests

By mobilizing relatively cohesive caste and class structural networks (Omvedt, 1994; Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987; Banaji, 1994), large farmer organizations in Phase 1 conducted protests at a scale that was unprecedented in the history of farmers' mobilization in India (Varshney, 1994; see Table 1 below for details on select events). For instance, protests organized by the KRRS, which primarily relied on Vokkalingas and Lingayat caste networks, witnessed gatherings exceeding 100,000 people on several occasions (Nadkarni, 1987). A newspaper article depicts KRRS' capacity to regularly draw millions of farmers in their protests, it said "The KRRS had up to 10 million members – one in four of the southern Indian state's farmers -- and the professor [Nanjundaswamy, leader of KRRS] was frequently able to attract a million people to his famous rallies."[144] Similarly, in Maharashtra, SS, whose networks primarily comprised Marathas (Omvedt, 1988), organized several protests with more than 100,000 attendees and their 1989 protest in Nagpur, the largest they ever organized, drew a gathering of over 300,000 farmers (Nadkarni, 1987). BKU-T, from Uttar Pradesh, mobilized more than 500,000 farmers for a protest against the central government in Delhi in October 1988 (Gupta, 1988). Such large protests enabled the farmers' movement to create a unique place for itself in Indian

[143] Interview with RM, MKFD

[144] Vidal, J. (February 5, 2004). M.D. Najundaswamy (Obituary). *The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/news/2004/feb/06/guardianobituaries.globalisation

politics. As Omvedt (1988) noted, farmers' movement was "the only movement…capable of regularly organizing mass rallies involving, literally, hundreds of thousands of people, and of mounting mass struggles at the same level." (p. 14).

Thanks to the mobilization power of the large farmer organizations, the farmers' movement was dubbed to be "too strong to be crushed" (Lindberg, 1992, p. 25). The organizations conducted large and sustained protests despite the high risks associated with their participation. The protests were held over several weeks and continued to scale up despite arrests and physical violence initiated by the police (Lindberg, 1992; Nadkarni, 1987). For instance, protests organized by BKU-T and BKU-PB lasted several weeks although the members of these organizations came in direct conflict with the police on several occasions (Gupta, 1997; Singh, 1991; Gill & Singhal, 1988). In the protests led by SS, nearly 31,000 farmers were arrested including thousands of women (Dhanagare, 2014; Nadkarni, 1987). Similarly, while protests by KRRS involved over 30,000 arrests, the protests lasted over a month (Nadkarni, 1987).

Table 1: Major Protests and Rallies in Phase 1 (1970s-80s)

Event .No.	Year	Organization	Scale of Protests and Rallies	Place	Primary Structural Identity	Source

1	1977-78	Tamil Nadu Agriculturalists Association	200,000 in just Coimbatore. 4000 were arrested. Overall, 3 million members of the organization	Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu	Kammas and Vellalas	(Nadkarni, 1987; Rangan, 1972)
2	1977-78	All India Kisan Sabha	81000 members	Tamil Nadu	Dalits	(Nadkarni, 1987)
3	1980	Karnataka Rajya Ryotha Sanga	Thousands spread in 12 of 19 districts. Lasted over a month. 10000 were arrested.	Shimoga, Karnataka	Vokkalingas and Lingayats	(Nadkarni, 1987)
4	1982	Karnataka Rajya Ryotha Sangha	200,000 attendees. Lasted almost a month.	Karnataka	Vokkalingas and Lingayats	(Nadkarni, 1987)
5	1983	Karnataka Rajya Ryotha Sangha	Several thousands. Confrontational protest across the state. 22000 arrested (proxy for size). Lasted a week.	Karnataka	Vokkalingas and Lingayats	(Nadkarni, 1987)
6	1979-80	Shetkari Sangathan	Several thousands. 31000 arrested, protest lasted for 24 days.	Maharashtra	Marathas	(Nadkarni, 1987)

6	1981	Shetakri Sangathan	100,000	Pimpalgaon, Maharashtra	Marathas	(Dhanagare, 2014; Nadkarni, 1987)
7	1982	Shetkari Sangathan	30,000 office bearers	Satana, Maharashtra	Marathas	(Dhanagare, 2014)
8	1989	Shetkari Sangathan	300,000	Nagpur, Maharashtra	Marathas	(Dhanagare, 2015)
9	1984	Bharatiya Kisan Union (Punjab)	50-60,000 attendees. Lasted more than a week.	Chandigarh, Punjab	Sikh Jats	(Singhal and Gill, 1988)
10	1983	Bharatiya Kisan Union (Punjab)	Several thousands. Protests spread across all Punjab districts except for Kapurthala	Punjab	Sikh Jats	(Gill and Singhal, 1984; Varshney, 1994)
11	1987	Bharatiya Kisan Union (Tikait)	500,000	Karmukhed, Uttar Pradesh	Hindu Jats	(Gupta, 1988)
12	1988	Bharatiya Kisan Union (Tikait)	100,000+	Rajabpur, Uttar Pradesh	Hindu Jats	(Gupta, 1988; Bentall and Corbridge, 1996)
13	1988	Bharatiya Kisan Union (Tikait)	100,000 attendees. Lasted more than 3 weeks.	Meerut, Uttar Pradesh	Hindu Jats	(Bentall and Corbrdige, 1996)
14	1988	Bharatiya Kisan Union (Tikait)	500,000 attendees	Boat Club, New Delhi	Hindu Jats	(Gupta, 1988)

15	1993	Bharatiya Kisan Union (Tikait)	40,000 attendees	New Delhi	Hindu Jats	(Bentall and Corbridge, 1996)

5.2.2.1 The decline in protest size since Phase 1

Protest event data collected by The Armed Conflict Location Event Dataset Project (ACLED) shows that in general, the scale of protests organized in Phase 2 is significantly lower relative to Phase 1. Critically, no organization in Phase 2 can emulate the size or scale of protests seen in Phase 1. In other words, not only have the organizations that existed in Phase 1 lost their ability to mobilize their structural networks; even newer organizations formed post-Phase 1 are unable to mobilize their structural networks. Specifically, the ACLED data on nearly 10,000 farmers protests spread across India demonstrates that since 2016, the range of farmers' protest size ranged from a dozen to a few thousands.[145] The majority of protests witnessed fewer than 1000 participants, and only 22 events were reported to have over 10,000 or more attendees, but none of them surpassed 50,000 attendees. Importantly, prior to the formation of the farmers' coalitions (AIKSCC in 2017 and SKM in 2020), farmer protests drew over 10,000 protestors only on 5 occasions. The largest reported gatherings, two long marches conducted by AIKS from

[145] ACLED data is collected using media sources, so it is likely that there is a media bias in coverage of farmers events. However, my focus here is to show the large protests, which are anyway likely to be covered by the media. Moreover, a recent study of media coverage of protests clearly shows that protests in India, if big, are likely to receive coverage and are even reported without much bias (Shahin, Zheng, Strum, & Fadnis, 2016). Moreover, it should be noted that the average gathering of farmer organizations might even be less than 1000. Since ACLED data is based primarily on newspaper reports, and the existing studies show that news coverage is positively related to the size of protests, it is likely that what we are finding in the ACLED data are relatively larger protests than average farmers protest in India. Furthermore, in nearly all the protests of individual organizations that I have covered in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Haryana, the size of protests has never exceeded more than a few hundreds. The only exceptions to this are protests organized by AIKSCC or SKM.

Nashik to Mumbai in Maharashtra, drew 30000-40000 farmers. Interestingly, for over 50% of the protests in the ACLED dataset, protest size was not mentioned. This may reflect biased news reporting against farmer protests (Mudgal, 2011), but importantly, the decision to not report on the size of these protests could also indicate that scale is no longer a notable characteristic of farmers' protests.

An original dataset of protest applications submitted to Jantar Mantar (Singh, Hemrajani, & Ahuja, 2023), the most prominent place of protest in New Delhi, also provides clear evidence that the scale of farmers' protests has declined. Because this dataset was collected from police archives rather than news media unlike ACLED, the Jantar Mantar data gives us the whole universe of farmers' protests, thereby allowing us to make inferences with higher confidence. Analyzing expected protest size data for 196 applications submitted by more than 50 farmer organizations to protest at Jantar Mantar, I find that the expected gathering ranged from 20 to 5000.[146] Most applications expected fewer than 500 attendees, with only 14 applications reporting an expected gathering of over 1000 attendees. AIKS reported the largest expected gathering of 5000 people.

Looking more closely at individual organizations, I find that they have significantly lost their capacity to draw protestors. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, BKU-T, which could gather over 500,000 protestors at Karmukheda and Delhi (Gupta, 1988) and 100,000

[146] The details of size of the protest (=expected gathering) were mentioned on the applications submitted to the Delhi Police. Providing information on organizers, demands, and size is mandated by law under the protest permit system. For more information on how the permit system works in Delhi, see (Singh, Hemrajani, & Ahuja, 2023; Ahuja & Singh, 2023).

participants in Meerut and Rajabpur (Gupta, 1988; Bentall and Corbridge, 1996) in Phase 1, can no longer organize large protests. Since the early 1990s, BKU-T's mobilization capacity has plummeted drastically. Krupa (1992) notes that a rally in Delhi Boat Club in October 1991, which was an attempt to repeat the event of 1988, could not stir up even a meager few thousand. In 1993, BKU-T organized a rally in opposition to the Dunkel Draft of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade agreement, where only 40,000 people partook in the event (Bentall & Corbridge, 1996). In 2018, BKU-T's Kisan Kranti Yatra [Farmers Revolution March] managed to gather 20,000 participants after 10 days of continuous mobilization over 200 kilometers.[147] Recent data from ACLED shows that BKU's ability has further declined. Between 2016 and 2022, their average protest drew only 10,000 people. Ultimately, BKU-T's mobilization capacity has declined by about 50 times relative to Phase 1.

In Punjab, Gill & Singhal (1988, 1994) noted that BKU-PB could mobilize more than 50,000 farmers on several occasions in Phase 1 and their activities were spread across the entire state with the exception of the Kapurthala district. However, when I inquired about the change in strengths of farmer organizations over time during my fieldwork, I was informed that most organizations have their capacities limited to sub-district (block or mandal) levels.[148] Currently, the only organization whose presence is spread across

[147] (October 2, 2018). Kisan rally: Nearly 20000 farmers march to Delhi with 15 demands, city borders barricaded. *Hindustan Times.* https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/kisan-rally-thousands-of-farmers-to-approach-delhi-with-15-point-agenda-police-barricade-borders/story-p9sWPhYzBFX512XzJtj9RK.html

[148] Interview with H, RM

multiple districts in Punjab is BKU-EU. Reportedly, it is also an organization that can mobilize up to a few thousands independently, although still not at the same level as BKU-PB in Phase 1.[149] Gill (2004) finds that BKU-EU along with one other organization mobilized over 2000 people in 2004. In the same vein, one long term observer of farmers' politics in Punjab explained, "If other farmer organizations of Punjab are able to mobilize 300-400 to sit on a dharna [sit-in], Ugrahan [BKU-EU's leader] can bring 3000-4000 people to sit in."[150] Despite being the largest organization in Punjab, BKU-EU does not have the capacity to mobilize at the same scale as BKU-PB could in Phase 1.

Similarly, in Tamil Nadu, Nadkarni (1987) noted that the TNAA had a membership of 3 million in 1977-78, and it was able to mobilize over 200,000 people from Coimbatore district alone.[151] In stark contrast, describing protests in Phase 2, the President of one of TNAA's major factions told me that "on an average 1000 people turn up for protests, maybe 5000 for conference and public meetings."[152] Similarly, AIKS membership decreased significantly in Tamil Nadu: it had 81,000 members in the 1970s (Nadkarni, 1987) but in Phase 2, the organization manages to draw only a few hundred participants for protests and a few thousands to conferences.[153] The head of the AIKS confirmed that

[149] Interview with H, RM

[150] Interview with RM

[151] Rangan, K. (June 25, 1972). A state in India angers farmers. *New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/1972/06/25/archives/a-state-in-india-angers-farmers-roads-blocked-to-protest-rise-in.html

[152] Interview with M

[153] Interview with B

this is a broad pattern across farmer organizations in the country, "there is hardly any organization left in India that can gather people like in the past.[154] In the same vein, the National South Indian River Interlinking Agriculturalists' Association (NSIRIA), which received a lot of media attention in 2016 and 2017, has managed to organize only small-scale protests in Phase 2.[155] When I inquired specifically about its protests in Trichy, which is its primary center, the organization's President stated that the attendance ranged between 100-500 people. The leader of NSIRIA admitted that his organization faces the same struggle, "the association has district presidents, and they call the farmers and organize them. Yet, we got connected with only 426 farmers to go to Delhi."[156]

5.2.3 From influential to powerless organizations: low political influence

During Phase 1, the large farmer organizations that were backed by dominant caste and class networks garnered prominent positions and won policy concessions. For instance, in the 1980s, two prominent farmer leaders, Bhupinder Singh Mann from BKU-PB and Sharad Joshi from SS, were inducted in national politics as voices of Indian farmers (Dhanagare, 2015). While Mann was nominated to the upper house of the Indian parliament, Joshi was made the head of the Agricultural Policy Commission in India. Similarly, in 1988, the growing pressure from farmer organizations led the Indian

[154] Interview with HM

[155] NSIRIA's role in Phase 2 of farmers' movement cannot be underestimated. Despite its low capacity to mobilize, NSIRIA conducted protests at Jantar Mantar for around 140 days in 2016 and 2017. During these protests, NSIRIA engaged in innovative tactics to gain the attention of the media and the political elites. For instance, NSIRIA members displayed the bones and skulls of farmers who had committed suicide in Trichy area to highlight the plight faced by farmers in Tamil Nadu.

[156] Interview with AY

Agriculture Minister to induct three farmer leaders in the high-power panel– Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices– that determines the crop prices in the market or the cost at which the governments can procure (BM, 1988).[157] Additionally, several state governments conceded to the demands of the large farmer organizations, especially those concerning electricity bills, irrigation, rural credit, and output prices for sugarcane and other crops (Kripa, 1992; Gill & Singhal, 1984; Gupta, 1997; Dhanagare, 2014).[158] The power of farmer organizations was undeniable and even led the then Prime Minister to contend with the support they received from political elites. As BM (1980) notes, "She [Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister] cannot any longer write off the agitations as just a confrontation with the opposition parties. She has to reckon with the fact that a large number of her own party MPs and MLAs are very much in sympathy with the demands of the agitators (p. 2126)."

Moreover, when governments did not concede to the demands of farmer organizations, activists were openly defiant and refused to pay any standing arrears or bills to the government (Gupta, 1988; Gill & Singhal, 1984; Rudolph & Rudolph, 1987). For instance, Gupta (1988) notes that "in villages where the BKU is strong no government officials come anymore to disconnect tube wells for non-payment of electricity bills" (p. 2965). In the same vein, BKU-PB members in Punjab, TNAA members in Tamil Nadu, and KRRS

[157] This happened during the Rajiv Gandhi government when Bhajan Lal was the Agriculture Minister. There were a total 7 members in the commission.

[158] For instance, in Punjab, after the Chandigarh gherao in 1984, leaders of several political parties reached out to support BKU-PB's demands. The governor also conceded a large number of demands before the event was called off (Gill & Singhal, 1984). Similarly, in Karnataka and Maharashtra, KRRS and SS was able to directly engage with state agriculture ministries to seek concessions on their demands (see Kripa, 1992; Dhanagare, 2014, 2015).

members in Karnataka, threatened with violence the officials of co-operative banks, electricity board, and other local government institutions in case of non-alignment with their demands (Nadkarni, 1987). Furthermore, farmer organizations could influence electoral outcomes at the local level, which equipped them with an additional tool that they could leverage to pressure politicians (Alexander, 1980; Nadkarni, 1987; Hassan, 1994; Dhanagare, 2015). For instance, BKU-PB and BKU-T were instrumental in the defeat of several Congress party candidates in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh (Lindberg, 1992). Similarly, TNAA was responsible for the defeat of several candidates contesting on the ticket of All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1987). In fact, in 1989, the largest political party in India contended that the farmers' movement has emerged as the "third force in Indian politics," with the other two being the ruling and opposition parties.[159]

While the large farmer organizations were responsible for establishing "apolitical" as the main ideological anchor within the broader farmers' movement in Phase 1 (Nadkarni, 1987), they flouted their own ideology as they gained power. Specifically, the large farmer organizations began establishing formal and informal links with prominent politicians and political parties at the state and national level (Nadkarni, 1987; Dhanagare, 2015; Gupta, 1997).[160] For instance, a Prime Minister and two Chief Ministers visited protest sites and

[159] Ketkar Ketkar in Economic Times, 18 Sept. 1989, "The Congress concedes that the farmers have emerged as a major third force …" See Banaji (1994, p. 236).

[160] Farmer organizations tried to gain as much leverage as possible by aligning with politicians, even though they claimed to be "apolitical". As noted earlier, "apolitical" means that farmer organizations are independent of political parties and they wish to remain as pressure groups outside the political system (Nadkarni, 1987; Gupta, 1997). BKU is perhaps the only organization that has the most explicitly apolitical stance. It even mentions "arajnaitik" (apolitical) in its name (Gupta 1997).

the village of BKU leader Mahendra Singh Tikait to demonstrate solidarity and pay tribute to the farmers who had died during protests (Gupta, 1997). During this visit, BKU-T began to fraternize with several political elites. BKU-T even received material resources from Devi Lal, who later became the Deputy Prime Minister, and formed political alliances with Ajit Singh (Gupta, 1997; Gill & Singhal, 1988, p. 1730; Hasan, 1989).[161] In Punjab, the BKU-PB won favors of politicians from all political parties, especially from Prakash Singh Badal from the Akali Dal (Gill & Singhal, 1988).[162] In Maharashtra, prominent politicians such as Sharad Panwar, Pramod Mahajan, VP Singh, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee were a regular presence in the rallies organized by SS, with the latter two subsequently becoming Prime Ministers (Dhanagare, 2014, 2015). As parties began to demonstrate interest in SS, Sharad Joshi, the leader of SS, leveraged the situation to enhance his power and obtain tickets for members of his organization from different political parties across elections (Dhanagare, 2015).[163] Witnessing the power wielded by farmer organizations, a national

[161] Politicians from the Congress party, against whom BKU generally organized its protests, pressured their own party heads to open negotiations with the BKU fearing the backlash of farmers in their respective constituencies (Hasan, 1994). Some leaders went too far to show their interest in the organization. For example, though Devi Lal was not allowed to share the BKU stage in a protest rally, Devi Lal, then Chief Minister of Haryana, donated 200,000 rupees and 20 electric transformers to BKU to help farmers (Gupta, 1988, p. 2693). Moreover, Ajit Singh, who was the head of Rashtriya Lok Dal, even formed a separate farmers' political party with BKU-T in 1996 (Gupta, 1997).

[162] As Gill and Singhal (1988) note, "Looking at the level of mobilisation the Governor's administration in Punjab entered into several rounds of negotiations with the BKU representatives. Finally, an agreement was reached on March 18, 1984, and gherao was lifted. In the course of this action many Congress(I) leaders approached BKU and offered their help. A similar team was sent by Akali Dal. Even Devi Lal, a Janata Party leader from Haryana, approached the BKU and wanted to address the rally. (p. 1730)." The BKU-PB's link with the Akali Dal political party was far stronger than with any other parties. Both these organizations ultimately represented similar constituencies, the landed Jat Sikhs, and thus had a strong overlap in their interests (Nadkarni, 1987).

[163] In the 1980s, Janata Party appointed Joshi as an adviser in the Ministry of Agriculture, which was equivalent to the rank of cabinet minister, and in the early 2000s, he was nominated to Rajya Sabha with the support of Shiv Sena and BJP (Dhanagare, 2015). In the early 1990s, several leaders of the Shetkari Sangathan contested on the Janata Party tickets. Furthermore, he continued to switch his support to political parties depending on which would benefit him and the organization the most. For instance, in the 1990s, wherever there was a direct competition between Congress (I) and the BJP, Joshi asked his supporters to vote

newspaper declared that "a new specter of peasant power is likely to haunt India in coming years",[164] alluding to the ability of farmer organizations to disrupt the upper caste and urban dominated power centers in India.

5.2.3.1 The decline in influence and links with political elites since Phase 1

My fieldwork across states reveals that there has been a considerable decline in the ability of farmer organizations to influence policies and politics compared to Phase 1. Interviews with farmer leaders, journalists, and public intellectuals indicate that farmer organizations are struggling to voice their concerns in a way that places direct pressure and politicians have very little incentive to forge any links with farmer organizations or listen to their demands. For instance, a leader from Tamil Nadu who was previously the state head of a farmers' organization and is associated with the current ruling government had organized a five-month long protest campaign in Delhi had explained, "during the protest very few politicians reached out, and when we followed up with politicians from Tamil Nadu, they didn't even care to respond to us though they made promises in front of the media."[165] Another leader from the same state contrasted the role of farmers' leaders in the present with that of Phase 1. He said, "Now no politicians cares. Parties used to give at least 30% of their tickets informally to farmer leaders. But then MGR killed the farmers' protests."[166]

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in favor of Congress (I), but later he supported Shiv Sena and the BJP, which eventually led to his nomination to the Indian parliament (Dhanagare, 2014, 2015).

[164] Times of India, February 3, 1988, (See Varshney, 1994)

[165] Interview with AY

[166] Interview with B. Lindberg (1992) also mentions the role of M.G. Ramachandran, the Chief Minister when TNAA organized large protests, in creating disunity within TNAA and use of police force to curb protests.

Another leader explained that they struggle to influence even bank managers, so influencing politicians is quite far-fetched. He said,

> So many farmers have been banned from the banks. The bank manager comes to their house and demands repayment of loans even when there has been a drought in Tamil Nadu for years. Farmers tell them that there has been a drought, so we were unable to repay the loans. But immediately the bank managers ask the farmers to sell their lands and repay. When farmers tell them that nobody is ready to purchase their lands because there is no water, then the manager taunts the farmers asking how you are able to purchase new dhoti and saree? Their families are approaching us, but we can't do anything for them. When we can't do anything, they don't trust us also. This is why we brought their skull and bones from Tamil Nadu to Delhi to show the country our conditions, but no one cared for us.[167]

In Maharashtra, a farmer leader who has been a Member of Parliament for two terms and runs one of the largest farmers' organizations stated, "Politicians understand only the language of vote. There is no agrarian vote bank anymore. No farmer organization can entice parties with a large vote bank to make them interested. Why would they care about farmers?"[168] Another added, "Leaders of no party are genuinely interested in solving farmers' problems. They all say they are farmers. We conducted the biggest protest of the last 20 years in Maharashtra, but hardly any change has occurred. When we protest, politicians come and make false promises. They never fulfill them."[169] When I probed

[167] Interview with SP

[168] Interview with RS

[169] Interview with AD

further to understand the link between politicians and farmer organizations, a leader mentioned that "a couple of farmer leaders have been offered symbolic posts within the government in recent times, but mainly to present themselves [politicians] as pro-farmers in public eye. No politician is interested in the issue of farmers.[170]

In Punjab, some leaders acknowledged that they had some influence at the local level and there have been instances when their demands were fulfilled by local bureaucrats. However, the general consensus was that party leadership at the state level no longer listens to the demands of farmer organizations.[171] For instance, I learned that BKU-EU has effectively gained compensations from the local bureaucracy for the families whose members died by suicide.[172] Similarly, I was told that BKU-Lakhowal and BKU-Rajewal have been successful in solving Mandi-related problems faced by farmers in their respective regions. Leaders of several other organizations, however, believe that there are only a few issues that can be managed at the local level. "Our most important issue is to get a fair price for what we sow, but this issue can be solved by the state or central government. They don't listen to us," said the spokesperson of BKU-Kadian, an organization active in the Doaba region of Punjab.[173] In the same vein, a keen observer of Punjab politics, who has also been engaging with politicians to pass statewide policies that can alleviate the problems of farmers, stated that "[state level] politicians easily dismiss

[170] Interview with PS

[171] Interview with BSR

[172] Interview with H, GS

[173] Interview with RAV

farmer organizations by saying that they represent only a small section of farmers. They know that most farmer organizations do not have a following in more than a few villages."[174] When I probed further to understand the reasons for politicians' indifference towards farmer organizations, he added,

> Politicians don't need organizations because they feel that they [organizations] won't affect the votes anyway. They [politicians] believe that if there are 100 farmers then 30 will vote for congress, 30 will vote for BJP-Akali, and this time 30 will vote for Aam Aadmi. They [politicians] never think that farmers will be united and vote together, and if votes are equally divided between parties, then why should we work for that.[175]

My interviews in Punjab with civil society activists, bureaucrats and journalists concurred with those of farmers' leaders.[176] Most interviewees believe that farmer organizations no longer hold the power to sway political results like they did in the past. A civil society activist who has been working with agricultural laborers for the past two decades mentioned, "if politicians listened to organizations, would there be such a big crisis in the state? There have been thousands of suicides in Punjab alone."[177] A recently retired Agriculture Secretary of Punjab delved further into the current issues by stating that, "with the exception of one or two farmer organizations, most of them are without any ground power…They can't challenge political parties like they used to. Rajewal and all are still

[174] Interview with RM, PMS, KSP

[175] Interview with RM

[176] Interview with PK, KSP, MKFD

[177] Interview with PMS

there, but each political candidate has far more money and power these days and the government listens to politicians not farmer leaders."[178]

In Uttar Pradesh, a farmer leader who was once a Member of Legislative Assembly in the early 1990s, and now runs one of the largest organizations in the state mentioned that "we have organized protests in Delhi, Lucknow, Bijnor, and so many other places. But it doesn't matter to political parties. They still do nothing for the farmers."[179] Moreover, several leaders from the state have stated that they are unable to influence policies even at the local levels or receive any attention or help from politicians. For instance, leaders complained how *Mandi* (regulated market yards) and Sugar Mills officials paid little attention to their demands. One leader who is active in the Terai region and primarily caters to the interests of Wheat and Rice growing farmers said that "my organization has conducted several protests that went on for tens of days on the Mandi premises, but no one ever cared for our demands. When we decided to block access to the Mandi to put pressure, they called the police to remove us from there."[180] Another leader shared a similar instance where the conflict was with the electricity board officials in his village. He said, "they have been trying to request the local *bijli ghar* [powerhouse] people to replace the transformers to fix the agriculture electricity supply in their village, but it has been months and no work has been done. When we block roads, *prashasan* [state administration] becomes active and

[178] Interview with KSP

[179] Interview with VMS

[180] Interview with TSV

calls the police on us."[181] Another leader shed light on the futility of protest politics in the face of no influence. He explained "leaders know a protest is not going to achieve anything. There are too many problems of farmers to solve just in Shamli-Muzaffarnagar [home districts of the leader] let alone across India. Why then show to your followers that you cannot do anything for them. They will even stop coming to your meetings."[182] Another leader also painted a similar picture. He said,

> There are farmers who produce different crops, so they have different problems. But farmer leaders are hardly able to do anything for them even if they want to. It is like I am a national president of my organization, but I cannot do much for farmers. I have a national level post but not that many people with me. Just that people keep inviting me to events. Same for my organizations' district presidents. People also invite them to attend social events. So, now farmers' politics for us has become all about attending these events. We don't even organize protests unless people come to us in a group. A lot of leaders are happy in this politics. They don't have to do anything for farmers' welfare, but their own personal status is increased because of their position in the organization.[183]

Rakesh Tikait, who is currently the main face of BKU-T, which is perhaps the largest organization in the state, also admitted that farmers' influence with political elites has declined considerably. When I asked him about the changing relations between political parties and his organization, he admitted that "very few are interested in the same way as

[181] Interview with SW

[182] Interview with VB

[183] Interview with RSM

before… money is what drives politicians, not the welfare of the farmers."[184] Interestingly, the politicians in his area are of the same caste as him and are farmers. When probed about this, he further emphasized "they also need money to continue in politics, and what can they do, they themselves have no power. So, they just make money and stay silent." Another leader from BKU-T also alluded to the growing distance between politicians and farmers and farmer organizations.[185] He stated,

> The farmers' organizations have been continuously speaking up, but you need to understand, if our MP [Member of Parliament] who is a farmer and comes from our village doesn't speak on behalf of farmers, who will listen to us? These days MPs and MLAs believe that the vote is given to the party not to them, so they don't care about taking up issues of farmers.[186]

The decline in farmer organizations' links and influence with their co-ethnic political elites could be further understood through the nature of relationship that BKU-T now shares with Rashtriya Lok Dal [National People's Party], a political party led by a Jat leader and has had close ties with BKU-T in the past. When I asked about BKU-T's relationship with

[184] Interview with RT

[185] However, in my interviews with other office bearers of BKU-T, I was able to confirm that the Tikait family still has links with a few Bharatiya Janata Party [Indian People's Party] (BJP) leaders such as Rajnath Singh, and that one member of the Tikait organization was also recently nominated by the BJP to the Uttar Pradesh Farmers Commission (interviews with AC and AL). The majority of the interviewees also mentioned that these links translate mainly into personal material gains for the Tikait family and that such links do not advance the objectives of the organization or farmers. When I inquired further, one farmer leader illustrated this point with a recent example. He stated that "Tikait family's link with BJP leaders failed when they were not allowed to enter Delhi during their Kisan Yatra in 2018. UP and Delhi police [both controlled by BJP] lathi-charged BKU-T's members when they were trying to force their way through the barricades (Interview with AC)."

[186] Interview with YU

RLD, Rakesh Tikait stated that they still network with each other and meet frequently, but no "political alliance" exists. This point was further corroborated by members of RLD. Jayant Chaudhary, who is currently the head of RLD, stated that his links with BKU-T are "based on courtesy and because we belong to the same caste, we end up attending the same social functions."[187] However, he explained that the main reason why BKU-T and RLD are no longer in alliance is because BKU-T does not provide any electoral advantage. He added that "while there were other differences, the main reason was that they [BKU-T] acted only in self-interest. They were also not able to deliver votes in the elections. Their own cadre is highly divided between parties."[188] However, on probing further, he admitted that,

> Sometimes our party [RLD] cadre people also wear green caps and sit on the stage with BKU-T. But that is because there are a few things that we cannot say from our own party platform. We also have to take care of our coalition partners. We don't want to antagonize any other constituency of ours that does not relate well with farmers' issues. But apart from this, we have very little need for BKU-T or any other farmer organization in electoral mobilization. We are happy if farmer leaders join our party and work with us.[189]

Further, I find that over the years, the relationships between farmer organizations and political leaders have soured due to trust issues from both sides, further alluding to the growing distance between farmer organizations and their co-ethnic political elites. As one veteran politician who has worked with several farmer organizations in Phase 1, explained,

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[187] Interview with JS

[188] Interview with JS

[189] Interview with JS

> Political parties need some loyalty in exchange for their support. But farmer leaders protest even against those who support them. They also switch loyalty as a new party gets into government. BKU has protested against Chaudhary Sahab [Ajit Singh] though they have taken so much support from him. This is what they [farmer leaders] did in Maharashtra. Joshi was first close to V.P. Singh, but then moved to BJP to become a Rajya Sabha member…because of such behavior farmer leaders have lost credibility with their own group and parties.[190]

The distrust among politicians vis-a-vis farmer organizations was also confirmed by a few farmer leaders. As one farmer leader from Uttar Pradesh explained, "regardless of what the reason was, it is true that Ajit Singh and Mulayam could never fully trust which way BKU-T would swing during elections." He further added, that "even BJP, a party which BKU-T had supported when Mahendra Singh Tikait was at its peak, reached out to me to start their own separate Kisan Morcha. I worked with Kalyan Singh who spoke to me in length about how he wants his party to learn about kisangiri [farmers' style of politics]. I was even offered BJP tickets in 1991 and 1993 in exchange for helping to build Kisan Morcha."[191]

In general, interviews with journalists and public intellectuals who cover rural affairs across different states confirm that farmer organizations have lost their influence in shaping policies, and this has led to an increasing disconnect between farmers' concerns and

[190] Interview with YS

[191] Interview with RSM

government policies. For instance, an agrarian political economist who has also worked with governments in the past added,

> Regardless of whether there is a BJP or Congress government, parties actually work on a broad Neoliberal agenda. Most parties want to reduce the number of people engaged in agriculture…farmer unions can't do anything about this. Most unions have a very narrow agenda. Tikait focuses only on sugarcane farmers. Maybe the left parties could do something but they also have no power… Just to understand how open governments are in helping farmers, you should check the reports that governments themselves produced in the past and see how many of the recommendations were implemented.[192]

Recent analysis of political party manifestos and questions asked in the Indian parliament also confirm that politicians pay very little attention to farmers' issues, which is another indication of the decline of farmer organizations' ability to influence political elites. For instance, a report by the Centre for Policy Analysis reveals that the share of rural issues in election manifestos has dropped from 42% in 1952 to a mere 5.6% in 2019.[193] Similarly, Singh (2020) finds that of the nearly 300,000 questions asked by legislators in the Indian parliament between 1999 and 2019, only 14,969 (5%) were related to farmers.[194] He also argues that although politicians use protest as an important tactic to set the media and

[192] Interview with HU

[193] (September 2022). Promises that matter to Indian Democracy: A study of election manifestos since 1952. *Centre for Policy Research.* https://cprindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/The-Promises-That-Matter-to-Indian-Democracy_Web.pdf

[194] Singh, R. (December 5, 2022). In 20 yrs, farmers featured in just around 5% of BJP and Congress's Lok Sabha questions. *ThePrint.in.* https://theprint.in/opinion/in-20-yrs-farmers-featured-in-just-5-of-bjp-congress-lok-sabha-questions/557602/

legislative agenda, they rarely take up farmers' issues. Between 2016 and 2019, 377 petitions were filed by political parties to conduct protests at Jantar Mantar, but only 3.2% of these applications were related to farmers' issues.[195]

5.3 Conclusion: Qualifying the decline

In sum, compared to Phase 1, there has been a dramatic shift in farmer organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks in Phase 2. All the large farmer organizations active during Phase 1 have fragmented into several smaller organizations. Most farmer organizations in Phase 1 are small, have lost the capacity to conduct protests at a scale akin to those in Phase 1 and have little to no links and influence with political elites. This decline can be traced back to two principal causes: the advent of caste politics and the economic distress endured by farmers. The rise of caste politics stirred a competition between farmer leaders and political elites, leading to the gradual dominance of the latter as more viable representatives of farmers. At the same time, escalating economic tribulations within the agricultural sector amplified the divide between farmer leaders and farmers, with organizations falling short in addressing the needs of farmers.

The transformation in organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks over time is striking, reflecting a widespread decline across organizations and states. However, to fully understand this trend, two key qualifications must be considered. First, despite the general decrease in mobilization capacity since Phase 1, considerable disparities remain

[195] Singh, R. (December 5, 2022). In 20 yrs, farmers featured in just around 5% of BJP and Congress's Lok Sabha questions. *ThePrint.in.* https://theprint.in/opinion/in-20-yrs-farmers-featured-in-just-5-of-bjp-congress-lok-sabha-questions/557602/

both across and within states regarding different organizations' ability to rally their structural networks. For example, in Uttar Pradesh, BKU-T remains the most prominent Jat caste organization despite the emergence of many others from the same caste network. In Punjab, BKU-EU appears to have the largest association with Jat Sikh networks compared to its contemporaries, closely followed by other organizations like BKU-Dallewal, BKU-Lakhowal, and BKU-Rajewal. Similarly, in Karnataka, the two factions of the old KRRS, KRRS-Puttannaiah and KRRS-Chandrashekhar, are more capable of mobilizing Vokkalingas and Lingayat communities than other groups. In Maharashtra, Raju Shetty's faction of SS has the greatest mobilization capacity, while AIKS now stands as the largest organization in Rajasthan and Maharashtra with a strong association with Dalit and Tribal groups. Finally, in Haryana, BKU-Chaduni, primarily associated with Jat Sikh networks, appears to be the largest organization, with most Hindu Jat organizations demonstrating a lower capacity to mobilize their caste networks. Second, while the early 1990s marked the onset of caste politics and economic crises within agriculture, the impacts of these factors aren't uniform across time and intensity. The initiation and development of economic crises and the rise of political parties occurred at disparate times, and the dynamic nature of electoral politics and economic precarity factors such as market or climatic conditions may have caused fluctuations in organizations' capacity across different periods.

Ultimately, the converging evidence presented in this chapter validates the mobilization capacity thesis, asserting a discernible decline in the ability of farmer organizations to mobilize their structural networks. Considering that previous theories fell short in

explaining coalition formation in the Indian context, our affirmation of the mobilization capacity thesis makes it the most plausible explanator of coalition formation within divided movements. Following this, the forthcoming chapter will investigate the mechanisms that link the diminished capacity of organizations to mobilize caste networks to coalition formation. Specifically, I will trace how the decline in organizations' capacity helped mitigate divisions along caste, class, and ideological lines and the sequence of events leading up to the formation of the AIKSCC and SKM. Throughout the analysis, I would also attempt to identify examples that can help us between understand whether cross-sectional variation in mobilization capacity impact coalition formation.

6 Chapter 6: Mechanisms: Restructuring of Inter-organizational Dynamics and Sources of Power

This chapter focuses on understanding the connection between the diminishing capacity of organizations to mobilize structural networks and the formation of coalitions in the Indian context. Specifically, I show that the decline in organizations' mobilization capacity restructured inter-organizational dynamics, making structural divisions less salient and thereby fostering a more open and inclusive movement environment. Further, as a result of the decline, organizations employed transient, ad-hoc engagements, showcasing a shift in the sources of power to increase their organizational strength and influence. This, in turn, had a reinforcing effect and facilitated the development of connections and shared understanding among a wide array of organizations within the movement. Ultimately, the inter-connected organizations coalesced into large, diverse coalitions to combat an oppressive and negligent government.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the decline in barriers posed by structural divisions. Here, I underscore the transformation of inter-organizational dynamics, highlighting how the decrease in power asymmetries and the legitimacy of structural identities for mobilization, coupled with the emergence of alternative actors and strategies, diminished the influence of structural divisions within the movement. The second section focuses on the rise of collaborative strategies within this more open environment, underscoring the importance of ad-hoc engagements. These strategies amplified not only the chance of success of individual organizations but also promoted a collective understanding and inter-organizational ties within the broader movement.

Finally, I focus on the key events and actors to detail the process through which large, diverse coalitions formed in an interconnected, inclusive movement environment.

6.1 Restructuring of inter-organizational dynamics: Open and inclusive movement environment

This section delineates the transformation of the movement environment from one primarily characterized by antagonisms to a more open and inclusive setting, a shift driven by the decrease in organizations' ability to mobilize their structural networks. This change is anchored on three critical shifts. First, with the decline in organizations' mobilization capacity, their influence within the movement also waned. This attenuated power asymmetries within the movement, as no single organization or group of organizations could set the movement agenda. A more balanced distribution of power emerged among diverse organizations, and the scope of influence and potential conflicts became localized, serving as a safeguard against potential encroachments by larger entities. Second, the reduction in organizations' mobilization capacity precipitated a strategic de-emphasis on structural identities within the movement. Organizations had to prioritize openness and inclusivity to boost their chances of success and resurrect their legitimacy. Third, the decreased legitimacy and influence of traditional caste and class-based organizations created room for new types of organizations to rise to prominence across states. By establishing collaborations early on, aligning their objectives with the broader farming community's interests, and strategically handling ideological differences, these new organizations cultivated a movement environment that is open and inclusive. I discuss each of these shifts in detail in the following sub-sections.

6.1.1 Decrease in power asymmetries within the movement

The Phase 1 of the Indian farmers' movement was marked by extreme power imbalances between organizations. By leveraging their ability to mobilize extensive caste networks, a select few organizations associated with numerically dominant caste groups (Nadkarni, 1987) held considerable sway within their respective states, and at times, even managed to exert influence at a national level (Varshney, 1998). Consequently, these large organizations' specific caste and class interests were presented as inseparable from the overall movement's objectives (Gupta, 1997), thereby amplifying caste and class divisions within the movement (Nadkarni 1987; Banaji, 1994; Varshney 1998; Gupta 1997). Indeed, organizations serving landowning cultivators from numerically dominant castes like Jats, Marathas, or Lingayats often set the movement agenda within their respective states and at the national level (Gupta, 1997; Lindberg, 1994).

In contrast, my fieldwork across states indicates a notable shift in the dynamics of the overall movement due to the decline in organizations' capacity to mobilize structural networks. As organizations could no longer leverage their caste networks at scale, their ability to conduct large-scale protests or influence political elites inherently curtailed their ability to shape the movement's agenda along specific caste or class lines. This directly impacted the power asymmetries between the landowning, dominant caste organizations and other actors within the movement. For instance, comparing the present state of the farmers' movement with Phase 1, a leader from Maharashtra delineated the transformation in caste and class dynamics within the movement, a shift brought about by the decline in

the ability of previously dominant organizations to influence to shape the movement agenda. He said,

> Sharad Joshi [leader of SS in Phase 1] used to keep influencing the issues of other organizations. We [agricultural laborers mainly from lower castes] were opposed to Joshi's vision of commercial farmers. He used to be opposed to the working class. He never paid attention to our issues…Sharad Joshi used to jump from government to government to get his demands met. Later he made such a huge jump that he even ended up being part of a government…This is why there is no point in even asking why no unification took place in the past. It was not possible because of such leaders' narrow vision and politics for the rich. Today there is no Sharad Joshi. We do our protests separately and put our issues on the agenda. Others do the same. His [Sharad Joshi] organization is divided into so many small organizations. Everyone is trying to get their demands on the agenda separately. But no one is capable enough. [196]

Throughout my fieldwork, I did not find any single leader who perceived that their organization had the potential to set the broader movement agenda. Consider the perspective of a leader who, despite his organization's claim to be present in nearly ten states, openly acknowledges the constrained power his organization actually wields. The leader himself questioned, "I am a national convener of an organization spread in 10 states. But what does existing in 10 states even mean? It means we are there in some villages of a district but a state typically has 25-30 districts and thousands of villages. We need to also read the reality before asserting ourselves."[197] Echoing this sentiment, another leader from

[196] Interview with KG

[197] Interview with AS

Bihar conceded, "we are present in 11 states, but our strength is nowhere close to what it should be [to shape the movement]."[198] Similarly, a leader that has been at the helm of an agricultural laborers and marginal farmers organization for more than two decades stated, "No organization in India is truly a pan-India organization…Most of them are small organizations spread across the country. Everyone fights their own issues.[199] When I probed about the ability of relatively powerful organizations to influence the agenda of other organizations, he further added, "how will they influence others' agenda when they can't even get their own agenda met."[200]

A closer look at the success of relatively large organizations provides further insights into the inability of organizations to set the movement agenda. For instance, while organizations like AIKS in Maharashtra, BKU-T in Uttar Pradesh, and BKU-EU in Punjab have been successful in mobilizing on a larger scale, they struggle to influence state policies or political decisions in their favor.[201] AIKS has coordinated several protest campaigns marches between 2016-18, aimed at capturing the attention of media and political elites to get their demands on forest land rights and better remuneration implemented. Yet, the impact of these efforts on policy implementation has been negligible.[202] The government

[198] Interview with AM

[199] Interview with HM

[200] Interview with HM

[201] While newspaper reports and ACLED data shows that these organizations have conducted large rallies and protests in the recent past, my interviewees also name these three organizations to be one of the largest organizations currently active. Of course, every interviewee contends that none is as larger or powerful as organization active in Phase 1.

[202] Shantha, S. (April 12, 2018). A month after Long March, have farmers' demands been fulfilled? *The Wire.* https://thewire.in/agriculture/a-month-after-long-march-have-farmers-demands-been-fulfilled

has not only failed to meet AIKS's demands but has also reneged on their commitments several times.[203] Not surprisingly, a leader from AIKS who was instrumental in conducting large protest marches contended, "the government cleverly escapes by making false promises and farmers lose any hope for change. This happens all the time."[204] The case of BKU-T in Uttar Pradesh presents a similar scenario. Despite having historic ties with BJP (Hasan, 1994), and maintaining relationships with a number of the party's senior figures, the organization has failed to achieve its demands or elicit a peaceful and sympathetic reaction from the state towards farmers. The current president of BKU-T also contended that "politicians have no moral obligation to help farmers any more. Whatever work we have gotten done in our area is through our own efforts. I will admit that it is not enough, but if we were to not speak up even this much won't happen."[205] BKU-T's own protests have met with severe state-sanctioned violence, reflecting the decline in the capacity of BKU-T's influence with the political elites.[206] Moreover, another leader, whose organization represents a different caste and class of farmers than BKU-T, reinforced the idea of BKU-T's waning influence on the movement's agenda. He also highlighted a change in BKU-T's past attitude towards other organizations, stating, "When BKU-T was prospering on their own. They did not want anyone to get united. We tried once to work with them on an issue but they [BKU-T] were not interested. They wanted to maintain their

[203] (March 17, 2023). After Long March, Maharashtra farmers to continue protest until government implements promises. *The Wire.* https://thewire.in/agriculture/after-long-march-maharashtra-farmers-to-continue-protest-until-govt-implements-promises

[204] Interview with KG

[205] Interview with NT

[206] (October 3, 2018). Kisan kranti March: Opposition parties condemn police action on farmers on gandhi jayanti. *The Indian Express.* https://indianexpress.com/article/india/kisan-kranti-march-opposition-parties-condemn-police-action-on-farmers-on-gandhi-jayanti-5383233/

separate agenda. But now when no one is listening to them they are feeling the need to take support from others."[207]

Further, the diminished capacity of organizations to mobilize their structural networks led to a more balanced power dynamic, as organizations representing diverse constituencies held relatively equal power. For example, of the three sizeable organizations discussed above, BKU-T is the only one that addresses the interests of landowning farmers from dominant caste groups, which is the same group that dominated the movement agenda in Phase 1. BKU-EU, on the other hand, while draws from a dominant caste group (Jat Sikh), mainly represents a class of farmers distinct from BKU-T or the BKU-PB, namely small to marginal farmers.[208] AIKS focuses on the needs of marginal farmers, tribal groups, and agricultural laborers, which differs with BKU-T as well as BKU-EU. These differences are directly in contrast to the past, where the primary large organizations across states served similar groups—landowning cultivators from numerically dominant caste groups—and had the power to direct the movement according to their interests. Further, these organizations represent diverse ideologies. BKU-T continues to emphasize its "apolitical" orientation, AIKS follows Marxism, and BKU-EU is a staunch follower of Maoist ideology. Notably, despite AIKS and BKU-EU being part of the broad left ideological group, their historical disagreements and affiliations with distinct political parties create more disparities than commonalities between them.[209] Ultimately, these organizations'

[207] Interview with MS

[208] Interview with H, RM

[209] Interview with PMS

inability to shape the movement agenda, coupled with the inherent diversity in the groups they represent prevents a single group from polarizing the movement along specific caste, class, or ideological lines.

The complex interplay of diversity and reduced power of organizations leading to a level playing field can also be found within the states. As such, the relatively equal mobilization capacity among some of the major organizations that cater to diverse groups serve as checks against any structural division or organization to polarize the movement. For instance, in Maharashtra, AIKS might be the organization with the most significant mobilizing capability, but the Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatna (SSS), which primarily serves landowning cultivators, especially sugarcane farmers, can mobilize to a reasonable degree and present formidable competition to the interests of small, marginal and tribal farmers represented by AIKS. Similarly, in Punjab, while BKU-Rajewal and BKU-Dakonda also rally Jat Sikhs like BKU-EU, they specifically represent the interests of medium and large farmers. This differs from BKU-EU, which primarily represents small and marginal farmers. Given the divergence in the class interests of these organizations, they act as a check against each other if one group's interests were to gain prominence within the state. In Uttar Pradesh, while BKU-T might be the most extensive organization and has a substantial base among sugarcane farmers, the Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan (RKMS) has been making strides with the same group. RKMS' recent large-scale protests in locations such as Lucknow, Delhi, and Bijnor highlight its escalating influence and potential to challenge BKU-T's dominance. Simply put, when organizations are unable to impact each other's objectives and share a relatively equal representation

power, it results in a unique dynamic within the movement. This environment enables groups with various agendas and identities to coexist without posing substantial threats to each other. Further, it leads to the absence of dominant narratives based on caste, class, or ideology within the larger movement.

6.1.1.1 Localization of organizational influence and competition: Less antagonistic relationships

Moreover, as organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks at a large scale dwindled, their sphere of influence also localized. This shift constrains their interactions with groups outside their immediate geographical region and further reduces the frequency and severity of conflicts stemming from structural divisions, leading to less antagonistic relations within the movement. For instance, in Punjab, I found that while a few organizations have influence spread across a few districts, most organizations are limited within their respective districts. "Many organizations previously part of the BKU-PB are very small. They have their activities limited to the block or mandal level [sub-district levels],"[210] said one of the farmer leaders. Similarly, a leader based in Haryana outlined his organization's localized scope, despite its presence in multiple districts. He emphasized, "We are active only on the ground in 4 districts [of Haryana]—Sonipat, Jind, Rohtak, and Jhajjar. Among these districts, we have grip on the ground only in Sonipat."[211] He conceded that in other parts of Haryana, different organizations hold sway, but most maintain a stronghold in just one or two districts. This observation was further substantiated by

[210] Interview with H

[211] Interview with AK

another leader from the same state who noted that distinct organizations exert influence in different districts. When I asked for specific examples, he mentioned, "BKU-Shaheed Bhagat Singh is prominent in Ambala, BKU-Chaduni is in Kurukshetra, there is a small unit of BKU-T in Yamuna Nagar, and then there is BKU-Haryana in Hisar. Like this there are 17-18 organizations spread across the state."[212] This confined geographic influence, along with reduced power asymmetries, contributes to a less antagonistic movement, indicating fewer possibilities of inter-organizational conflicts.

Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh, the organizational landscape is marked by a high level of localization and dispersion, with 30 organizations spread across 14 distinct districts. Moreover, with the exception of four organizations,[213] I find that most other organizations typically operate within a few villages or at sub-district levels. Underscoring the low capacity of organizations to mobilize their networks, one leader pointed out that some do not even enjoy full support within a few villages. He said, "not every organization is big like in the old days. In Punjab you may still find organizations that cover at least 3-4 villages. In our area (West Uttar Pradesh) there are organizations only for name's sake. They have one leader with a following of 40-50 individuals. The leaders' own village people don't fully support them."[214] Further, the reach and influence of relatively large organizations– BKU-T, RKMS, BKU-Bhanu, and AIKS– varies notably across districts. For example, BKU-T commands a significant presence in Muzaffarnagar and Shamli

[212] Interview with TSA

[213] BKU-T, RKMS, AIKS, BKU-Bhanu

[214] Interview with YD

districts and maintains a reasonable following in Gautam Budh Nagar, Saharanpur, Meerut, and Bijnor.[215] RKMS, on the other hand, is influential in Bijnor and Pilibhit, with a lesser presence in Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, and a few villages in Sitapur.[216] BKU-Bhanu exhibits its strongest presence in Aligarh and some villages in Gautam Budh Nagar and Muzaffarnagar.[217] AIKS is primarily concentrated in Bulandshahr and Etawah villages, although it does have minor presences in Sultanpur, Balia and a couple of other districts.[218] Further, when I probed further to understand the nature of inter-organizational dynamics in the state, my interviews reveal not only the presence of less antagonistic relationships, but also a recognition among leaders about the territorial influence of other organizations. As one leader whose organization is present only in 2-3 villages close to Greater Noida mentioned, "we are small compared to Tikait [BKU-T] or VM Singh's [RKMS] organization, but if they want to come to my villages, they will always call me first…I don't care much about other organizations in my district. Everyone does their thing in their area. "[219] My interview with AIKS leaders in the state further attested to the presence of less antagonistic relationships. When I inquired whether being a prominent organization for laborers and marginal farmers in a state with a history of caste and class conflicts, and with numerous organizations representing landowning farmers, provoked any tensions. One leader noted without any hesitation, "AIKS is the biggest organization in the country.

[215] Interview with MC

[216] Interview with AC, AB

[217] Interview with DR

[218] Interview with MS

[219] Interview with BB

We have never meddled with any other organization. No one interferes with ours. These days farmers are free to join any organization they prefer."[220] His comments clearly demonstrate the changed power dynamics as well as the nature of inter-organizational dynamics within the movement.

A more detailed analysis of the inter-organizational relationships in the Muzaffarnagar district further elucidates the dynamics of localized conflict and the diminished power of organizations. I could identify that except for BKU-T, the spheres of influence of all other organizations are geographically distinct, with no overlap in their areas of operation. BKU-T maintains a presence across the district with its main center being the Sisauli town and Budhana block area. The Bharatiya Kisan Mazdoor Sanyukta Union (BKMSU) is concentrated near Bhainswal village, the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS) in Nasirpur, the Kisan Mazdoor Manch in Jaula, and AIKS near the city of Muzaffarnagar. RKMS focuses on the Mohammadpur village area and the border region between Muzaffarnagar and Bijnor district. BKU-Ambawta, perhaps one of the smallest organizations, functions primarily on an ad-hoc basis. Although it doesn't cater to any specific geographic area in the rural parts of the district, the leader, who resides in the city, tends to concentrate most activities there. Further, when I inquired about the nature of competition between organizations within the district, most leaders indicated that they operate autonomously in specific geographic areas without much interference from each other. As one leader put it,

[220] Interview with MS

> During BKU-T's old days, they [BKU-T] did not like any other organization to rise up. They used to try to merge everyone under their own organization so they could become bigger…But why would someone be a small person in their organization when they can be big in their own. Now even BKU-T recognizes that the norm is to have your own organization in your area whether small or big.[221]

I also find that leaders of four organizations –BKMSU, BKS, BKU-Ambawta and RKMS– in Muzaffarnagar district share an amicable relationship with each other. During the interviews, these leaders made constant references about how they meet often and have attended each other's organizational meetings and events. For instance, the leader of BKMSU pointed out that "I have known VM Singh [the leader of RKMS] for more than 15-20 years. We do so many things together. I have even chaired meetings that he has organized in UP and Delhi."[222] Similarly, the leader of RKMS highlighted, "I have never tried to interfere in any other organization's matters. I have a good relationship with everyone. I do my thing and they do theirs. Whenever possible, they reach out to me and I often help them out…Last year [2019] when Thakur Puran Singh [the leader of BKS] did a yatra [march] from Delhi, I was there at Ghazipur border to help him in any way possible. I only talked to the police before the yatra reached the border."[223] In my interview with the BKS leader, I was able to confirm the help he received from the RKMS leader. He said, "We know how things work in UP but not in Delhi. When we marched for 200 kms from Haridwar to Delhi. I reached out to VM Singh to deal with the District Magistrates and the

[221] Interview with RSM

[222] Interview with RSM

[223] Interview with VMS

police so that I get permission to enter Delhi. VM Singh is a lawyer, and he knows these people in Delhi."[224] Moreover, the BKS leader pointed out that in the current movement environment some leaders favor having supportive relationships between farmer organizations stating, "If someone I know has a problem in an area where another organization is active, I can ask them for help. Similarly, if they have someone facing issues in my area, they can reach out to me."[225] In the same vein, another leader added, "we know who has strength in which area of the district. Instead of going there to mobilize on our own and spending our resources, it is easier to reach out to an existing organization in the area and work with them."[226]

To summarize, a more detente-like movement environment characterized by fewer antagonistic relationships emerges from the inability of organizations to dictate the movement's agenda, the creation of a power balance among organizations representing diverse groups, and the geographical segregation that safeguards against potential overreaches.

6.1.2 Decreased legitimacy of structural identities for mobilization

In contrast to Phase 1, where organizations' heavy reliance on structural networks amplified the significance of structural identities, with some even utilizing caste or class pride for mobilization (Gupta 1997), the decrease in their ability to mobilize structural

[224] Interview with TPS

[225] Interview with TPS

[226] Interview with AC

networks has inherently lessened the legitimacy of these identities. With most organizations being geographically restricted and lacking the capacity to significantly impact each other's interests and agenda, the broader movement environment comprises of a group of diverse and small organizations dispersed across India's extensive rural landscape. This setting allows for more autonomous operations, and organizations are less constrained by overarching movement norms that were shaped by intense competition along caste, class, and ideological lines during Phase 1.

More importantly, I find that the decline in organizations' ability to mobilize their structural networks has created a context in which, paradoxically, organizations need to strategically downplay their structural identities. Specifically, a lower capacity to mobilize equates to a decreased ability to succeed either in delivering for farmers or to obtain their personal goals, thereby jeopardizing the organizations' legitimacy. To overcome this, organizations need to attract more members. However, they cannot achieve this by continuing to emphasize their structural identities because doing so would limit their reach to other potential groups. As a result, organizations find it necessary to downplay their structural identities in order to appeal to a broader demographic and expand their membership base. As a leader from Uttar Pradesh, who underscored the importance of reaching out beyond specific caste groups mentioned,

> If I have only Jat or Gujjar farmers, then other caste people won't join me because of differences. Many from my own caste people won't join because they will think I am doing caste politics. Caste politics is what political parties do, not farmer leaders. We must then reach out to other castes as farmers alone. Now I have with

> me farmers from Harijan community, Gaddariya Pal, Muslims, and Sainis just in Bijnor alone.[227]

Echoing a similar point, a longtime observer of the Punjab farmers' politics said,

> Leaders are struggling to have farmers as part of their organizations. So they are also learning and making changes. They first used to claim only Jats are farmers, now they claim anybody who owns the land is a farmer. I have seen all kinds of farmers with the organizations. I have seen farmers with 2 acres and I have seen farmers with 100 acres as well. Some are even engaging women also for mobilization in this way. When did we ever see that in farmers' movement.[228]

I find that leaders across states corroborate the need to change strategies that can help them move beyond their traditional identities to improve their chance of success. For instance, the left organizations, which catered mainly to agricultural laborers and marginal farmers in the past, changed their strategies to appeal to a wider group of farmers. One of the left-leaning farmer leaders mentioned that organizations have been making changes to their demands to attract more members. He said,

> You will notice that many left organizations do not take up the issue of land redistribution that strongly. It has gone off the agenda. Politics has become primary. We have to go soft to accommodate more and more people. We still believe in land redistribution but we have to wait for the right time.[229]

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[227] Interview with AB

[228] Interview with RM

[229] Interview with PSG

A leader from AIKS, one of the most prominent left organizations, also highlighted the growing importance of unity between disparate classes of farmers among left organizations. He added, "how can the movement be a mass movement if organizations focus only on a narrow agenda. We have to have a mass movement to fight the problems faced by farmers…you need to be willing to work with all types of farmers to bring the necessary changes."[230] Another leader went a step further and said he sees no conflict of interest between farmers and laborers, asserting, "We cater to the idea of Kisan [Farmer] and Mazdoor [Laborers] because we do not think there is a separation in the idea of agricultural worker and peasants. They are broadly the same category."[231] However, when I brought up that laborers are often exploited by farmers, potentially leading to conflict, he swiftly refuted my point, stating, "No, it works out…Only those people who align with me on the broader thought process come into my organization, so we don't have any conflict or problem in my organization."[232] Another leader while contended that conflict between farmers and laborers is no longer as intense as it used to be in the past, provided a completely distinct rationale. He said, "the fight against landowning farmers made sense as long as there were feudal landlords, now your fight is with corporates. It is corporates versus everyone else. There is not much difference between 80% of the farmers who own less than 1 hectare of land and laborers."[233]

[230] Interview with HM

[231] Interview with AM

[232] Interview with AM

[233] Interview with PSG

To expand their outreach, I find that organizations adopt and appropriate issues of farmers beyond their own immediate locations and caste groups. For instance, organizations like AIKS who previously only focused on agricultural laborers and marginal farmers now take up issues related to forest land rights and debt to build inroads with the small and tribal farmers.[234] In Uttar Pradesh, my interviews with farmers in Noida, Ghaziabad, and Saharanpur show that organizations primarily working in Muzaffarnagar and Bijnor districts have tried to show solidarity to them when they faced problems. I also found that organizations active near the Haryana and Uttar Pradesh state borders mobilize on issues related to cattle trade, which has allowed them to reach out to some local Muslim farmers. Similarly, in areas that touch the borders of the National Capital Region and Uttar Pradesh, organizations have actively pursued issues such as increase in *muawza* (remuneration) of the land acquired by the state or private builders and to make highway toll gates free for local farmers. Moreover, I also found that BKU-T made connections even among the Dalits, Gujjars, and other lower caste communities, groups with which it has had conflicts in the past.

To show how little caste mattered to them, many leaders were quick to point out the presence of office bearers from a wide variety of castes in their organizations. For instance, a leader from Karnataka whose organization in the past primarily catered to the interests of Vokkalingas and Lingayats claimed “leaders from OBC castes are now open to joining us.

[234] Interview with HM

We have several Kuruba leaders at the district level."[235] Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh, I found that BKU-T has office bearers who came from a diverse range of castes, including Gujjars, Kashyaps, and Rajputs. One leader from the Kashyap caste, typically consisting of small-scale farmers and agricultural laborers, expressed his view on working with the Jat-associated organization, saying, "we are farmers first."[236] Further, a Gujjar leader who is an office bearer in BKU-T suggested a need to transcend caste disputes, stating, "we should move past rivalries for the sake of farmers. It is crucial for Jats and Gujjars, the two significant castes in our area, to work together as farmers."[237] I also found that BKU-Bhanu, which primarily represents Rajput farmers, also hosts office bearers from Jat, Rajput, Tyagi, and Dalit groups, as noted by the state president. However, when I pointed out that most members I encountered during a protest, including the president himself, were of Rajput caste, he clarified, "it does not mean we do caste politics. Our organization is open to farmers from every caste."[238] When I posed the same question to a Jat leader, he elaborated on the situation, saying, "caste is the reality on the ground and Jats are numerous in West UP. But it does not mean that my organization now exclusively represents Jats. Even BKU-T, the largest organization in the state, cannot afford to stand only for Jats."[239]

[235] Interview with NH

[236] Interview with MK

[237] Interview with RN

[238] Interview with DR

[239] Interview with RSM

The fragmentation of large, dominant caste organizations further decreased the legitimacy of caste identity as a viable frame for mobilization. The presence of several smaller organizations that broadly represent the same caste group find it difficult to assert a unique identity of their own, thereby necessitating these organizations to establish their own legitimacy in other ways. This situation is illustrated by the experience of a leader from Uttar Pradesh, who was an office bearer in BKU-T during Phase 1. He observed that he is far more effective in a context where his caste is not even present compared to his own hometown. He stated that "I have more people from East UP in my organization than from Shamli [his home district in West UP] now. There are so many Jat villages here but you can't popularize yourself. There are too many Jat leaders, farmer leaders and politicians."[240] On probing further about what is different in East UP, he said "In East UP there are no Jats. I am considered only a farmer leader". His statements underscore both the declining ability of his organization to mobilize his caste networks and the growing infeasibility of caste identity when multiple organizations from the same caste are active. While some organizations move to different areas, others have attempted to build their legitimacy by placing themselves directly in competition with their parent organization. Specifically, in the aftermath of organizational fragmentation, the factions critiqued their parent bodies for engaging in what they term as "caste politics" or "caste favoritism", as one leader from Maharashtra stated, "because of their [BKU-T and SS leaders] organizations only hope broke. The way these big organizations worked. Leaders had big egos. They never did any alliance."[241] Many former members assert that the parent

[240] Interview with RSM

[241] Interview with PS

organization's focus on narrow caste politics resulted in an "injustice to the cause of farmers."[242] The discrediting of large, powerful organizations of the past for exploiting caste identities for mobilization further discouraged the emphasis on caste identity among organizations.

Indeed, many organizations now differentiate themselves by suffixing the leader's name to the organization's title. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, numerous organizations bear the names of their leaders, such as BKU-Ambawta, BKU-Balraj, and BKU-Billari. A similar pattern can be seen in Punjab with organizations like BKU-Rajewal, BKU-Lakhowal, and BKU-Kadian. In Karnataka, the three main factions carry the names of their leaders as suffixes– KS-Puttannaiah, KRRS-Chuki, and KRRS-Kodihali Chandru. While it was unclear to me whether this was a deliberate effort by leaders to disassociate from particularistic caste identities, I did note that the perception about organizations is anchored around individual leaders' personality rather than specific caste or class groups. Nonetheless, this shift away from caste identities and towards individual leader-based identities helps organizations establish their unique identities, which in turn reduces the salience of caste identity within the broader movement.

6.1.2.1 Decrease in ideological antagonisms

Organizations' need to maintain and revive their legitimacy has also reduced ideological antagonisms within the movement. As a leader from AIKS's unit in Uttar Pradesh explained in detail how opening up his organization beyond their traditional base reduces

[242] Interview with RSM, VMS

differences between organizations and help build their legitimacy also with other organizations. He said,

> We helped hundreds of Brahmin families from four villages near Etawah. They had come to us because there was an issue related to land acquisition. A railway line had to be laid down in their villages. We organized a huge fight in their support and some 200 crores from UP Vidhan Sabha was then released as compensation…This itself has changed the circumstances. They [Brahmin farmers] have sympathy with us, if you go to their village, they won't say why have you come here like it was in the past. They will make you sit with them and listen to you…Farmer organizations [left leaning] have understood the importance of such alliances. Every organization is trying to unite, so they listen to each other's views even if their own perspectives are different then also, they try to understand each other. It's not like there is no conflict, or anger, or resentment, all that is always there. We keep our views, they keep theirs, and everyone listens by coming together…But unless you show that you are really working for all farmers, no one will trust you.[243]

Corroborating the point about how left leaders' ability to raise issues that also matter to the landowning farmers, another leader from Uttar Pradesh added, "the non-left farmer organizations are now learning the skills from left organizations to increase their outreach. Some publish pamphlets and have developed their own symbols like the red flag of the left. Some are even documenting their activities in writing, which was never done by organizations in the past."[244] His point not only highlights the reduction in differences

[243] Interview with MS

[244] Interview with AC

between organizations, but the increasing tendency to learn from each other within the movement. Importantly, another left leader, however, cautioned and clarified,

> There is no unity between laborers and farmers as such. Everyday conflict between laborers and farmers exists on the ground. The leaders are trying to bridge the difference between the two groups by calling for unity…It is sad to say this but this game of unity is a top-down game played by organizations not farmers. It should not be understood as a change in the society. I don't even know if it is on the agenda of farmers to form unity given what all they are facing. But organizations know that they cannot do anything alone anymore."[245]

While it's true that the survival and legitimacy of organizations primarily concerns leaders, I also find evidence suggesting that farmers perceive the unity among farmer organizations as an essential factor for instigating change. Particularly, farmers no longer favor contentious relations between organizations, which in the past often publicly surfaced rivalries. As one farmer, who organized a separate tent of Antil Khap at the Singhu border outside Delhi, pointed out, "casteism in farmer organizations makes them ignore the real issues of farmers."[246] This sentiment was echoed by another farmer who emphasized, "unity is the only way out for farmers."[247] When asked about how organizations mobilized in his area, he explained, "Tikait sahab [leader of BKU-T in Phase 1] made things problematic even in Haryana. Farmers don't like caste politics anymore."[248] Similarly,

[245] Interview with YV

[246] Interview with MJ

[247] Interview with AKM

[248] Interview with AKM

farmers from other states pointed that the narrow framing of farmers' politics on caste lines is detrimental to organizations' legitimacy. As one farmer from Uttar Pradesh said, "when farmers face problems, the problem does not distinguish based on caste. But farmer leaders do. We don't even go to farmer leaders with our problems."[249]

Furthermore, while the ideological divisions between "apolitical" and "political" organizations had lessened as they lost links with political elites, some leaders expressed their concerns about how forming associations with political elites led to a trust deficit with their constituents, compelling them to further reinforce their legitimacy. For instance, one leader of Madhya Pradesh stated that "farmers distrust politicians and when farmer leaders get associated with them, they distrust us also. In the meetings in the village, no one gets easily convinced of what we say. They look at you with extreme suspicion waiting for you to take the name of your preferred party…it takes time to build a trusting relationship. You must consistently show yourself as apolitical and fully in support of farmers. It is better to remain apolitical."[250] This is further corroborated by a leader from Maharashtra. She explained, "when farmer leaders tried to enter politics with political parties whether it was Sharad Joshi, or Tikait people's trust on them broke. Even Medha Tai [Medha Patkar] also went in politics then people stopped trusting her no matter that she had worked with several thousand families. So, it is that kind of thing.[251]

[249] Interview with a farmer in BF

[250] Interview with RR

[251] Interview with PS

When I inquired about how several farmer organizations and leaders who have been active in electoral politics continue to be a part of farmers' movement. I find that given many farmer organizations have previously had connections with politicians, they tend not to highlight this due to the risk of implicating themselves. As the leader of BKU-T from Uttar Pradesh explained, "as long as an organization is not an official wing of a political party or working for BJP, it is fine with us. There are many leaders who have contested elections. But what matters is that we stand independently for farmers."[252] Another leader, however, contended that blaming organizations for being political has always been strategically used by leaders. He cited the example from Phase 1 stating "Tikait [BKU-T leader] blamed Joshi [SS leader] for being close to VP Singh, but Tikait was always close to Devi Lal. He even supported BJP so many times."[253] Further corroborating the decreased legitimacy of "apolitical" as a mobilization frame, another leader made a more general point, stating, "Farmer leaders do not shy away from politics themselves…So many leaders are motivated by political power themselves…then how do you expect differences on the issue [apolitical vs political] come up."[254] Indeed, there is evidence that leaders from a variety of organizations, including RKMS and BKU-T in Uttar Pradesh, KRRS in Karnataka, SS and SSS in Maharashtra, TNAA and NSIIRA in Tamil Nadu, and KSS in Madhya Pradesh, have ventured into electoral politics. Moreover, out of the 25 leaders who make up the

[252] Interview with NT

[253] Interview with AC

[254] Interview with RS

working group of AIKSCC, 14 have even contested elections at either the state or central level.[255]

Simply put, the decline in organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks has compelled them to de-emphasize their structural identities to enhance their legitimacy, which in turn has reduced the salience of structural divisions within the movement. As a leader from Tamil Nadu mentioned, "we understand that caste and religion are not a problem when it comes to farmers' issues anymore. This is why BJP [the ruling party and the target of protests] people failed to instigate conflicts between us."[256] Similarly, a leader from Madhya Pradesh emphasized the significance of integrity and consistency more than caste among farmer organizations, stating that "organizations must show consistency and honesty to farmers. If organizations say they stand for farmers, they should stand for all farmers. Your caste and party are secondary."[257] Adding an intriguing perspective, a leader from Uttar Pradesh remarked, "caste problems arise only when some castes have organizations but others don't. Previously only some castes like Jats had their organization. Now every caste is free to have their own organization."[258] Notably, his observation highlights not only the absence of caste related disputes but also the fact that organizations acknowledge each other's existence without any antagonism. Interestingly, a leader from Maharashtra pointed out the pragmatic approach of catering to a broader group, given the

[255] Fieldwork data on AIKSCC Working Group.

[256] Interview with AY

[257] Interview with RR

[258] Interview with BB

widespread distress among all farming sections, irrespective of their caste. According to her, "while farmers are divided more on the basis of the crops that they grow, these days, farmers from every caste are suffering."[259] She further elaborated "the problems of farmers do not come in piecemeal anymore. We have a crisis going on and this impacts everyone. If I were to now focus only on one type of farmers, others' won't take me seriously."[260] Another leader from Punjab mentioned a similar point, "my organization's main members generally have land between 5 to 50 acres. Most of them grow wheat and paddy. But we also want small and marginal farmers to join us…Whenever we conduct any program in the village, we always say that all farmers need to stand together."[261]

Moreover, I find that leaders make deliberate efforts to avoid being perceived as an organization of particularistic caste or class of farmers. My conversations with office bearers of organizations reveal that leaders have instructed administrators of social media platforms, including Facebook and WhatsApp groups, to actively moderate and delete posts emphasizing caste identities or issues. One of the administrators, responsible for managing nearly 50 different WhatsApp groups for his organization, explained this policy, "I am always looking out for those who want to bring Jat issues to the group. Singh sahab [the leader of the organization] does not want any caste issue to enter farmers' discussion."[262] He further elaborated, "You can't stop people from commenting on

[259] Interview with PS

[260] Interview with PS

[261] Interview with RAV

[262] Interview with AC

Facebook, but there is someone or the other from our organization who would post against those bringing caste issues or will complain to us to remove them from the group."[263] Similarly, this trend of de-emphasizing caste identities is reflected in the speeches of farmer leaders at protest sites. Leaders frequently encourage farmers to resist divisions based on caste or religion, encapsulating this sentiment in statements like "farmers need to stay away from those who divide them on caste or religion"[264] and "our caste is Kisani."[265] They advocate for a broader farmer identity, especially in the context of electoral politics, with reminders like "we should forget our castes when we go to elections. We need to vote as farmers."[266] They continually highlight the broad applicability of their struggle, stressing that their fight is for "all India farmers"[267] and acknowledging that "all farmers are suffering".[268]

However, it is important to note that despite leaders' emphasis on broadening the scope of their organizations to enhance their legitimacy, this doesn't equate to a substantial shift in their demographic makeup. Many organizations still primarily maintain ties with certain caste or class groups. Nonetheless, such strategies help organizations in enhancing their legitimacy by associating themselves with a broader cause or identity. Moreover, building

[263] Interview with AC

[264] VMS in BKS' protest

[265] DD in Patiala

[266] RS in Delhi

[267] BP in Delhi

[268] DS in Delhi

stable multi-caste coalitions under single organizations is extremely difficult. As one leader from Uttar Pradesh pointed out, "you go to a place and help the farmers there for your benefit. Farmers also take help from you because they need you in that moment. But after the issue is done, they don't really care about you on other issues because you are not present in the area. And you can't force them to work for the organization."[269] Another leader from the state further added,

> Organizations' strategies to expand are ineffective to begin with. The main way in which they expand their base is by trying to connect with some notable people in an area where the farmers' issue is boiling. But these new leaders want a post within the organization, so the main leaders appoint them as the district or mandal [sub-district] head and give full responsibility of the area. But soon these new leaders realize if they are the ones who are doing all the work for the organization in the area, why should they work under someone else. They break away and form their own organization.[270]

I also find that in Uttar Pradesh, the networks that BKU-T built were with only individuals from villages nearby Noida and Ghaziabad, not the community or the village itself, and these individuals keep shifting loyalties as opportunities arise, thereby leading to an unstable multi-caste network.[271] In the same vein, one leader from Muzaffarnagar attributed lack of resources as a cause of unstable networks within organizations. He said,

[269] Interview with RSM

[270] Interview with AC

[271] Interview with RN

> Since most farmer leaders do not have money to run their organizations, they auction the posts within their organizations. These people who buy and become farmer leaders don't care about organization or issues. They just enjoy the status and keep looking for other opportunities to enhance their status. Therefore, they frequently change organizations, and your own organization suffers.[272]

In sum, the inability of organizations to mobilize their own structural networks and rebuild their legitimacy leads to the emergence of a movement environment where organizations underscore openness and inclusivity to increase their chances of success.

6.1.3 Increased space for alternative actors: the rise of bridge builders

During Phase 1, organizations that deviated from the prevailing mobilization strategy, which relied heavily on structural networks, were typically marginalized, and discouraged (Omvedt, 2005). This further diminished the possibility of alternative collaborative strategies and actors gaining prominence within the movement. In a notable shift from Phase 1, new types of organizations have emerged across states. These organizations are primarily led by individuals belonging to castes that traditionally do not engage in the agriculture sector. Many of these leaders reside in urban areas, hold professional degrees, and even have a history of involvement in electoral politics and other social movements prior to joining the farmers' movement.

For example, in Madhya Pradesh, there is Dr. Sunilam, a Brahmin and PhD holder, with a socialist movement background, who also served twice as a Member of the Madhya

[272] Interview with VB

Pradesh Legislative Assembly. Now he heads the Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (KSS). Similarly, Dr. Darshan Pal in Punjab is a Brahmin and was previously medical doctor who also worked with working-class movements led by leftist organizations. In Uttar Pradesh, VM Singh, a Khatri who resides mainly in Delhi and was an independent MLA in the 1990s, has been leading one of the largest organizations. In Maharashtra, Raju Shetty, a Jain-Bania, now leads one of the state's largest organizations. He has been elected to the Indian Parliament twice and was a Member of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly once. In the same state, there is Pratibha Shinde, a Dalit Maratha that primarily works with tribal farmers in the Vidarbha region. Ashish Mittal, a Bania caste doctor involved in students and working-class movements, works primarily in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In Tamil Nadu, Ayyakanu, despite his family's traditional ties to agriculture, has lived most of his life in Trichy city and is a lawyer by profession. He has also contested elections in the past. Additionally, civil society activists that traditionally focused on wider development issues have increasingly become prominent in the farmers' movement. This shift can be seen through figures like Kavita Kuruganti in Karnataka, who leads the Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA). Similarly, Medha Patkar plays a significant role in Madhya Pradesh through the National Alliance for People's Movement, while Kiran Vissa leads Rythu Swarajya Vedika, making substantial strides in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. In Haryana, Yogendra Yadav, although from an agrarian caste, has pursued a professional life as a political scientist in urban centers with a history in socialist movements and electoral politics. Moreover, several prominent civil society activists and intellectuals including P. Sainath, M.S. Swaminathan, Dr. Devender Sharma, Anruna Roy,

and Anna Hazare, are considered legitimate supporters and vocal advocates on farmers' issues.

The decline in organizations' ability to mobilize their structural networks had a considerable impact in increasing the space for these new organizations. In my interviews across states, I find that farmer leaders maintain that the increased diversification and openness within the movement can be traced back to the decline in the legitimacy of the traditional caste-based organizations, a shift that, as previously mentioned, is inherently linked to the reduced capacity of organizations to mobilize their structural networks. As one of the leaders explained, "as the popularity of the stalwarts like Tikait and Sharad Joshi reduced in farmers' politics, the space for new organizations and leaders also increased." On further probing he explained that "previously the bar of authenticity to become a farmer leader was extremely high. You had to be an actual farmer to become a leader then only farmers or other organizations would accept you as leaders. But now, if you care for farmers' issues, you can be a genuine leader.[273] Another leader from Maharashtra also attested, "civil society members had to work in the shadows of larger organizations in the past. Now having your own organization is what everyone prefers."[274] A leader from Uttar Pradesh also emphasized how being a farmer leader traditionally meant in Uttar Pradesh "you had to have some recognition, at least within your area or caste as a person who is connected to the ground. If someone educated or outsider would try to give advice to farmers about their problems, they would not take him seriously…Most people believed

[273] Interview with YV

[274] Interview with PS

that Tikait is the main leader and he will fight and get things for them."[275] As such, in a context, when the large, dominant organizations no longer dictated the movement agenda, these organizations had space to establish themselves as credible actors seeking benefits for farmers.

Moreover, as the traditional organizations began to adopt open and inclusive mobilization strategies to appeal to a larger group of farmers, it made it easy for new organizations to establish their legitimacy. The new organizations are mainly focused on issues and are agnostic to the background of farmers who engage with them. For instance, in Karnataka, ASHA led by Kavita Kuruganti has been working against the introduction of genetically modified crops, and so has factions of KRRS.[276] Similarly, in Punjab, Kisan Krantikari Union, while led by a doctor, has been working on the issues of agricultural laborers and marginal farmers related to wages, land rights, which was something a lot of left organizations also did.[277] Moreover, I find that several of the new organizations have been at the forefront of working towards farmer issues using strategies that considers the welfare of the broader group of farmers. In addition to organizing protests using broad frames, a few of them also take the judicial route to hold governments accountable and present the case on behalf of the wider farmers' community. For example, RKMS has been litigating against the Uttar Pradesh government and sugar mills to deliver fair remuneration to sugarcane farmers. Organizations in Madhya Pradesh have filed petitions in the state High

[275] Interview with AC

[276] Interview with NH

[277] Interview with H, DD

Court and Supreme Court to stop the governments from taking over the land of tribal and small farmers. In Tamil Nadu, farmer organizations have submitted petitions in several courts to seek profitable prices for farmers' produce and to resolve the Cauvery water issue. In Punjab, organizations have petitioned to seek appropriate compensation for the families of those who have committed suicide as a result of increasing debt or economic losses.

Engaging in the judicial space itself allows these organizations to establish their credibility with farmers. Most of these court cases tend to be about broader community of farmers rather than particular caste or class of farmers. A farmer leader even mentioned, "when we are going to the courts, we are trying to show that what farmers are fighting for is their right, not some special treatment or goods for one particular group. The idea of rights then has to be broadly about all Indian farmers. It cannot be about specific caste or class groups."[278] Similarly, a leader from Jai Kisan Aandolan who was also a lawyer before joining farmers' movement underscored the importance of rights and judicial activism,

> In December 2014, realizing that we are very small and that we don't have a pan India organization, we moved to the Supreme Court. We felt that weakest person in this country can get a strong support from the highest court of this land thanks to the beautiful constitution that we have. Supreme Court heard the matter for four months and passed historic judgements in May 2015. Holding that the right to relief is a constitutional right, relief is not a matter of charity.[279]

[278] Interview with DS

[279] Interview with AS

It is important to note that several leaders who have filed petitions agree that court cases take years to settle, and it is difficult to predict whether the judgement will favor them or not.[280] One leader further added that "even when court gives a favorable response you are not sure if you have achieved any victory or not. Sometimes the governments change by the time verdict comes. Sometimes the governments don't even implement court orders."[281] Nevertheless, the judicial route favorably impacts the legitimacy and scope of new organizations and the favorability of movement environment for collaborative strategies. This is because it shows that these organizations work towards the benefits of the wider farming community, which, in turn, further enhances the credibility of inclusive mobilization.

6.1.3.1 Legitimizing and encouraging an inclusive and collaborative movement environment

The role of these new organizations is crucial in bridging differences between disparate movement actors and bringing them under one banner. Since these new organizations do not have their bases in particular caste or class networks of farmers, they tend to be open to collaborations with all types of farmers from the very outset. For instance, All India Kisan Khet Mazdoor Sangh and National Alliance of People's Movements got formally launched as networks of smaller organizations under one umbrella. The founding member of All India Kisan Mazdoor Sangh explained that his organizations reached out to 30-40 smaller organizations from 6 states in the year 2000. These organizations included those

[280] Interview with DS and VMS

[281] Interview with VMS

that work with fishermen, railway platform labor who also acted as agricultural workers, as well as small and marginal farmers. When I asked him about how he convinced so many organizations to join, he said that "people had realized that there is no need in fighting separately and not winning".[282] Similarly, I find that since the late 1990s and early 2000s, the role of Kisan Sangharsh Samiti in Madhya Pradesh and Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan in Uttar Pradesh have been crucial in bringing organizations of disparate farmer groups to protest collectively on multiple occasions.[283] More recently, new organizations such as Jai Kisan Aandolan and Consortium of Indian Farmers in Karnataka were formed in 2014 and 2015 following a similar pattern. One of the leaders from Jai Kisan Andolan explained that we first began as a network of 40-50 smaller organizations from all over India, but then we merged to form one single organization."[284] The presence of such organizations is important not only because they bring organizations together, but they also legitimize collaborative strategies and reduce the salience of structural divisions within the movement.

These new organizations have also been crucial in lessening the ideological antagonisms within the movement. Specifically, several of the leaders of these new organizations have contested elections in the past, which leads them to approach the the two main ideological points of contention–left vs rest and apolitical vs political– within the movement more strategically than traditional organizations. Unlike a significant proportion of traditional

[282] Interview with AM

[283] Interview with DS, AC, RSM

[284] Interview with AS

farmer organizations, leaders of the new organizations do not believe strongly in the "apolitical" ideology and are more open to adopt alternative strategies. As the leader of RKMS in Uttar Pradesh explained, "by being apolitical, farmer organizations try to make their name, but actually it creates more trouble for farmers. Politicians don't take farming issues seriously."[285] However, he contended that he is not much of a believer in the ideology, but he prefers to stay away from politicians. He stated, "Even when I was MLA [member of Uttar Pradesh state legislative assembly], I didn't meet with politicians. I met Mayawati 3-4 times because she was my CM [Chief Minister]. After that I didn't even meet once. Only people [other organizations] who seek contracts from the government meet politicians."[286] Contrasting how farmer leaders of the past understood the "apolitical" nature of organizations, some of the new organizations have a looser interpretation. For instance, one leader explained that for his organizations "apolitical simply means that we do not allow leaders of political parties on our stage, but the leaders of a party's farmers wings and those who have sympathy for our issues are welcome."[287] Such approaches open up the possibilities of working with organizations that may not be "apolitical".

Moreover, a few leaders consider their stint with electoral politics as a way to enhance their power to deliver for their constituents, which brings them closer to the left organizations that are official wings of political parties. As one farmer leader who had been successfully elected Member of Parliament twice said, "my disagreement with a lot of farmer leaders is

[285] Interview with VMS

[286] Interview with VMS

[287] Interview with YV

that they don't think like politicians. I am in politics for the welfare of farmers while continuing to protest from outside."[288] Another leader from Maharashtra said that "while she and her organization members don't contest MLA or MP elections, those are quite expensive and involve party politics, we focus mainly on local elections to help our farmers."[289] Similarly, a Madhya Pradesh leader stated that "if there is pressure on you to deliver, you change your strategies as well. I was a student leader in the past and then became MLA. I know as an elected representative you can do much more than through protests for farmers."[290] Not surprisingly, when I asked the president of AIKS about how his organization, which is the official wing of India's largest communist party and he himself, because he has been a Member of Parliament five times, is perceived by other farmer organizations, he mentioned, "people recognize the difference between who is genuinely interested in the cause of farmers and those who want to do things only for their organization…I personally don't think it is a good idea to be apolitical. Nor do many other farmer leaders that work with us in AIKSCC."[291]

Further, participation in electoral politics also incentivizes leaders to adopt a coalitional approach to mobilization in general. If farmer leaders want to contest as independent candidates or under their own parties' symbol, they cannot solely rely on their organizational membership to get majority of the votes. They need to build coalitions with

[288] Interview with RS

[289] Interview with PS

[290] Interview with DS

[291] Interview with HM

other farmer leaders to garner support, which is why leaders who contest elections claim to build a broader "agrarian vote."[292] On the other hand, in a context, where several political parties represent agrarian caste groups, farmer leaders motivated to win elections can join political parties, but this is not a credible option because if they contest on party tickets, they must tow party lines regardless of whether it is in favor of farmers' agenda or not. As Raju Shetty explained,

> When I contested elections in 2014 with the help of BJP, I was asked to merge my party with the BJP several times. But I knew that if I merge, I will have to listen to what BJP says. So I negotiated with them to remain independent in my own party. My fears came true in 2014 itself. The BJP government brought a land acquisition bill that I was strictly against. If I had joined the BJP, I would be either forced to support the bill or resign from my seat.[293]

In sum, the diminished legitimacy of conventional caste and class based organizations has created room for new types of organizations. By engaging in collaborations from the get-go, prioritizing the interests of the wider farming community, and addressing ideological differences more strategically than their traditional counterparts, these organizations contribute to a more open and inclusive movement environment.

6.2 Restructuring of sources of power: Emergence of collaborative strategies

[292] Interview with RS, HM

[293] Interview with RS

My fieldwork across states revealed that leaders not only emphasized that the unity between farmer organizations was necessary, but that it has been occurring in different ways for a long time. For instance, one Punjab leader, who works primarily with agricultural laborers and small farmers mentioned, "First I was with people's movement, but when I joined the farmers' struggle in 2008, I saw that some organizations worked with each other. I mainly found some unity among left organizations."[294] This unity between the broad group of left organizations was also corroborated by another leader from Punjab, whose organization had faced severe pushback from the dominant-caste organization in Phase 1. He mentioned,

> We have been working towards a farmers' unity since the beginning of the farmers' struggle in the 1960s. We were the first one to give the slogan of "peasant-worker" unity. But things became more concrete only in the early 2000s. We initiated meetings between several organizations, mostly from those that come from left ideology, but others also came. It was open to everyone.[295]

Further, even relatively large organizations like BKU-T contended that they have worked with other organizations for some time now. "We have been part of an inter-coordination committee since Tikait Sahab's [the president of BKU-T in Phase 1] days," said Rakesh Tikait, the national spokesperson and son of the founding president of BKU-T.[296] A leader from Karnataka confirmed working with BKU-T and also mentioned that "organizations

[294] Interview with DD

[295] Interview with HM

[296] Interview with RT

from South India have also been working together from time to time. They have a network called South Indian Farmers Movement Coordination Committee."[297] Similarly, a leader from Maharashtra who had been at the forefront of forming AIKSCC explained that he has had plans for building a national level unity almost for a decade now. He added,

> After winning the 2009 election [he was the Member of Parliament from Maharashtra] only I realized that farmers would get fair price only when they act collectively and show their power. I thought it was time to build a national level farmers organization. I tried to call it NAFA- National Association of Farmers Associations. The ex-CPC chairman was considered as the head of the association. But things did not succeed much. Different states have their own dynamics. But now I have close relationships with organizations in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.[298]

The use of collaboration as a tactic by farmer leaders is also well recognized by journalists and public intellectuals working on rural issues. As a public intellectual from Punjab said, "many organizations have formed networks for different issues like on water, debt, or MSP. We also have a big suicide [farmers' suicide] problem in Punjab. When they come to Chandigarh, you will see them giving memorandums to the minister or the governor, standing in front of the press together.[299] A senior journalist from Uttar Pradesh also mentioned a similar point, "leaders know each other personally and whenever opportunity arises, they join hands to protest. This has been going for some time now. The Jat [farmer]

[297] Interview with NH

[298] Interview with RS

[299] Interview with PK

organizations have shown solidarity on caste protests also. I think otherwise their politics [farmer leaders'] would have finished a long time ago…Whether they achieve anything together or not, is not clear, but at least by showing unity they can run their shop [organizations] for some time."[300] Another journalist, while contending that some unity has existed between organizations, cautioned about the unity shown by organizations in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. He stated, "this unity is too fragile. The moment there is a prominent Jat politician that comes to power. Like if a Jat becomes CM [chief minister] in Haryana or Jayant Chaudhary becomes big in Uttar Pradesh, all the Jat leaders [farmer] will forget unity and work to get as much out of the government as possible for their own benefit."[301] Regardless of the nature and motivation for unity between organizations, it is clear that farmer leaders engage with each other to further their agenda. Simply put, when organizations grappled with effectiveness but the movement environment has become open and inclusive, collaborations serve as effective strategy to enhance organizational power and influence.

6.2.1 Ad-hoc engagements

Upon further investigation, I find that the farmers' movement has not only become more open and inclusive, but the challenges organizations face in influencing policies and political elites have also compelled them to adopt collaborative strategies to enhance their chances of success. Specifically, I find that organizations initially favored ad-hoc engagements as their primary collaborative strategy. This allowed them to overcome some

[300] Interview with HS

[301] Interview with AJ

of the challenges of working with groups that represent divergent identities and interests. Essentially, ad-hoc engagements comprised informal, transient alliances chiefly involving leaders from distinct organizations. They are typically deployed around specific issues or events, without the requirement for long-term commitments, formal structures, or the participation of each organization's wider membership under a shared leadership. Further, these collaborations are executed without the expenditure of significant resources or compromising the independence of the involved organizations. More specifically, I identified three dominant modes of ad-hoc engagements.

First, I find that leaders from several organizations meet and invite each other in an attempt to enhance their organizational status and personal prestige. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, a leader suggested that "leaders of organizations that had separated from BKU-T invite each other to give speeches in their events and talk about farmers' issues of other places."[302] When I asked about how attending events of other organizations helps his organization, he said, "some leaders do not know what is happening in other parts of the country. So they ask people like us to come and share our knowledge. Farmers relate with the cause more when they hear from others. It helps people like us by building new links."[303] Another leader whose organizations is active in multiple states echoed a similar sentiment, "when you go and talk on the stage of others, you have automatically enhanced your own outreach. More people know about you and your organization now."[304] In the same vein, a leader

[302] Interview with VMS

[303] Interview with PSG

[304] Interview with AS

from Punjab mentioned that he has organized several camps for farmers in the last few years, and to each of these events he has called leaders from Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh.[305]

Moreover, I find that leaders leverage their participation in social events at the village and district levels to increase their visibility and chances of getting invited by other organizations. This also allows them to build legitimacy for their organizations and enhance their personal prestige at the local level. For instance, while contending that leaders may not be able to gain success on policy matters through protests, a leader from Uttar Pradesh noted that,

> Leadership positions such as rashtriya adhyaksh [national president], pradesh adhyaksh [national or state president], or IT cell adhyaksha [Head of Information and Technology Department] are titles that give you some status in your village. If nothing else, at least acknowledge and call you adhyaksha ji [President] and you feel good about yourself… You get invited to public events.[306]

Echoing a similar point and further explaining how leaders make themselves invited, another leader noted, "whether you have 50 people or 100 people with you on the ground, you are the national president of an organization. You write that on your car, motorcycle…Your Facebook profile will also have it… Many people in the village like that someone with a name came to their home. It adds to their prestige…You also meet

[305] Interview with BSR

[306] Interview with VB

other leaders in social functions in the village and then they reach out to you whenever they organize a function."[307] These dynamics were also corroborated by my interviews with journalists. One noted, "protest politics for some organizations is not possible. The leaders now engage in *samaj ki rajneeti* [social politics] instead of *Kisan rajneeti* [farmers' politics]. They meet with everyone who calls on them in the village."[308] Another journalist highlighted that, "being a farmer leader was only about having a designation that you add to your name…You mainly went to functions like weddings, funerals, or any such *samajik* [social] event in the village and that gave you some status."[309]

Second, several organizations display support to each other during challenging times, especially when there is a confrontation with the government. The show of solidarity helps organizations further the broader agenda of farmers' movement, which has been sidelined in the political landscape. For instance, in Maharashtra, whenever the governments fail to raise the output price for sugarcane and other crops, organizations show solidarity either by fronting their campaigns on issues common to all sugarcane farmers across the state or on the broad issue of justice for farmers.[310] In the same way, organizations such as LSM and SSS have participated in joint events addressing tribal farmer issues and debt, even

[307] Interview with AC

[308] Interview with HS

[309] Interview with AJ

[310] Interview with RS. Pallavi, A. (November 15, 2012). Maharashtra sugarcane farmers protest for better price. *Down to Earth.* https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/maharashtra-sugarcane-farmers-protest-for-better-price-39611

though these issues are more relevant to LSM than SSS.[311] Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh, I found that organizations active near the state border with Haryana in Shamli district have mobilized on issues related to cattle trade to oppose state policies even though these organizations generally cater to farmers who do not engage in cattle trade.[312] Some leaders have also actively pursued issues such as increase in *muawza* (remuneration) of the land acquired by the state and private builders and to make highway toll gates free for local farmers. This helped organizations build links with a few individuals in the local Gujjar, Yadav, and Thakur villages in the Gautam Buddh Nagar district. BKU-T has shown an inclination to support issues concerning groups that they have previously marginalized. A group of farmers from Shahjahanpur district who had arrived at the Ghazipur protest camp site stated that Dalits as well as Kashyaps in their area are members of BKU-T. But when I probed further, a leader from the Kashyap caste who is also the head of the women's wing of BKU-T in Shahjahanpur, admitted that though "BKU is opening up to lower castes, only a few people join and those who do are from outside Muzaffarnagar. The past conflict between Jats and lower castes in Muzaffarnagar still makes it a problem for BKU to have them in their organization."[313]

Expressions of solidarity among organizations become especially evident in situations involving police intervention, whether during protests or other contentious issues. A striking instance of this took place in Punjab, where twenty organizations collaborated to

[311] Interview with RS, PS

[312] Interview with AC

[313] Interview with MK

protest in support of BKU-EU. This collective response was incited by the police's refusal to charge an elected representative of the ruling government, Akali Dal, in the death of a BKU-EU office bearer.[314] Such expressions of solidarity in the face of police harassment are common even in other states. For example, a leader from Dausa district in Rajasthan state shared his experience of supporting organizations in Ganganagar district on water-related issues that involved police intervention. Two leaders from distinct organizations in Madhya Pradesh stated that local bureaucrats often use police to intimidate small and marginal farmers seeking compensation for their damaged crops, or when they have some land related issues. These leaders revealed that they have, on multiple occasions, protested in solidarity with these farmers to counteract such tactics.[315]

Notably, many of these expressions of support and solidarity translates into actual collaborative engagements when police intervention occurs during protests. As one farmer leader from Maharashtra explained the logic of solidarity in instances of repression,

> Small organization working in secluded areas such as Nandurbar district are easy to suppress. Such injustices [police repression] won't happen, if you have achieved strength through alliance with other organizations…I show solidarity to all organizations who face problems with authorities. I even went from Maharashtra and met people in Kerala when injustice against them was committed by the state.[316]

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[314] Chaudhry, A. (March 24, 2010). Hundreds of farmers arrested across state. *The Indian Express.* https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/hundreds-of-farmers-arrested-across-state/

[315] Interview with RR, DS

[316] Interview with PS

In the same vein, a leader from Haryana, advocating for unity as a means to overcome challenges related to police excesses, expressed, "Police arrests farmers sometimes even before the protests…We realized that if we worked in a collective way, our strength would increase manifolds."[317] Similarly, a leader from a small organization in West UP added, "it is more beneficial to engage in protest when other organizations are also raising the issues. This helps to show police that we are not alone."[318] A leader from Madhya Pradesh, whose organization had faced extreme police violence in 1998 also further elucidates how mobilization capacity leads to differences in motivations for collaboration in teh context of police repression. He said,

> 20 farmers were killed by Digvijay Singh's government in Multai in 1998. I was leading the protest and put in jail after the incident. Many organizations came to show support after the massacre took place. Even leaders of big organizations like BKU came. They gave speeches of forming unity between farmer organizations. But no real efforts to collaborate were ever made by these big organizations…See if you are big, you think you can handle governments on your own. But we have realized that when you are small, governments will send police to suppress your protest. So, after the incident with me in Multai, I tried to forge unity between several small organizations. I work with all types of farmers whether small, big, or tribal farmers. We protest together most of the times.[319]

[317] Interview with AK

[318] Interview with VT

[319] Interview with DS

Moreover, an incident from Uttar Pradesh succinctly illustrates the intricate interplay of organizational dynamics during police intervention, particularly within the evolving movement environment since Phase 1. In 2002, Mahendra Singh Tikait, the leader of BKU-T since Phase 1, was embroiled in a controversial incident in Bareilly with the police and the state government. I was informed that during the unfolding of this incident, leaders from various organizations, including those which had previously been affiliated with BKU-T but had since parted ways, were actively supporting BKU-T against the government. As one leader articulated,

> When Mahender Singh Tikait faced charges in the Bareilly incident. The case had something to do with railway quota during Mayawati's time. He was paranoid about the fact that he could go to jail. BKU didn't have support in that area. But when VM Singh, me and a few other organizations organized a big panchayat [council] in Bareilly in his support. We were able to put pressure on the Railway Magistrate and police and the case was dismissed.[320]

After the case was dismissed, leaders thought that showing solidarity to the government is in favor of all farmer organizations. One leader noted that even Mahendra Singh Tikait who has been reluctant of unity between organizations in Phase 1, "made an emotional appeal and asked for organizations [from Uttar Pradesh] to be unified so that governments would not disrespect farmers anymore."[321] He suggested the formation of Bharatiya Kisan Mazdoor Sanyukta Morcha, a coalition of farmers and laborer organizations in the state. While the idea of coalition seemed promising initially, BKU-T soon withdrew and shifted

[320] Interview with RSM

[321] Interview with RSM

their focus towards uniting with organizations outside the state. However, on delving deeper, I found that the resistance from Uttar Pradesh organizations to the coalition structure proposed by BKU-T was a significant factor. They objected to the dominance BKU-T sought and their reluctance to regard others as equals. A participant in the negotiations remarked, "BKU-T envisioned a coalition where all organizations worked under a new name as a unified entity, with Tikait at the top. But other leaders did not accept this. They preferred having their own independent organizations while supporting each other."[322] Another leader shared similar sentiments, stating, "This wasn't the first time Tikait had made such a move. In the past, when a coordinating committee with Sharad Joshi was formed, he [Tikait] started to build an All India BKU with himself as the main leader."[323] Another leader commented on the difficulty for Tikait's sons to collaborate with organizations that were once part of BKU-T, especially amidst disagreements over who was the rightful inheritor of Mahendra Singh Tikait's legacy as the farmers' leader in the state.[324] Despite BKU-T's withdrawal from the coalition, the leader noted the beneficial aspect of the process, observing that "the formation of the Morcha had brought several organizations onto the same platform."[325] I found that since then BKU-T shifted its focus on building collaborations with organizations in Punjab, Karnataka and Maharashtra.

[322] Interview with RSM

[323] Interview with AC

[324] Interview with VMS

[325] Interview with VMS

The incident from Uttar Pradesh underscores that police repression acts more as a trigger for solidarity among organizations rather than being the primary driver. The key factor here is the shifting ability of organizations to mobilize their structural networks, which subsequently influences the power relations within the movement. Notably, since the early 1990s, BKU-T had been gradually losing its ability to rally its caste networks, a fact that had also become visible to others by the early 2000s. Consequently, smaller organizations were able to resist BKU-T's influence and continue with their strategic choice of ad-hoc engagements. Additionally, the growing acceptance and promotion of unity and solidarity, facilitated by the open and inclusive movement environment, made it challenging for BKU-T to disrupt the unity.

Third, I find that several farmer organizations have taken initiatives to organize open public meetings and conferences. These forums encourage voluntary participation from leaders of various organizations and actively promote the concept of unity among different groups. As a leader from AIKS explained that "starting in 2000, we held several meetings with left and other organizations. We discussed the problems faced by the agriculture sector as a whole because we had understood that the country is so vast. The people are so divided and there are so many organizations, so we should try to find a common understanding."[326] Another leader who claims to have differences with the existing left organizations for they are not "left enough" also attested to the need for ad-hoc engagements and attending these meetings. He said, "we started to reach out and attend meetings with other organizations.

[326] Interview with HM

With numbers behind you it is not easy to not be seen or heard."[327] Highlighting the increasing role of public intellectuals in the broader farmers' movement, another leader added, "Farmers were getting to know that they face bigger problems because of Prof. Swaminathan also. In early 2000s, Prof. Swaminathan conducted a series of meetings before he submitted his report to the government… He met with farmer leaders and gave his depositions on the basis of that…Since then many meetings have been happening to address big issues in the Indian farming sector."[328] A leader from Tamil Nadu added another important point, "we also prefer to organize more meetings and conferences because more farmers come to these events than protests."[329] Moreover, these open meetings help bridge leaders to appeal to wider audiences, including those that previously had conflicts with each other. As a leader from Punjab articulated, "issues like debt and suicide are so significant that even organizations primarily representing medium and large farmers extend their support to other organizations in their public meetings."[330]

The role of new organizations has been crucial in organizing several of these public meetings and conferences. In Madhya Pradesh, I found that KSS has been at the forefront of conducting meetings and bridging differences between civil society and tribal farmer organizations to pressure the governments.[331] "You need unity and strength to be taken

[327] Interview with AM

[328] Interview with PSG

[329] Interview with M

[330] Interview with H

[331] Interview with DS

seriously by the governments. This is why my organization reaches out to as many organizations as possible," said the leader of KSS.[332] I was also told by leaders from other organizations that KSS joins protest to show unity among farmers in other states such as Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra.[333] In fact, one leader mentioned that KSS leader has been most active in forging links between organizations that joined AIKSCC after its formal inception in July 2017.[334] Similar to the role of KSS, I found the role of ASHA in Karnataka in bridging differences between organizations. On issues related to GM crops and the growing role of corporations in agriculture, ASHA was also instrumental in bringing organizations outside Karnataka in these meetings.[335] By conducting public meetings and bridging differences with several organizations, Western Odisha Farmers Coordinating Committee organized one of the largest protests in Odisha in 2007 against the state government's efforts to use dam water for industrial use.[336] Similarly, RKMS from Uttar Pradesh has brought several organizations together to conduct large protests in Lucknow, Meerut, and Delhi in the last few years.[337]

6.2.1.1 Reinforcing effects of ad-hoc engagements

[332] Interview with DS

[333] Interview with HM and VMS

[334] Interview with YV

[335] Interview with NH

[336] (December 31, 2007). 30000 farmers demand hirakud dam water. *Down to Earth.* https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/30000-farmers-demand-hirakud-dam-water--7037

[337] Interview with AC

Throughout my fieldwork, I find that leaders share the perspective that joint events and collaborations are remarkably effective in promoting camaraderie and understanding about the broader dynamics within the movement. For instance, one leader reflected, "When a Jat leader who has 100 acres has to stand with a lower caste leader in the same protest, it builds trust and declasses them,"[338] encapsulating the essence of how shared struggles can blur caste and class lines and promote understanding. This understanding extends beyond protests and into strategic collaborations, as a leader that generally works with lower caste groups and agricultural laborers highlighted about their relationship with dominant castes in their area. He said, "In Etawah, we have Yadav stronghold. We work with them also. Farmer leaders now understand issues from the perspective of a broader farmers' community not just their own individual organizations."[339] His observations underscore the transformative power of collaborations in instilling a broader, community-oriented perspective among leaders. Moreover, leaders stress the importance of engaging with other organizations to remain informed and educate their farmers about government policies and laws. As one leader articulated, "Otherwise government will keep moving ahead with its policies and law without gaining farmers' representatives trust,"[340] emphasizing the necessity of this continuous learning process. This commitment to understanding issues is not limited to their regions alone; as a leader from Haryana highlighted, "I have travelled to so many places to understand farmer issues. I have met people from Gujarat to Kashmir and all face similar situations. Nobody is able to speak for the rights of farmers in any

[338] Interview with AS

[339] Interview with MS

[340] Interview with RSK

state."[341] This echoes the universal hardships of farmers, transcending regional boundaries. Adding to this discourse, a leader from Maharashtra remarked,

> I feel that if anyone wants to fully understand about farmers, they have to meet with other people. The aspect of caste has broken down to a large extent, and a lot of flexibility and expansion has been seen in the overall movement…One should understand that as people are uniting and challenging the government, the definition of farmers will keep expanding…Nowadays people who do farming are not only farmers but also who do fishing or are dairy producers they are also farmers. Plus, we as leaders have understood the political process involved. We know that we can't just raise issues for our own specific community but have to stand up against globalization, crony capitalism also.[342]

Taken together, these insights underscore the powerful reinforcing effect of ad-hoc engagements, thereby increasing the legitimacy and need for collaborations within the broader farmers' movement. As one leader whose organization mainly caters to the agricultural laborers and marginal farmers in Punjab and Bihar pointed, "To increase our strength we need to show unity. Even the common population wishes for us to unite. So we collaborate whenever we can with different organizations."[343] However, he cautioned that these collaborations should not lead to assumptions that organizations are similar to each other, "we are independent and we have a lot of differences between us, there is earth

[341] Interview with AK

[342] Interview with PS

[343] Interview with PSG

and sky difference."[344] Another leader stated, "Farmers in Maharashtra struggle with very basic problems, and if we can't even help them they will go to someone else. So we sometimes join hands with other organizations to pressure the governments. It is beneficial for everyone."[345] A leader from Tamil Nadu underscored the importance of scale in protests that can be achieved through collaborations, saying, "there is no organization that can have 2-3 lakh people on the street to protest. We need such organizations. This can come only through unity between all farmer organizations."[346] Another leader emphasized the need for unity to ensure farmers' voices are heard, asserting, "No matter how small or big the problem, we need many people to turn up in protests to make politicians hear us. Farmers need to be united to become a cohesive vote bank and then only politicians will take them seriously."[347]

Additionally, I find that through ad-hoc engagements, several organizations have established informal connections with each other. When required, these organizations leverage these networks to coordinate their actions. In Uttar Pradesh, for example, through multiple interviews, I identified a network of 17 organizations, all of which claim to have a trusting relationship with RKMS and have collaborated on initiatives in the past decade.[348] A similar informal network exists in Punjab's Doaba region, with nearly 10

[344] Interview with PSG

[345] Interview with PS

[346] Interview with AY

[347] Interview with RR

[348] Interview with RSM, AC. The name of the organizations are 1) BKU-Balraj, 2) BKU-Welfare Foundation, 3) Kisan Nyay Morcha, 4) BKU-Lathaith, 5) Jan Kalyan Samiti, 6) Tisang Bawana Manch, 7)

organizations coordinating their actions on shared issues when they seem necessary.[349] Furthermore, left-leaning organizations in Punjab also maintain informal collaborations, acting in unison on several occasions.[350] In Maharashtra, SSS is perceived to have links with numerous organizations, including LSM, AIKS, and several factions of SS, openly advocating for greater unity among these entities.[351] Several other organizations like JKA, ASHA, and Rythu Swarajya Vedika also have ties with each other. Moreover, certain organizations also maintain inter-state ties, extending their networks beyond their immediate geographical boundaries. For example, RKMS, based in Uttar Pradesh, has worked with organizations like SSS in Maharashtra. Similarly, BKU-Dallewal, located in Punjab, has connections with RKM in Madhya Pradesh and Haryana. Another case in point is BKU-T from Uttar Pradesh which has fostered ties with organizations in Punjab, such as BKU-Lakhowal and BKU-Dallewal and a few factions of KRRS in Karnataka and SS in Maharashtra. These cross-state linkages underscore the reinforcing effect of ad-hoc engagements.

To summarize, organizations motivated to increase their chances of succes, skillfully capitalized on the altered movement environment. They employed ad-hoc engagements to

BKU-Mahashakti, 8) BKMSU, 9) Indian Nurserymen Association, 10) Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, 11) Aaloo Utpadak Samiti, 12) BKU-Verma, 13) BKU-Secular, 14) BKU-Rashtrawadi, 15) BKU-Rashtrashakti, 16) BKU-Swaraj, 17) BKU-Tomar.

[349] Interview with H. The name of the organizations are 1) BKU-Doaba, 2) Azad Kisan Sangharsh Committee, 3) BKU-Rajewal, 4) Majha Kisan Committee, 5) Bharti Kisan Manch, 6) Doaba Kisan Committee, 7) Doaba Kisan Sangharsh Committee, 8) Gana Sangharsh Committee, 9) Kisan Bachao Morcha, 10) BKU-Kadian.

[350] The name of the organizations are 1) AIKM (CPIML), 2) Kul Hind Kisan Sabha- AIKS (Major Singh), 3) AIKS (Ajoy Bhawan), 4) Kul Kisan Hind Federation, 5) Jamhoori Kisan Sabha.

[351] Interview with RS

broaden their influence. These engagements, characterized by their capacity to fortify inter-organizational relationships, fostered a shared understanding among diverse organizations about each other and the broader movement. Moreover, they facilitated the formation of informal ties across a wide array of organizations, thereby enhancing their interconnectedness.

6.3 Consolidating power: coalescing of networks into large, diverse coalitions

The shifts brought about by the diminished capacity of organizations to mobilize their structural networks set the stage for the rise of large, diverse coalitions within the Indian farmers' movement. This decrease shaped an open and inclusive environment in the movement, where multiple organizations were already collaborating on an ad-hoc basis. The engagements between these organizations fostered the development of informal ties and created a broader understanding within the movement. As such, when Phase 2 of the farmers' movement began in 2014, with these foundational conditions already established, organizations doubled their efforts to consolidate their power through a more formalized partnership model, namely coalitions. This was a strategic move aimed at enhancing their chances of success and confronting an increasingly repressive and negligent government.

More specifically, until 2014, the mobilizations of farmers in India were sporadic and regionally scattered, causing the connections between organizations to also appear intermittent and geographically limited. However, the advent of Phase 2 of the farmers' movement marked a paradigm shift. The intensity of farmers' mobilizations escalated drastically, and organizations leveraged their informal ties for mobilization right from the

onset of Phase 2. As government-movement interactions grew increasingly contentious, several leaders strategically seized upon events and issues that called into question the government's behavior and those that supported the farmers' cause to appeal to a broader array of organizations within the movement. Between 2014 and 2017, a significant number of organizations began coordinating their actions as part of wider regional and informal networks. In 2017, in response to a repressive incident in Madhya Pradesh, a significant proportion of organizations coalesced into a more formal partnership, forming the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC). This initial group of 60-70 organizations expanded their mobilization efforts across 20 Indian states and within three years had brought more than 200 organizations under one umbrella. At the same time, several other networks of organizations continued their struggle independently, with a select few organizations operating alone. However, in 2020, when the Indian government passed three controversial agricultural laws, Delhi became the epicenter of protest for AIKSCC and other networks. A few leaders and independent activists orchestrated public meetings between AIKSCC and leaders of other networks, culminating in the formation of the Samyuktha Kisan Morcha (SKM). This consolidation aimed to further fortify the movement's power.

It's important to underscore that despite the fact that many organizations joined the coalitions at varying times and differ in what immediate external circumstances prompted them to join, the primary driving force for these coalitions stemmed from changes brought about by the diminished capacity of organizations to mobilize their structural networks. This decline sparked a transformation in the movement environment, preventing

organization from obstructing others' interests or hindering collaborative efforts. The decreased prominence of structural identities and the emergence of new organizations fostered a climate more conducive to collaboration. Moreover, the early architects of coalitions leveraged their pre-existing connections and understanding of the broader farmers' movement, gained through past ad-hoc engagements, to materialize and sustain these coalitions. The following sub-sections provides an in-depth exploration of this coalition formation process.

6.3.1 Phase 2 of the farmers' movement: contextual background for coalition formation

Post-2014 marked a period of intense mobilization, signifying the commencement of Phase 2 of the farmers' movement. This phase was particularly spurred by the heightened focus on farmers' demands in 2013-14. During the campaign for the 16th General Elections in India, the Prime Ministerial candidate of BJP, Narendra Modi, pledged several policy concessions to the country's farmers if his party were to take office. This marked a remarkable shift, as a politician of such stature hadn't publicly addressed farmers' struggles in decades. Following this, various farmer organizations took to protesting as a means of bolstering their chances of success and legitimacy of their demands. However, after his 2014 electoral victory, Modi reneged on many of his promises, particularly the one about enhancing farmers' income through higher output prices. Moreover, Modi's attempt to pass the Land Acquisition Bill in 2014 was perceived by farmer organizations to be against their interests, and pro-corporates. Consequently, numerous organizations staged protests

against the government on similar grounds around the same time, ensuing the second phase of the farmers' movement.

At the very outset, farmer leaders relied on their experience of ad-hoc engagements to build a wider unity between organizations and mobilize against the government. As one farmer leader put it, "in a place where there are 120 crore (1.2 billion) people, who knows you? what is your status? Unless 50 lakh people will shout with you, who will see. We lacked a national level unity, which is what we tried to build in 2014."[352] In the same vein, several other leaders contended that a unified struggle was needed to register a strong and loud challenge against the Land Acquisition Bill in 2014.[353] One of the most important partnerships that emerged during this period was through the formation of Bhoomi Adhikar Aandolan (Land Rights Movement) (BAA), a protest campaign led by 30 small organizations including Non-governmental and environmental organizations. While the main call for BAA was primarily given by Anna Hazare, a prominent civil society member who led the India Against Corruption campaign, gradually several farmer organizations who already knew about each other took center stage with AIKS leading the campaign. At the same time, within states, several organizations began to coordinate their activities to challenge the policies of the Modi government. For instance, in Maharashtra, two state level networks also came into existence to pressure their state government– Jan Aandolan Sangharsh Sambandhit Samiti and Sukanu Samiti. Both these networks comprised more than 20 organizations working across the state. These networks mobilized collectively to

[352] Interview with HM

[353] Interview with VMS, AC, AS

pressure the BJP governments at the state and central level and organized public meetings and conferences to raise awareness among farmers. A newspaper report shows that farmers' protests doubled between 2014-2015.[354]

Farmers' mobilization efforts were further emboldened when the Land Acquisition Bill failed to pass in the Indian parliament. Despite Modi's attempts to pass the Bill thrice, he remained unsuccessful and had to ultimately let it lapse in the parliament.[355] Regardless of the actual reasons why Modi government was unable to pass the Bill, the collapse of the Bill was marked as a sign of victory of farmers' unity by organizations across states.[356] As a result, farmer leaders used this as an opportunity to further their mobilization efforts by focusing on the issue of fair remuneration of agricultural produce, which Narendra Modi promised in his election campaign in 2013-14. Several public meetings and outreach programs were organized across states, to build a wider unity to pressurize the government. As a leader from AIKS mentioned, "we conducted a padyatra [foot march] from all four corners of India to bring other organizations under one umbrella."[357] Following these meetings and marches, in addition to the organizations who initially joined BAA in 2014, another 30-40 organizations including those from Punjab, Maharashtra, and Madhya

[354] Sharma, A. (September 08, 2015). Farmer protests doubled in 2015 due to land bill. *The Economic Times.* https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/farmer-protests-doubled-in-2015-due-to-land-bill/articleshow/48872026.cms?from=mdr

[355]Roche, E., Anuja. (August 30, 2015). Land acquisition ordinance won't be reissued; Narendra modi. *Livemint.* https://www.livemint.com/Politics/noHEydhRIEPpdkn0fAqjRN/Govt-not-to-repromulgate-land-ordinance-Narendra-Modi.html

[356] When Modi government came to power in 2014, they lacked majority in the Upper House of the Indian Parliament, which was one of the main reasons why they could not pass the bill.

[357] Interview with HM

Pradesh joined by 2016. Two leaders confirmed that a tentative name (All India Kisan Coordination Committee) was given to this network of organizations.[358]

Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh, Shiv Kumar Kakka, who was previously associated with the Bhartiya Kisan Sangh, the official farmers' wing of Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh and an affiliate of BJP began to build unity among farmer organizations across states. He first reached out to a few organizations in Punjab and Haryana in 2014 with whom he had connections from his days as a member of Bhartiya Kisan Sangh. By 2016, several meetings were conducted in Delhi and Bhopal followed by a large-scale padyatra (march) across India. Ultimately, a network of 65 farmer organizations from Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir was formed under the banner of Rastriya Kisan Mazdoor Mahasangh (RKMM) in early 2017.[359] In the same vein, in Karnataka, Changal Reddy formed a network of 70-80 small organizations and leaders under the banner of Consortium of Indian Farmers Association (CIFA), which not only engaged in protest activity but also conducted awareness campaigns on state and central government policies and promises.[360]

Additionally, the Tamil Nadu farmers' protest that lasted for more than 140 days (2016-17) in Delhi also became a crucial event wherein links between organizations from different states began to form. During the protest campaign, Tamil Nadu farmers displayed

[358] Interview with HM, DS

[359] Interview with AK

[360] Interview with AC, NH

extreme tactics every day that captured widescale media attention.[361] Several organizations from nearby states (Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab) visited the protest site to show solidarity to the protesting farmers. Some of these visits also culminated into public meetings to discuss the possibility of building wider unity between organizations across India.[362] In fact, in early June 2017, Ayyakannu, the leader of the Tamil Nadu farmers protest reached out to VM Singh of Uttar Pradesh with a proposal to build a national level unity and asking Singh to lead the efforts. Singh in turn reached out to Raju Shetty in Maharashtra who had been instrumental in forming the Sukanu Samiti of 27 organizations in his state.[363] When I asked Ayyakannu why he reached out to VM Singh and not any of the other organizations, he said, "He [VM Singh] has all the good characteristics like Manmohan Singh to build a unity. He is a minority [Sikh] and also knows Hindi and English that governments also speak. He lives in Delhi where the Agriculture Commission and other offices are."[364] Notably, his comments highlight the necessity of downplaying structural divisions within the movement by emphasizing a figure whose own identity does not wield substantial power.

Furthermore, initiatives were taken by farmer organizations and civil society members to show solidarity to each other. For instance, a group of civil society activists who had thus

[361] Singh, R. (2020a, September 25). When Modi govt came to power, farmer protests increased 700%—The 3 bills are its result. ThePrint. https://theprint.in/opinion/modi-govt-saw-farmer-protests-increase-700-the-3-bills-are-its-result/509392/

[362] Interview with AC

[363] Interview with VMS, RS

[364] Interview with AY

far only associated themselves with the farmers' movement in individual capacity launched an initiative to build a common platform (Jai Kisan Aandolan) to bring several organizations together. One of the founding members explained,

> Jai Kisan Aandolan did not start as an organization, it started as a platform, so right at its inception, we believed that only a platform will work to deliver for farmers. We invited organizations to come to Delhi for a meeting. 40 organizations came. We then made a formal announcement of Jai Kisan Aandolan. Our first activity was to conduct a yatra [march] across India with our message of unity. But then we realized that mobilization and working as a collective required far more skill and credibility than what we had. It took us two years till 2017 to actually see the fruits of our Jai Kissan Aandolan experiment. Those 2 years we needed to go to college to learn.[365]

In the same vein, a prominent agricultural economist who also work with organizations in Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, have been instrumental in organizing three national level farmers' conventions under the banner of Kisan Ekta Manch [Farmers Unity Front]. In these conventions, more than 100 organizations from across India participated. In an interview with Down to Earth magazine, he explains that the need for unifying farmer organizations has risen because "while farmer leaders are heroes at the local level, they are zero at the national level." He further adds that through Kisan Ekta Manch efforts have been made to bridge the gap between organizations that have generally not been considered part of the farmers' movement, but comprise "at least 40% of the farmers' community,"

[365] Interview with AS

namely fishermen organizations.[366] Ultimately, by early 2017, several states had a formal or informal network of organizations actively involved in mobilizing against the state and central governments. Some of these organizations had overlapping membership in the broad inter-state networks such as All India Kisan Coordination Committee, RKMM, CIFA, or informal networks associated with individual leaders.[367] Moreover, according to one estimate, the number of contentious events organized by farmers shot up by 700% during the first three years of Modi's government.[368]

6.3.2 Formation of All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC)

As the BJP government began to feel the pressure of farmers' mobilization, its response towards farmer organizations increasingly became aggressive. In one instance, BJP responded with extreme repression, which eventually fast forwarded the process of building a national level unity among farmer organizations. Specifically, on 6th June 2017, six farmers were killed by the Madhya Pradesh police under the orders of the BJP led state government.[369] Following this, a few leaders gave a call for a public meeting of farmer

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366 (June 23, 2016). Down to Earth interview with Devender Sharma. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1zYV9Ms73g&ab_channel=DownToEarth

367 Uttar Pradesh Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, Jharkhand Rajya Kisan Sangharsh Samanvya Samiti, Committee of leaders of 32 farmers organizations of Punjab

368 Singh, R. (2020a, September 25). When Modi govt came to power, farmer protests increased 700%—The 3 bills are its result. *ThePrint.* https://theprint.in/opinion/modi-govt-saw-farmer-protests-increase-700-the-3-bills-are-its-result/509392/

369 PTI. (July 18, 2017). Six farmers were killed in the June 6 police firing in Mandsaur. *Hindustan Times.* https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/six-farmers-were-killed-in-the-june-6-police-firing-in-mandsaur-mp-govt/story-oXPWt7C0PP9PrHNc1sDvlO.html#:~:text=The%20Madhya%20Pradesh%20government%20on,social%20elements%20for%20triggering%20violence.

organizations in New Delhi. In addition to a few independent organizations, these meetings were attended by the members of two already formed networks– All India Kisan Coordination Committee and a loosely tied group of organizations from Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra led by VM Singh, Ayyakanu, and Raju Shetty. A leader who was partaking the role of a coordinator for these meetings confirmed that nearly members of 100 organizations participated in these meetings.[370] After intense discussions in these meetings, a decision was taken that a group of organizations would go to Mandsaur as a collective to show solidarity to the farmers and affirm the unity of farmers' movement. As one leader aptly put it, "the firing was done to kill the morale of farmers. Government was getting scared of the unity among farmers. We knew that and this is why we all rushed immediately to Mandsaur to show support to the protesters."[371]

However, before the farmer organizations could reach Mandsaur, they were stopped by the police and detained. During their days in detention, leaders from the left organizations who were active in the All India Kisan Coordination Committee network proposed a plan to adopt a more formal approach to coordinate activities between organizations. As one leader put it, "at that stage coordination was important not just because of unity, but also because it helps in saving the movement from badnami [disrepute]."[372] When I probed further, he explained that "it is easy for the government to discredit the movement by painting it as a

[370] Interview with AC

[371] Interview with AK

[372] Interview with PSG

violent movement."[373] After a couple of days of deliberation during detention, a decision was made that a larger unity at the national level will be formed under the banner of All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC). One leader articulated that the word Sangharsh (Struggle) was added to the existing network's name because it represented the wider movement. "Not all farmers have organizations or unions, some struggle individually or in groups," he added.[374]

The initial members of AIKSCC were the 60-70 organizations who were part of the All India Kisan Coordination Committee network and farmer organizations from Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu that had links with Ayyakannu, VM Singh, and Raju Shetty. A few other organizations including Jai Kisan Aandolan, which started as a network in 2015 also joined. AIKSCC adopted a three-tiered structure with Chief Convener as the head, followed by a Working Group, and a National Council. While there was no formal process through which Working Group members were selected, the logic was to represent as many states in India as possible through the leaders who could work with other organizations in their state to expand AIKSCC. A leader however added, "it was also a way to massage the egos of prominent leaders from each state. Some organizations are not even big, but they can go on public platforms and make speeches against each other."[375] The Chief Convener position was adopted on a yearly rolling basis to coordinate activities between the working group members.

[373] Interview with PSG

[374] Interview with AC

[375] Interview with AC

After the formal inception of AIKSCC in July 2017, efforts were made to further widen the unity within the movement. Specifically, four extensive *padyatras* [foot marches] were organized from four different corners of India under the banner of Kisan Mukti Yatra (Farmers Freedom March). AIKSCC members covered thousands of kilometers to build solidarity with farmer organizations across 20 states.[376] Additionally, the Working Group members were given the responsibility to build unity in their respective states. AIKSCC also used Kisan Mukti Yatra as an opportunity to decide on an agenda that could resonate with farmers across India. While the issue of fair price for agricultural produce was already on AIKSCC agenda because it was a common demand among many organizations that initially joined, through the Kisan Mukti Yatra, members of AIKSCC also learnt about the widespread problem of debt faced by Indian farmers. A Working Group member mentioned, "output price is more of a concern for a big and medium farmer. We also needed to think about small and marginal farmers. This is why the demand of debt became so important for us."[377] Consequently, AIKSCC adopted a common minimum agenda that catered to a large group of farmers across the country, which also became crucial in sustaining this diverse collective. Furthermore, starting November 2017, AIKSCC began to organize annual events in New Delhi to bolster support for farmers' community among media and political elites from opposition parties. These activities led AIKSCC to become the most powerful actor active in the overall farmers' movement. AIKSCC's membership increased from 60-70 in June 2017 to more than 220 by November 2020.

[376] (July 18, 2017). Kisan Mukti Yatra: farmer from across India protest at Jantar Mantar. *The Wire.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7thiHdy-dI&ab_channel=TheWire

[377] Interview with DS

Despite AIKSCC's growing membership and influence to shape the overall farmers' movement, some of the organizations and networks active in the movement continued to operate independently. For instance, the 65 organizations' network RKMM continued to organize marches and protests mainly in Punjab, Haryana, and Madhya Pradesh. Additionally, several organizations in Haryana and Punjab had formed their own state level networks but had not joined AIKSCC or RKMM. In Uttar Pradesh, I found that BKU-T, BKU-Bhanu, BKU-Lok Shakti, and BKU-Tomar were the four organizations that had not joined any network and were organizing protests independently. In Maharashtra, I found a faction of SS led by Gunwant Patil that had not joined AIKSCC or any other coalition. In fact, Patil's organization was the only one that I found to be explicitly in support of the policies of the BJP government and had not conducted any protest during this period.

When I inquired about the reasons why some of these organizations and networks had not joined AIKSCC, one of the founding members of AIKSCC mentioned that it was primarily because they could not reach out to all organizations. He further detailed,

> When AIKSCC conducted marches to build an all-India unity, they were unable to reach out to organizations in Punjab and Haryana due to the disruptive protests organized by supporters of Baba Ram Rahim Singh in Punjab and Haryana area. AIKSCC march in these areas was cancelled in 2017. Only a few organizations with whom we had prior connection could join AIKSCC from these states. I think 12 or 13 organizations of the 30 organizations from Punjab and around 6 organizations from Haryana were with us.[378]

[378] Interview with YV

On further investigation, I also learned that while joining AIKSCC was a voluntary process, some member organizations held suspicions towards those that had previously been associated with the BJP. As one leader explained, "since RKMM was being led by a person who was previously associated with BJP, a few AIKSCC members were not keen on inviting them to their platform."[379] Gunwant Patil's links with BJP government in Maharashtra made some leaders reluctant in making him part of AIKSCC.[380] Several AIKSCC leaders confirmed their distrust of BKU-T because of Tikait family's perceived link with a few BJP leaders and one of the BKU-T's office bearers was a member of Farmers Commission of the Uttar Pradesh government. I also found that though BKU-Bhanu and BKU-Lokshakti were also perceived to be close to the BJP, they were extended invitations to join AIKSCC. When I inquired about why these organizations were preferred but not BKU-T, one of the AIKSCC members mentioned that "BKU-T's ability to act as a Sarkari Union [Government's stooge] also threatens the movement's unity. The other organizations are too small."[381] One of them further added, "we removed BKU-Bhanu from AIKSCC when we realized that he talked on behalf of the government."[382]

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[379] Interview with AC

[380] Interview with PS

[381] Interview with AS and VMS

[382] Interview with AM

Additionally, I found that a few organizations were reluctant to work with AIKSCC because of past rivalries and the competition for the leadership position. As one AIKSCC leader mentioned, "I even reached out to BKU to join AIKSCC. Rakesh Tikait said yes but then he didn't take up the invitation actively. I think he also understood the tension that other organizations from UP like that of VM Singh [Chief Convener of AIKSCC] had with him and his organization."[383] Moreover, organizations already participating as part of a other networks were reluctant to join AIKSCC because of competition over leadership positions. As one observer from Punjab explained,

> Haryana's biggest leader is Chaduni. He made a coalition of Haryana organizations and became its leader. In Punjab, Rajewal was leading the Punjab organizations' coalition. Except for BKU-Ekta Ugrahan, most of the other small organizations were with Rajewal. They [Rajewal and Chaduni] did not want to leave their newly found power and work under VM Singh [Chief Convener] in AIKSCC.[384]

Overall, in addition to AIKSCC, there were three other prominent network of organizations that operated independently– RKMM, Haryana Coalition, Punjab Coalition, and informal coalition led by BKU-T. However, despite the existence of several separate entities, the overall movement had assumed a unified persona. By 2018, the majority of farmers' organizations had become part of either the AIKSCC or other active networks and coordination committees across various states. The contentious interactions with the government had also become a common experience among disparate organizations and

[383] Interview with PSG

[384] Interview with RM, H

networks. For instance, BKU-T and those associated with it in Punjab and Haryana organized a Kisan Kranti Yatra (Farmers' Revolutionary March) to protest the MSP announcement.[385] However, police stopped the protesters at the border of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi and used rods and water cannons to deter their entry in Delhi. Several farmers were injured and there was a considerable loss to the public and private property. Leaders from Punjab and Haryana who were in collaboration with BKU-T were also met with police repression including the use of water cannons, rods, and several cases were registered against them. Similarly, AIKSCC had tried to pressure the government through legislative advocacy. AIKSCC reached out to all political parties including the BJP to seek support on its two demands – Right to Fair Remuneration and Freedom from Indebtedness. Overall, 21 political parties (except for BJP) gave their support in writing with a promise to support any bills that AIKSCC would get tabled in the Indian parliament. Given the power of BJP to maneuver parliamentary proceedings, AIKSCC failed to table its bills on time. Ultimately, the two bills lapsed as the parliament was adjourned until the fresh elections took place in 2019. Notably, unlike Phase 1, when the large organizations could derail collaborative efforts to maintain their own power within the movement, in phase 2, most collectives, despite their internal differences, were driven by the motivation to maintain a unified front. Even those few organizations, such as BKU-Ekta Ugrahan and BKU-Lok Shakti, that weren't part of any network and organized their protests

[385] In 2018, the Modi government announced the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for 22 agricultural crops using a formula that farmer organizations have vehemently opposed in the recent years. In fact, Modi had promised in his election campaign that he will change the formula to the one given by Swaminathan Commission, which was also recommended by farmer organizations.

independently, showed solidarity with the AIKSCC and other networks. Their support was primarily geared towards strengthening broader unity and ensuring collective success.[386]

6.3.3 Formation of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM)

In May 2019, despite the ongoing farmers' movement, the Modi government returned to power for the second term with an even larger majority. From the onset of the second term, Modi government redoubled their efforts to transform the agricultural sector and displayed a conspicuous unwillingness to engage in any form of dialogue with farmer representatives. While the government launched a flagship scheme providing Rs. 6000 (~$75) annually to small and marginal farmers, it went back on its promise to revise the formula for calculating the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for 22 crops, a measure that benefits medium to large farmers. Moreover, in June 2020, despite strong opposition from the political parties and the farmer organizations, the Modi government pushed three farm bills as emergency ordinances in the Indian parliament.[387] These bills were likely to have negatively impacted farmers who sell their produce in the government regulated markets and undermined the role of MSP.

Importantly, the government's actions brought three networks, previously independent of AIKSCC, to the forefront. Given that government-regulated markets are the primary venues for agricultural trade in Punjab, Haryana, and West UP, the Haryana Coalition,

[386] Interview with SH

[387] Bhardwaj, M. and Anand, N. (December 13, 2020). India farmers intensify protests as deadlock over new laws continue. *Reuters.* https://www.reuters.com/article/india-farms-protests/india-farmers-intensify-protests-as-deadlock-over-new-laws-continue-idUSKBN28N05R

Punjab Coalition, and the BKU-T-led informal group from West UP were compelled to rally against the government. They staged protests, road and rail blockades, and *gheraos* (occupy) to pressure the Modi administration. The government's reaction started with denying protest permissions, quickly escalating to extensive police barricades, arrests, and violence. These measures presented substantial obstacles for the farmer organizations and networks, making them challenging to overcome individually. Additionally, farmers' organizations including those in AIKSCC were coming to terms with a shift in power dynamics after 2019, given that the BJP government had secured re-election despite the intense period of farmer mobilization from 2014 to 2019.

In such a context, a few leaders who had overlapping membership in Haryana and Punjab Coalitions and AIKSCC brokered meetings in Chandigarh and Delhi between June 2020 and November 2020 to find an alternate strategy to overcome these challenges and bolster the power of farmers' movement. In these meetings, the leaders of Punjab and Haryana coalitions, BKU-T, AIKSCC, and the other major network, RKMM, were invited. Through extensive deliberation, these leaders collectively decided to form a supra-coalition under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) to effectively coordinate the overall movement. To maintain autonomy of networks and organizations, the mandate of SKM was restricted to two issues– repeal of the three farm laws and to demand fair remuneration of agricultural produce. To mitigate any leadership rivalries within SKM, conscious efforts were made that no single leader or organization will become the face of movement. It was decided that there will be a seven-member coordination committee, which will remain accountable to the general council, a body of 400 organizations comprising the overall

coalition. Of the seven members of the coordination committee, BKU-Ekta Ugrahan, BKU-T, Punjab Coalition, Haryana Coalition, and RKMM had one representative each, and AIKSCC had two given that it represented 200 organizations alone. Moreover, since AIKSCC was already preparing for its annual event at the end of November 2020, in New Delhi, a consensus was also reached to coordinate a large-scale protest in new Delhi under the banner of SKM on the same day.

When I inquired about how the trust issues were mitigated, a few leaders mentioned that the government's response to protests of BKU-T and RKMM was evidence that the government does not care about any farmer organization. One farmer leader further added, "There is no time to fight the differences or positions of different organizations. First, we all together survive this hailstorm brought by the Modi government. Being together is a compulsion."[388] Additionally, a few leaders mentioned that seeing the aggressive response of the government, they were pressured by their own constituents to forge a unity between organizations, which made the trust issues less salient. As one of the founding members of AIKSCC mentioned, "it was important to reach out also because our own people wanted unity. The main demand to build the empire [SKM] came from the common public, not the emperor [leaders]."[389] In the same vein, Rakesh Tikait, who led the Farmers Revolutionary March and the main face of BKU-T during this movement also contended,

[388] Interview with AM

[389] Interview with AS

The common population also understands what is going on, so they do work according to this understanding. They know the benefit of working together. They know that if we tell the government officials as a collective, it will put pressure on them, and they will be listened to. So, this understanding is now taken up by everyone [organizations] in the movement [SKM]. People feel that they must stick together, then only the power will be concentrated and the officials and government will then work.[390]

[390] Interview with RT

7 Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this chapter, I begin by offering a comprehensive summary of the project, which includes the key objectives and findings. Subsequently, I delve into the theoretical and political implications of studying social movement coalitions within divided contexts. Finally, potential avenues for future research are discussed.

7.1 Summary of the project

In this project, I set out to understand coalition dynamics within a divided context. For this purpose, I conducted a within-case analysis of one of the most difficult cases - the Indian farmers' movement. The first phase (1970s-80s) of the Indian farmers' movement was marked by profound divisions rooted in caste, class, and ideology, leading to fragmentation and a notable lack of unity among organizations. Yet, despite the persistence of these divisions, two large and diverse coalitions have recently emerged in the second phase (2014-2022) of the movement. Thus, the study's research objectives included understanding the conditions that have facilitated coalition formation within the Indian farmers' movement despite the presence of structural divisions, while addressing what the Indian case helps us understand about coalition formation within structurally divided movements in general.

7.1.1 Past research

To answer these questions, I began by positing five propositions drawn from the existing literature on social movement coalitions – political threats, political opportunities, alignment along common interests, formal organizational structure, and presence of high material resources– as theoretically plausible drivers of coalitions within divided movements. Note that, in addition to these factors, the existing literature also presents social ties and alignment along identity and ideological lines as explanations for coalition formation. However, within the context of a divided movement, the plausibility of such factors is not theoretically anticipated. By definition, a divided movement comprises actors who are divided in terms of identity and ideological lines. If these factors indeed contribute to coalition formation, their roles are likely limited to functioning as enablers. The primary drivers of coalition formation are most likely the factors that led to the emergence of social ties or alignment along ideological or identity lines in the first place.

7.1.1.1 Theoretical framework

The primary proposition was that we must consider the paradoxical effects of organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks on inter-organizational dynamics within the movement. I theorized that while a high capacity to mobilize structural networks might aid organizations in achieving their objectives, it can also amplify structural divisions within the movement, thereby hampering collaborative potential between disparate actors. Organizations with a high mobilization capacity could polarize the movement along structural lines by setting the movement's agenda, threatening the interests of others, and substantially reinforcing structural identities and divisions. Conversely, in case of organizations with low mobilization capacity, although achieving

their objectives may seem challenging, the movement environment might become less constrained along structural lines. This is possible because organizations' ability to mobilize their structural networks is positively correlated to their capacity to threaten each other's interests, assert their identity, or set the movement's agenda. Moreover, the broader organizational field may become localized and segmented, leading to a détente-like state among disparate actors. In effect, with the decline in organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks, contextual changes such as their low capacity to achieve objectives as well as the less constrained movement environment could potentially contribute towards coalition formation within divided movements.

7.1.2 Alternative explanations

Drawing on extensive fieldwork and secondary sources, it becomes apparent that the majority of factors suggested in the literature either didn't exist in the Indian context, or if they did, were not sufficient on their own to explain the formation of coalitions within the Indian farmers' movement. Political opportunities such as openness of the government and associations with the elite have been conspicuously absent in the Indian context. Indeed, farmer organizations perceive the political elites, including the ruling government, to be pro-corporates and anti-farmers. While their inherent differences are recognized by the majority of the organizations, the shared agenda that the coalitions eventually adopted was formed post-coalition, thereby limiting the role of common interests as an explanatory factor. In fact, the two demands identified as a part of the common minimum agenda were strategically selected to sustain coalition work as opposed to initiating it, thereby enabling

diverse organizations to preserve their autonomy while participating collectively. In contrast to the theoretical expectations, I find that organizations in India generally adopt informal organizational structures and are resource constrained. Furthermore, while political threats were present before the coalitions were formed, their role is primarily limited to operating as enablers, rather than as primary drivers. Political threats, like police repression against farmers' organizations, have been common since the 1970s and 80s, and the process of coalition formation predates the temporally proximate acts of repression.

7.1.3 Argument

I found converging evidence for the primary proposition: there has been a significant decline in the ability of organizations to mobilize their structural networks. Specifically, I find that since the 1990s, organizations have become smaller, and are typically restricted to their geographic areas with only a fraction of caste networks associated with them. This is further attested by the decrease in the size of their protests and loss of elite links, two indicators directly corresponding to organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks. For further analytical clarity, I trace two exogenous shifts that probably led to this decline– the advent of caste politics and the economic distress endured by farmers. With the rise of caste politics, a new class of political elites has emerged, originating from similar caste backgrounds as farmer leaders and vying for the same constituencies. However, farmers increasingly perceive political elites as more capable to address their needs than farmer leaders. Compounding this, are the dire economic conditions within the agricultural sector, which has amplified both the scope and intensity of farmers' problems.

As farmers grapple with increasingly complex and severe issues, the organizations continue to struggle when addressing these problems, which has also widened the gap between them and the farmers.

The decline in organizations' capacity to mobilize their structural networks resulted in the structural divisions within the movement to become less salient, making the movement more conducive for collaborations. The decline minimized power asymmetries and allowed organizations representing diverse constituencies to operate autonomously without threats to their identity or interests. Further, as organizations struggled to mobilize their own groups, they had to de-emphasize their structural identities and prioritize openness to attract a broader audience. Ideological antagonisms softened as organizations distanced themselves from political elites to regain credibility. Moreover, the decline in the power of traditional caste and class organizations paved the way for new organizations, who, unconstrained by past ideological limitations and structural identities, were quick to collaborate from the initial stages. This open and inclusive environment pervading the movement, coupled with organizations' inability to achieve success on their own, led organizations to interact and cooperate with each other. Initially, they engaged on an ad-hoc basis, using strategies such as holding open meetings and conferences, inviting leaders of other organizations to their own events, and echoing solidarity during challenging times. Gradually, these engagements had a reinforcing effect, developing and fostering ties among disparate movement actors. Ultimately, these interconnected organizations coalesced into large, diverse coalitions to confront an oppressive and negligent government.

In sum, the central argument that I put forward is that mobilizing structural networks have a paradoxical effect on inter-organizational collaboration within divided movements. A high capacity to mobilize structural networks help organizations attain their objectives, while also exacerbating divisions by giving them the ability to threaten each other's interests and assert their identity. Conversely, a reduction in the capacity to mobilize structural networks creates greater space for alternative strategies and actors and modify inter-organizational dynamics to make structural divisions less pronounced.

7.2 Theoretical Implications

The study of Indian farmers coalitions offers three important theoretical insights pertaining to coalition formation within divided movements in general. First, this study shows that greater accumulation of key resources may not necessarily lead to coalitions in divided contexts. While the presence of high levels of structural networks (socio-organizational resources) can bolster organizations' ability to succeed, there exist inherent constraints that can deter collaborations. Organizations' associations with large structural networks could negatively affect the potential for collaborations by polarizing and antagonizing the movement along structural lines, and allowing little legitimacy for strategies that involve mobilization beyond structural lines. These challenges arise also because organizations with large networks may manifest and reinforce structural divisions and identities and possess a high ability to threaten each other's interests.

Second, while the presence of political elites as allies may increase organizations' chance of success, it may also lead to ideological conflicts or an increase in power asymmetries

within the movement. In a context where organizations are divided along divergent ideological or identity lines, and there is no overarching partisan ambit that circumscribes the social movement sector, organizations from one ideology may not want to be associated with other organizations linked with political elites voicing a differing ideology. Further, while associating with political elites for may increase the power of some organizations, such association can be threatening to others. Given these possibilities, a more careful consideration of how the movement context and the broader political environment shapes relational dynamics becomes crucial in explaining collaboration between divided groups.

Third, contrary to theoretical expectations, this study reveals that coalitions can indeed occur between groups with divergent identity and ideologies. The key insight from this study indicates that the condition necessary for coalitions among divided groups includes organizations with a low capacity to mobilize their structural networks. This low capacity generates a more level playing organizational field, where divisions are less salient, threats to organizations' interests and identities are low, and the need for seeking alternative sources of power is high. Moreover, achieving congruence among divided groups is a really high bar, and any attempts to build it may be counterproductive for organizations. In divided movements, organizations act as embodiments of structural groups, so their need to prioritize the interests and identities of their primary constituents is likely to be high. Any attempts to modify an organization's identity or ideology to align with others may conflict with the innate interests of the organization's core group, leading to a legitimacy crisis. This in turn disincentivizes collaboration across the movement organizations.

Simply put, this study illuminates a potential collective action paradox inherent in divided movements. Elements that bolster collective action within a single organization may simultaneously impede it across the broader movement. Even a limited number of influential organizations, having nurtured internal cohesion and unity or amassing significant resources, could attain their objectives, but their dominance might intensify power imbalances or make divisions salient within the movement. Thus, coalition formation within divided movements necessitates a careful consideration of the potential downsides of critical resources, strategies, and seemingly advantageous political environments as well as how leaders strike a balance between their focus on the individual organizations and the broader collective for enhanced success and survival.

Furthermore, most of the existing studies on social movement coalition formation have focused on cases wherein organizations vary along interest/identity lines but fall within an overarching ideological or partisan ambit. The study of coalition formation among farmer organizations in India adds to this burgeoning literature by highlighting conditions that can facilitate coalitions in a context where multiple structural and ideological divisions exist. Moreover, by examining coalition formation in the context of a developing country with a high degree of political mobilization, this study advances the literature on social movement coalitions, which primarily draws from movements in Western democracies.

7.3 Political Implications

The Indian farmers case offers valuable insights into the efficacy of coalitions in building a robust and powerful movement, an observation highlighted by several existing studies.

Coalitions illustrate the power of collective action, unity, and resource pooling. Specifically, Indian farmers' coalitions signal a new era in democratic mobilization, where a historically divided and economically distressed group has managed to break through barriers to achieve tangible political changes. These coalitions do not merely function as a catalyst for action. Instead, they have proven to be an invaluable asset in crafting a more inclusive agenda that transcends the narrow interests of individual actors. The case of Indian farmers, thus, offers a vital lesson in building momentum and stands as a testament to the resilience, unity, and strategic brilliance of a community fighting for their rights in the face of overwhelming odds.

The Indian farmers' movement, underscored by coalitions, offers insights into the intricate dynamics of social mobilization in India's crisis-ridden agrarian landscape. In the backdrop of a thirty-year agrarian crisis in India, marked by alarming farmer suicides resulting from mounting debts and losses due to unpredictable climatic conditions, the farmers' movement emerged as a resilient and unified force, demanding governmental attention to their long-neglected crisis. Led by diverse and robust coalitions, this movement witnessed a seismic shift in its fight against the daunting challenges affecting the agricultural sector. These coalitions organized large-scale mobilizations, protests, rallies, and marches, while working toward legislative and political advocacy. The collective effort effectively reversed three high-profile anti-farmer bills and propelled farmers' issues onto the agenda of media and political elites.

In general, coalitions can pave the path for stronger and more effective mobilizations in the future by solving a key mobilization conundrum for Indian farmers' organizations. Building powerful organizations typically requires significant mobilization of structural networks or large material resources, both of which present unique challenges. However, coalitions mitigate these challenges by reducing the resources required by each organization and minimizing inter-group antagonisms within the movement, thus facilitating a powerful collective effort. Additionally, coalitions strengthen the movement's effectiveness against the state by presenting a more formidable entity during negotiations, making it challenging for the government to co-opt or suppress individual organizations. Despite these advantages, coalitions also have limitations. They are typically sustained by a common minimum agenda, which may lead to certain issues gaining prominence while others receive less attention. By drawing on their coalition membership, some organizations may garner more media attention, social ties, and material resources than others. This differential could potentially foster resentment and inter-organizational antagonisms in the long run, posing a risk for coalition work. Nonetheless, these concerns do not present as formidable or persistent challenges as those posed by mobilizing structural networks at scale or a lack of material resources. These issues can be resolved through strategic decision-making.

7.4 Future research

Existing literature widely acknowledges the role of structural divisions in discouraging collaborations between social movement organizations. However, only a limited number of studies have explored the conditions under which such divisions become less significant,

thereby facilitating collaborations. In order to bridge this gap, it is necessary to extend the findings from the Indian farmers' movement to further understand how divisions can be overcome to bridge coalitions in divided movements. Testing the applicability of the findings of this project in understanding coalition dynamics within other movements (e.g., women's, environmental, and labor movements) that face challenges similar to the Indian farmers' movement can be another objective.

Moreover, the current theoretical framework for understanding coalitions includes a list of factors without addressing the conditions under which these factors become important drivers of coalitions. It also does not address whether some factors work better in certain movements when compared to others or how they impact movement-level dynamics versus organizational-level dynamics. Future research could attempt to streamline the factors that are more influential in facilitating coalitions between divided organizations. Incorporating a comparative framework at both the movement and organizational levels could provide more insights into understanding coalition dynamics more intricately.

Coalitions are a powerful tool for mobilization, but their establishment and maintenance can be highly time-consuming and resource intensive. Moreover, very few studies systematically explain the implications and sustenance of coalitions. Thus, future research should aim to understand coalitions' impact on the broader political environment and within the movement to underscore their importance and efficacy more comprehensively. Drawing from the Indian experience, some of the objectives for future research could entail understanding when and how coalitions facilitate policy change, whether coalitions are

more effective than individual organizations in divided contexts, how coalitions tackle internal and external threats, and whether coalitions impact societal divides or bring groups closer to the regimes.

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