RESIST, PERSIST, AND TRANSFORM: THE EMERGENCE AND IMPACT OF
GRASSROOTS RESISTANCE GROUPS OPPOSING THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY

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The November 2016 election sparked nationwide resistance to the new Trump administration
and Republican Congress. Initial studies have focused on public protests and professionally
staffed advocacy organizations, but the resistance also includes thousands of volunteer-led
grassroots groups. This article uses data from online surveys, fieldwork observations and
interviews, and web searches to analyze the development, demographics, and activities of
grassroots resistance groups located in multiple states as well as all parts of Pennsylvania.
Starting right after the 2016 election, local resistance groups were founded in places of all
sizes and partisan orientations through friendships and social media contacts. Most of their
members and leaders are middle-class, college-educated white women. Groups have reached
out to surrounding communities, generating and supporting candidates for local, state, and
national public offices; and many participants seek to join and reform local Democratic Party
organizations.

With polls predicting a win for America’s first female president, excitement built with the
approach of Election Day, November 8, 2016. On October 20, “Pantsuit Nation” was
launched as an invitation-only Facebook group coordinated by Libby Chamberlain, a college
counselor based in Maine who wanted a site where members, overwhelmingly women, could
share joyful anticipation (Correal 2016; Ohlheiser 2016). Some 2.5 million people quickly
signed up, often posting pictures of mothers and daughters dressed in pantsuits. On Election
Day itself, people posted emotional accounts of heading to the polls. Hours later the euphoria
came crashing down when Hillary Clinton fell short in the Electoral College and Donald
Trump won the presidency. Suddenly, Pantsuit Nation members plunged into mourning and
anger, and many started connecting with one another to organize a
and push back. Within days,
proximate posters began setting up local community-oriented pages in particular cities,
counties, and states, and many started to announce times and places for Pantsuiters and their
contacts to meet face to face.

As they reached out locally, Pantsuit members and others shocked by the election also
responded to a national call. On November 9, Pantsuit member Theresa Shook suggested a
women’s march on Washington (Chenoweth and Berry 2018). An immediate positive
response encouraged her to announce the “Million Women March” event, which got more
than 10,000 RSVPs overnight (Stein 2017). Ideas for this event spread on Twitter and through
newly established local groups, even before it was formalized as the Women’s March on
Washington organized by Bob Bland, Tamika Mallory, Carmen Perez, and Linda Sarsour
(Kearney 2016). Bus caravans were organized wide and far, and on January 21, 2017, the day

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answered our online questionnaires.
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after Donald Trump was inaugurated, hundreds of thousands of protestors, overwhelmingly women, descended on Washington D.C., and companion marches happened that day in more than 600 additional cities located across the country in conservative and liberal states (see map in Frostenson 2017). In total, an estimated 4.2 million people joined women’s marches that day, creating the largest mass demonstration in U.S. history (Chenoweth and Pressman 2017).

In late 2016 and early 2017, further national resistance initiatives were also launched (see appendix A). Pantsuit Nation participants lost their national lodestar weeks after the 2016 election, when the group’s creator took the controversial step of signing a book deal and turning the organization into a nonprofit charity whose title could no longer be used by groups directly engaged in politics (Correal 2016; Tiffany 2016; Trotter 2016). Local networks interested in such activities had to look elsewhere, and many found inspiration, support, and connections in other regional or national frameworks including the “Action Together” and “Suit Up” networks and above all the national “Indivisible” effort.

Indivisible got its start on December 14, 2016, when former Democratic Congressional staffers led by Ezra Levin and Leah Greenberg posted publicly in the Google Docs application a manifesto called Indivisible: A Practical Guide for Resisting the Trump Agenda. Drawing from their understanding of what Tea Party activists had done eight years earlier to push back from the right against then-President Barack Obama and the Democrats, the Indivisible Guide spelled out exactly how local anti-Trump resisters could organize to spread political messages to their neighbors and contact the district offices of their members of Congress (Betha 2016; Criss 2017; Levin, Greenberg, and Padilla 2016; Levin, Greenberg, and Padilla 2017a). The guide gave millions of people tips on what they could immediately organize to do locally yet within a national framework – an important message for liberals long accustomed to looking to Washington D.C. for political leverage. Later, Levin and Greenberg told journalists that they were surprised at how quickly their Guide went viral on the Internet and how many responses they suddenly received from concerned citizens determined to organize all across the country (Tolan 2017; see also Brooker 2018). Media outlets including MSNBC (2017) spread the word, too.

By March 2017, Indivisible was chartered as a Washington D.C.-based organization with a growing staff and a website offering practical tools, ideas, and an interactive national map of local entities proclaiming themselves to be part of the resistance. Notably, well before Indivisible became a formally organized, professional staffed organization, local sets of volunteers all over the country had formed grassroots resistance groups. Many kinds of groups and projects signed themselves up on the national organization’s interactive map as soon as it became available. This made sense, because Americans looking for places to channel their opposition to the new Trump-GOP regime soon learned that they could find efforts to join in their local communities by entering the zip code on the Indivisible map. Researchers too, including the authors of this article, started to consult and tally Indivisible map listings.

Especially in the first year or so, entities registered on the map were a mixed bag. Many were newly created grassroots groups that actually met and mounted activities; others were pre-2016 organizations that revamped their activities to be part of the nationwide resistance movement; and still others were assorted online-only projects or even individually assembled email contact lists. Nevertheless, by mid-2017, contact listings on the Indivisible map – numbering around 6,000 overall, according to the group’s leaders – signaled that resistance to the Trump administration’s agenda had sunk popular roots in communities of all types in all fifty states. In our research, we have often used listings to find local groups. We started with 2017 Indivisible map listings for a given area and sorted through the contacts to set aside those that are defunct or that do not connect to actual groups whose participants at least occasionally meet face to face. Then we added further organization names by using locally focused web and newspaper searches plus interpersonal referrals from state or local leaders who know about other groups.
As this procedure indicates, documenting and analyzing locally organized grassroots resistance efforts is challenging for scholars. The relevant groups are not listed in any one place; they are not parts of any one encompassing national organization; and their participants are not flagged in national surveys. Local resistance leaders and organized activities are, moreover, only sporadically featured in the national media, because journalists and television producers find it much easier to quote professional leaders of national organizations with headquarters in big cities. In this article, we use innovative (and laborious) forms of data collection – via fieldwork in multiple states, interviews, online surveys, and tracking of the Facebook pages of local groups – to offer the first comprehensive description and analysis of grassroots resistance organizations.

In the following sections, we situate our research methods and sources of data in relation to earlier studies in the new but growing scholarly literature on the anti-Trump resistance. We explain why it is important to focus on organizations and their ongoing activities, not just on individuals and events; and we stress the value of tracking groups across many localities and outside of large metropolitan areas and liberal bastions. Then we present our empirical findings about the remarkably widespread incidence of volunteer grassroots resistance groups and the characteristics of their leaders and core participants – most of whom are middle-class, college-educated white women, mothers and grandmothers, current and retired professionals in public and private sector occupations. Equally pertinent, we look at the grassroots organizations themselves, probing their structures, dynamics, and their political impacts in community and electoral spheres. The anti-Trump resistance was sparked by a national election result that, simultaneously, shocked millions of Americans into heightened citizen activities. Like the analogous grassroots organizations that preceded it, the grassroots resistance is, in turn, feeding back into and transforming local, state, and national politics in America.

STUDYING THE RESISTANCE

Although fast-moving contemporary processes are challenging for scholars to conceptualize and measure, important studies of the anti-Trump resistance have appeared very quickly. Key contributions have been inspired by social movement theory, which tends to understand politics in terms of broad sociocultural tendencies expressed through civil society organizations operating apart from electoral politics. Such studies have especially focused, at the mass level, on public marches and other protest events and, at the leadership level, on national advocacy or social movement organizations tied to public protest activities.

The Focus and Assumptions of Previous Studies

Early work on the resistance benefitted from the quick availability of data on contemporary “protest events;” data including evidence about the size and location of the more than 600 “sister marches” that coincided with the massive Washington DC Women’s March held on January 21, 2017, the day after President Trump’s inauguration, as well as data on the many, multiply focused public protests that continued during the first year of the Trump presidency. Three informative articles using such data, all by teams of sociologists, appeared in the December 2018 issue of this journal. Rachel McKane and Holly McCammon (2018) analyzed the incidence and size of marches in hundreds of metropolitan statistical areas and found that larger marches occurred in pro-Clinton, relatively white areas with more college-educated women, while “organizational resources” such as prior protests and the presence of movement-sponsors like Planned Parenthood influenced both the incidence and size of marches. Taking a slightly different cut, Kraig Beyerlein, Peter Ryan, Aliyah Abu-Hazeem, and Amity Pauley (2018) look at the 2017 sister marches in 400 cities
and find that “the average turnout for these events was over six times that of the April 15, 2009 Tea Party rallies,” with women in the age ranges of 18 to 35 and over 60 the predominant participants. This team also finds that most organizers and speakers were women and indicates that local organizations or chapters often sponsored the events, especially feminist, gay rights, and environmental groups. Finally, Kenneth Andrews, Neal Caren, and Alyssa Browne document the size and issue foci of more than 6,500 protests by more than two million Americans that unfolded during the year after Trump’s inauguration, “the most remarkable 365 days of protest in U.S. history” (Andrews, Caren, and Browne 2018: 393). These researchers compare the anti-Trump resistance to the Tea Party, another multi-issue movement that staged geographically widespread protests spanning all states and reaching beyond major cities. The anti-Trump resistance is more analogous to the Tea Party, they find, than to Occupy Wall Street or Black Lives Matter.1

Beyond these data-rich articles, two major books have appeared: a wide-ranging collection called The Resistance: The Dawn of the Anti-Trump Opposition Movement, coedited by sociologist John S. Meyer and political scientist Sidney Tarrow (2018), and American Resistance by sociologist Dana R. Fisher (2019). Both focus on mass public protests yet also provide accounts of national advocacy organizations that have sponsored public protests and opposed specific areas of Trump-GOP policymaking. Event reports and surveys of participants in marches provide evidence about the demographics, motives, and contacts of grassroots protestors, while elite interviews and organizational websites are the principal data sources about national organizations. Importantly, research in these books examines both preexisting groups like the American Civil Liberties Union and environmental and immigrant rights organizations and newly launched, post-November 2016 organizations like Indivisible and Swing Left. Overall, these two volumes offer rich descriptions of multiple social movements that have separately and together mounted public protests and pressures against the Trump administration and its GOP allies. A key goal is to understand “intersectionality,” that is the ways in which (and degrees to which) diverse demographic groups and issue-focused movements have formed resistance alliances from the progressive left.

As this quick overview suggests, early studies conceptualize popular participation in the resistance in terms of the turnout for mass protests by people from various demographic categories. When organizations appear in these studies, they are formal, professionally run advocacy groups that coordinate and sponsor protest events and contact followers electronically. Leaders of such organizations are treated as spokespersons for broad sets of individual followers defined demographically or ideologically (see Beyerlein et al. 2018; Fisher 2019, ch. 4). Thousands of local resistance organizations, voluntarily formed and led, are not systematically described or analyzed in these studies, even though they make up the ongoing popular base of the anti-Trump resistance.

The fact that resistance research so far tends to focus on protest events and professional rather than popular organizations is not surprising, for two reasons. As already mentioned, other kinds of systematic data are hard to come by; there is no ready archive counting and describing local resistance groups comparable to the Crowd Counting Consortium run by Erica Chenoweth and Jeremy Pressman to keep track of protest events. More important, research so far has relied on social movement theories that treat organizations as channels for social grievances or supporters of urban protest events. What is more, most social movement analyses focus on the United States as whole, classify organizations in terms of their issue stands, and treat them as expressions of underlying ideologies or interests. Little attention is paid to organizational structures and networks of organizations. But this is profoundly misleading, because U.S. government and politics are federated; that is, they operate through divisions of authority nested at local, state, and national levels. This means that multi-level organizations and networks of organizations are the ones most likely to gain and exercise disproportionate political influence, well beyond the sheer size of their budgets or numbers of their Internet followers.
Considered as arrays of organizations, both the Tea Party starting in 2009 and the current anti-Trump resistance have loosely federated qualities. They both include top-down, professionally managed national and state organizations operating along with geographically widespread arrays of bottom-up, voluntarily run local groups (for dynamics in the Tea Party, see Skocpol and Williamson 2012, ch.4). In both movements, the top-down and bottom-up organizations share enemies and general goals, take part in an overarching symbolic space, and mutually leverage one another’s activities and resources. It makes little sense to analyze either of these movements as sets of protest events coordinated by national or metropolitan advocacy organizations, because neither movement can be understood apart from their grounding in thousands of volunteer-led local groups operating in communities of all sizes and partisan stripes. The widespread popular organizational grounding of the Tea Party and the anti-Trump resistance accounts for much of their outsized impact. American politics is not decided only – or even primarily – in big cities. Consequently, any research approach that focuses too exclusively on urban protest events and metropolitan organizations is bound to miss a great deal of what matters.

How New Evidence Was Gathered

To document and analyze grassroots resistance groups, we use newly collected data from groups voluntarily formed and operating in a range of localities from late 2016 through 2018. Our evidence speaks to the outlooks of leaders and active participants and enables us to track the ongoing activities and impact of local group efforts in many places far from America’s major metropolitan centers or most liberal states. We cannot document the exact numbers and incidence of all local resistance groups all over the United States, because there is no nationwide tally of actual groups and no easy way to obtain representative samples. The closest thing we have to a national overview is a tally of August 2017 Indivisible map contacts by state, normalized by voting age population. Unsurprisingly, those normalized counts show that Indivisible map listings were more numerous in pro-Clinton states and areas of Pennsylvania. Across the country, listings per 100,000 voting age population range from 8.29 in Vermont to 0.84 in Mississippi (although the vast majority of states ranged between 1.0 and 4.5). The four states with local groups featured in this study cluster close to the median of 2.23 per 100,000 voting age population – with Wisconsin at 2.46, Pennsylvania at 2.31, Ohio at 2.24, and North Carolina at 1.97. However, we know that only a minority of 2017 Indivisible map listings referred to actual grassroots groups; and we know that additional groups not listed on the map have operated in many places. Given that truly reliable nationwide datasets are not available, we proceed by making multiple cuts into the overall local resistance landscape. We have collected several kinds of data on grassroots groups and their active participants that give a complete, contextualized picture of local group activities in widely dispersed counties and across all kinds of sociopolitical settings in an entire state. In the end, the consistency of our findings across disparate settings suggests that the dynamics we lay out here have played out in similar ways nationwide – but that is a tentative conclusion that remains to be further verified.

Our first systematic source of evidence on local resistance groups comes from ethnographic fieldwork, in-person interviews, and follow-up online questionnaires focused on ten groups in eight counties located outside of big cities. The counties (listed in Appendix B) include two medium-city counties and two smaller counties apiece in different regions of North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. In 2016, voters in all eight counties supported Donald Trump, but the medium-city-centered counties are swing areas. We need to stress that these counties were not originally selected for research on the anti-Trump resistance. They are sites in the Eight Counties Project, launched right after the 2016 election by three Harvard University Professors (economist Kathy Swartz, political scientist Theda Skocpol, and sociologist Mary Waters) as an ongoing effort to track many kinds of social,
economic, and political developments during the Trump presidency. Researchers repeatedly visit these counties and get to know local business, civic, political, religious, and institutional leaders. The project was open-ended from the start, with some thematic areas in mind: changes in business and the economy; operations of local political parties and civic groups; and the local impact of changes in health policy and immigration enforcement. During initial visits to all counties in the spring and summer of 2017, one of us (Skocpol) was surprised to discover ten active local resistance groups. Because of her previous research on local Tea Parties, Skocpol realized that the current presence of anti-Trump resistance groups in such conservative places was interesting and important. She was able to interview group leaders, attend meetings in several cases, and establish ties for ongoing interactions and research follow-ups, including the eventual dissemination of links to online questionnaires for grassroots resistance participants.

Our research team as a whole has followed the evolution of the Eight Counties resistance groups through emails, subsequent site visits, and by tracking groups in local news media and through their Facebook pages (in cases where the groups granted full access). Data from these groups has proved especially valuable for tracking their founding and subsequent evolution. Interviews with leaders and observations of meetings allow us to track group structures and activities; and the online questionnaires filled out between July and October 2017 by 337 people in these groups give us a sense of the social characteristics, motivations, and activities of the most committed participants. Although this evidence is not representative in any statistical sense, no other methods could ever have given us as much in-depth and over-time evidence about local groups and their participants.

Of course, we realized from the start that the Eight Counties evidence could prove misleading about the grassroots resistance overall if local activities in those pro-Clinton counties are very different from resistance efforts in large cities and liberal areas. Consequently, we moved by the summer of 2017 to develop a more complete picture of grassroots groups and activities across the large and variegated state of Pennsylvania. Our first step was to work with a state-wide coordinating group called Pennsylvania Together, whose leaders kindly agreed to send two kinds of online questionnaire links to about 75 affiliated groups across the state (not all of them were local resistance groups, but dozens were). One “participant questionnaire” (see appendix D) was identical to the questionnaire given to grassroots participants in the Eight Counties. Another “organizational biography questionnaire” (see appendix C) was designed for leaders and organizers of grassroots groups and was meant to collect the same kinds of information on group origins, structures, and activities that we obtained from field interviews in the Eight Counties. From summer to early fall 2017, leaders of some thirty-six groups in the Pennsylvania Together network responded to the organizational biography questionnaire. We cannot calculate an exact “response rate,” because we do not know how many leaders of actual grassroots groups received the link, but we found the thirty-six organizational biography responses very helpful, because they came from groups in very different parts of the state — some from around Pittsburgh, some from around Philadelphia, and others from medium-city areas and rural areas in-between. We also received 102 participant questionnaire responses from members of these thirty-six groups, responses we have analyzed along with (and in comparison to) the 337 individual participant responses collected from the Eight Counties groups.

Further evolutions of our research have generated even more comprehensive data. To investigate exactly how widespread current local anti-Trump organizing has become, we developed county-by-county state maps showing the incidence of post-2008 Tea Party groups and post-2016 grassroots resistance groups, and we have done especially comprehensive work on Pennsylvania. Once we gathered the initial 2017 round of information from thirty-six groups across that state, we wondered whether we could assemble evidence on post-November 2016 groups in all 67 Pennsylvania counties and connect group activities to political outcomes. The entire undertaking is huge and only partly completed so far. We started by using the search techniques described earlier in this article to develop a statewide
“master list” of 225 grassroots resistance groups whose members met for stretches of time between November 2016 and the end of 2018. We have discovered one or more groups in 55 out of 67 Pennsylvania counties (and our list is by now as close to as complete as it can be).

Building on this further data collection, in early 2019 we cooperated again with Pennsylvania Together and with leaders of resistance networks in various regions of the Keystone State to disseminate a new online questionnaire (see appendix E) meant to generate a picture of recent group developments, ties to the Democratic Party, and the activities of local resisters during the 2018 mid-term elections. Ultimately, we collected responses from leaders of 82 local groups, including one or more in all but six of the Pennsylvania counties where we know grassroots groups have existed.2 We similarly tracked the 2018 evolution and political activities of the groups we follow in North Carolina, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

To make sense of the rich information gathered in all of these ways, we use multiple methods of aggregation and analysis – including breakdowns of demographic characteristics and motives as reported in individual questionnaires, and accounts of group origins, structures, activities, and external ties as reported in organizational questionnaires. Importantly, we have also pulled together detailed timelines tracking the development of local resistance groups in relation to supra-local events and organizations. As the chronology in appendix A shows, important national and regional resistance projects were launched in late 2016 and early 2017. But how did such supra-local efforts impact citizens across America? We have found temporal analysis of parallel national and local timelines to be a very valuable method to get a handle on the complex, loosely coupled interplay of local and national initiatives that are propelling the overall anti-Trump resistance. The results may surprise many analysts, because they show that local volunteer group organizers often acted well before professionally staffed national organizations were in place. The national professionals said they were organizing to guide local volunteers, but the actual processes were much more disconnected and differentially sequenced than such missions imply. Very often, local volunteers were quite organized and active well before the national professionals started to offer sustained direction.3

WHO PARTICIPATES IN THE GRASSROOTS RESISTANCE – AND WHY?

According to responses to our Eight Counties online individual questionnaires (see appendix D) – and what we see with our own eyes when attending local meetings around the country – most participants in resistance groups are middle-aged or older white college-educated women. Our largest set of individual responses comes from participants in the pro-Trump counties who fit a consistent profile. Nine of every ten are women, and our field observations suggest that male members of local groups are often husbands or partners of the female members. Furthermore, the leadership teams for groups found in the eight counties are either all-female or (in two instances) include a woman teamed up with one or two men.

Nine of ten respondents report their race as white (compared to 8% who identified as nonwhite and 2% who do not indicate a category); the respondents are even whiter than the surrounding populations in these overwhelmingly white non-big city areas. As for age, these resisters are mostly older adults ranging upward from their thirties into their retirement years (plus one nineteen year old). The overall median age is 55 years. They are highly educated people, with 37% reporting college degrees and another 46% holding advanced post-graduate degrees. Some of these participants are retired. Among both retirees and those still at work, the most frequent occupations cited are schoolteacher or university professor; health care positions; work in retail or human services jobs; and business management positions.

To determine if these results were atypical because the eight pro-Trump counties are relatively conservative places, we analyzed 102 additional individual questionnaire responses collected in mid-2017 from participants in groups across Pennsylvania, including greater
Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. These 102 respondents fit the same profile: 94% are white, 85% are college educated or above; their median age is 61 years; and the overwhelming majority are retired from or actively engaged in middle-class occupations. We did not find any important variations by the size of community. Our confidence in the demographic portrait reported here is further reinforced by the fact that other analysts have reported very similar findings about resistance participants across America (Han and Oyakawa 2018; Putnam and Skocpol 2018; Shulevitz 2017; Tesfaye 2017). Furthermore, it is worth noting that these findings for actual local groups are quite similar to the McKane and McCammon’s (2018) findings about organizers of sister women’s marches all over the country in January 2017.

Why Local People Became Active

Beyond demographics, our questionnaire returns provide vivid insights into the political leanings and motives of people who have joined local resistance groups. Given that many got involved out of frustration about Trump’s election, it is hardly surprising that most of our respondents identify themselves as liberals or progressives (and are taking part in a larger upsurge of activism among such citizens; see Clement, Somashekhar, and Chandler 2017). Among a total of 412 individual respondents (from the eight counties plus the three dozen Pennsylvania groups) who indicated their political leanings on our questionnaires, 252 called themselves “strong Democrats;” 64 said they “leaned” Democrat; 67 claimed to be “Independent, near Democrat”; and eight adopted the sole label “Independent.” Three said they were Republican independents or leaners, while eighteen said they were supporters of other parties. More than nine of every ten, in short, identified as Democrats in some sense.

More interesting are the reasons people give for participation in this kind of relatively demanding and sustained resistance activism. We do not, of course, believe that the participants who took the time to fill out our online questionnaire are statistically representative in any sense – certainly, they do not represent all Americans who sympathize with anti-Trump causes, nor do they represent all who might participate in one event or do one kind of activity such as donate to the ACLU. In fact, these respondents probably are not representative of all the occasional participants in their local groups or all the Facebook followers of those groups. These are almost certainly among the most committed members who have already made an atypical commitment to join an actual, ongoing group. Nevertheless, it is telling and important to know who these respondents are (as described above) and why they say they chose to become very active in 2017. Many respondents predictably report that they felt a sudden jolt from the electoral returns. “After the election,” explained one resister, “I was devastated by the results. I decided I wasn’t going to sit back and do nothing. I wanted to take my country back.” This explanation is, in fact, quite parallel to the reasons Tea Party activists gave for becoming newly active eight years earlier, following a presidential election and inauguration that left them equally determined to “take back” the America they thought they knew (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, ch. 2). Clearly, national elections with results that surprise or enrage many people can kick start political activism by large numbers of Americans in all fifty states and many localities.

Yet grassroots resisters cite reasons beyond Trump’s win for their heightened engagement. In interviews and online questionnaires, we asked both leaders and participants “Why did you decide to get involved? What do you hope to achieve?” Table 1 provides a typical sampling of the word-for-word answers we got from people in North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Figure 1 aggregates the various types of reasons people cited, coding all of each person’s responses for the types of reasons he or she invoked. We used the following six categories: opposition to Trump, need to act personally/become a more active citizen, saving/improving the country and American democracy, finding community/working with like-minded others, electing democrats/new people/progressives, and help/speak for the less privileged.
Table 1. Reasons People Joined Grassroots Resistance Groups

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<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Response when asked: Why did you decide to get involved? What do you hope to achieve?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PA woman, age 62</td>
<td>“After the election, I was devastated by the results. I decided I wasn’t going to sit back and do nothing. I wanted to take my country back. As a result, I attended the Women’s March and I weekly make phone calls to senators and congressmen. I hope to become more active in being a true citizen of the U.S.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>WI woman, age 59</td>
<td>“Upset over the election – be with like-minded people. Stop some of the GOP agenda.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>OH woman, age 61</td>
<td>“Something needed to be done to save our democracy.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>OH man, age 52</td>
<td>“Trump. Trump out.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OH woman, age 39</td>
<td>“I felt helpless in the wake of the election. In the community I live, especially, I hoped to share thoughts with like-minded people – to feel a local connection. I hope the conversation continues and our group can bring about positive change locally, statewide and be a part of a bigger picture change in the country.”</td>
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<td>NC woman, age 46</td>
<td>“I cannot sit on the sidelines while others try to tear down our country. I hope to help educate citizens [in] our red county that are frustrated to contact their representatives. I want to support local grassroots candidates to get elected to office.”</td>
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<td>WI woman, age 74</td>
<td>“Very concerned about the future of our country and planet after the election of a man who is a lot of bluster but no substance.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>WI woman, age 60</td>
<td>“I decided to get involved because I can’t just sit by and watch what is happening to our rights in this country without doing anything. I hope to help progressives get elected in future elections. I hope to bring attention to what the proposed changes in healthcare mean to the average American, and I hope to show future generations what is important and how to stand up for what is right, just, moral, and ethical.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>NC woman, age 62</td>
<td>“I want a positive inclusive country.”</td>
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<td>NC woman, age 30</td>
<td>“I felt like my voice was not being heard. My family’s interests were not going to be protected. I felt like my new ‘president’ was a dangerous lawbreaker. I felt like it was my responsibility to help the disenfranchised citizens who feel like I do.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>OH woman, age 55</td>
<td>“I hope to be part of helping stop the madness that is taking over this country. Lying and hatred are becoming acceptable. Individual rights are being assaulted at every turn. I desperately want Congress to work together and stop the incessant partisanship that is paving the way for Trump to dismantle everything good that this country stands for.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>OH woman, age 49</td>
<td>“To know other people shared my concerns and learn new ways that I can contribute my efforts, also to stay on top of all the information. To make a difference, strength in numbers.”</td>
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Drawing on all of our questionnaire returns, figure 1 classifies the 765 reasons given by 436 of our respondents, revealing that the most commonly cited motives for getting involved were concern for the wellbeing of the country and American democracy and an individually felt need to take action. As several of the responses quoted in table 1 illustrate, respondents often blended these reasons in their answers, invoking an intense worry about America’s public wellbeing in the wake of the November 2016 election along with a heightened sense of
personal responsibility for “being a true citizen of the U.S,” doing more than just voting and passively following events. Shocked by the 2016 election results, many of these respondents seem determined to take personal responsibility, heeding Barack Obama’s oft-quoted call to citizen action: “We are the ones we have been waiting for.”

Figure 1. Reasons for Participation in Grassroots Resistance Groups: 765 reasons offered by 436 respondents to 2017 questionnaires

Many resisters also placed high value on camaraderie and joint action with other local people who share their views and want to join forces to create “strength in numbers.” Social ties formed in local resistance groups and projects are crucial, as we have learned. Leaders and participants who did not previously know one another told us they have become close friends while working together in these groups. This dynamic can have a downside, of course; if one friend pulls back, that can reduce the other’s motivation. Yet at the same time, as the months have passed, people often tell us that they are remaining involved despite feelings of burnout, precisely because they value the fellowship. As one female co-leader in North Carolina put it in an email to the authors explaining why she is sticking with her group while another exhausted leader pulled back, “Working with our community makes me happy. I grow appreciative of the interconnectedness we share. I learn about myself and my world. Indivisible members have been a great blessing to me.” Attachments to fellow participants were apparent in many questionnaire responses. As we suggested earlier, the grassroots resistance has created and reinforced interpersonal social ties in the course of drawing volunteer citizens into new levels of activism.

THE FOUNDING AND SPREAD OF LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

To cast light on exactly how local citizen organizers connected with one another and pulled resistance organizations together, table 2 summarizes key parts of the timelines we have
assembled for the ten grassroots groups operating since late 2016 or early 2017 in our eight pre-Trump counties. The first column indicates how participants in local organizing teams met and started working together, and the second column provides the dates, locations, and attendance estimates for the founding organizational meetings. Summarizing a more complex set of factors, the third column indicates what local group leaders told us about their use of supra-local resources and the inspirations they took from regional or national organizations— including the Pantsuit Nation site, Indivisible, and the Democratic Party, among others.

Some striking patterns are apparent. Cooperative sets of two to five leader-initiators (mostly women) launched these grassroots resistance groups in each county. Tellingly, in most cases members of the leadership teams did not all previously know one another. Some pairs of longstanding friends got involved, but many team members met for the first time in the process of organizing their groups, and only after that became close friends. Local leaders and founding participants often met for the first time after they individually joined online groups or started to participate in regional or national resistance projects. In many accounts, we see the importance of Pantsuit Nation’s shift from a celebratory national Facebook site to a connector of members living close to one another who wanted to meet to share despair and anger and move toward organized resistance. We also see instances of would-be organizers coming together as they planned for—or traveled by bus to—the Women’s March on January 21, 2017. The Women’s March was essential for the development of member ties in many cases as it provided opportunities to socialize and establish shared connections locally.

Table 2. When and How Grassroots Resistance Groups Formed in Eight Pre-Trump Counties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Leader links</th>
<th>First in-person meeting</th>
<th>National/regional support or inspiration?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Indivisible Citizens of Catawba Valley</em></td>
<td>Four women who did not previously know each other planned group at late January county Democratic Party women’s meeting.</td>
<td>Founding meeting of c. 60 on Feb 9, 2017 at local library in Hickory, North Carolina.</td>
<td>Local Dems, especially “Lady Dems,” helped and overlapped, but separate because not all are registered Dems. <em>Indivisible Guide</em> was passed out at Dem meeting. Democracy NC and Indivisibles North Carolina have also inspired, helped local group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Suit Up Wilmington</em></td>
<td>Local woman in pair formed local Pantsuit group right after 11-8-16; met other at November county Democratic Party women’s group meeting.</td>
<td>600 people were signed onto local Pantsuit Facebook group by Nov 10; local organizing meeting of 40-50 by late November 2016 at local restaurant.</td>
<td>Pantsuit Nation was inspiration; loose ties to other NC Indivisible groups and overlaps with local Democratic Party women’s group. Two buses organized for D.C. Women’s March. Ideas from both <em>Indivisible Guide</em> and Bernie’s <em>Rules for Revolutionaries</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Indivisible OH-12 East</em></td>
<td>Man was initiator; met others, esp. women professors, at first meeting. Links through local church and university.</td>
<td>First meeting of OH-12 “subgroup” 43 persons at local church announced in District 12 News for Feb 28, 2017.</td>
<td>Election spurred formation of Indivisible Ohio 12 from which this branch group became independent. Inspired by <em>Indivisible Guide</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Voices Rising</td>
<td>“Strong Moms Rising” grew out of mothers’ group at local church, became “Strong Voices” when men joined.</td>
<td>Emerged “after the election” at local church.</td>
<td>Reaction to November 2016 election the main spur. Two leaders read the <em>Indivisible Guide</em>. Some activities and overlap with Indivisible OH-12 East.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Together Stark</td>
<td>Five initial leaders met via Pantsuit groups; two main leaders met at January 2017 Action Together meeting.</td>
<td>Late November 2016 by c.50 people at local library; created Facebook page with 106 participants.</td>
<td>Pantsuit Nation; Action Together, Nation article, &amp; <em>Indivisible Guide</em> offered tools. Group organized 350 for D.C. Women’s March.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indivisible We Rise – West Central PA</td>
<td>Initiator was a woman who bought bus ticket to D.C. March, met three other women; week later met with two others to plan group.</td>
<td>Meeting of c. 40 early Feb 2017 at local library.</td>
<td>Central PA trip to D.C. Women’s March, plus <em>Indivisible Guide</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Together NEPA – Luzerne Chapter</td>
<td>Two co-lead women met for first time at 11-12-16 “bitch session” meeting.</td>
<td>Forerunner 11-12-16 “bitch session” of women from Clinton campaign and Pantsuit Nation at local restaurant; NEPA organizer recruited Luzerne co-leads. Then recruited participants at December “Meet and Greet” at local restaurant. Formal start with 75 people after three buses went to January 2017 D.C. March.</td>
<td>Started as local “NEPA Pantsuit Nation” group; HRC campaign lists used for recruitment. Three buses went to D.C. Women’s March; some members met then. <em>Indivisible Guide</em> was discussed and spread, inspiring to some, but tips known already to others. Helped “valorize” their local contacting at representatives’ offices. Listed themselves on Indivisible Map, but later joined Action Together until regional coordinator quit in Feb 2017. Action Together NEPA became 501c4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indivisible Hazelton</td>
<td>Founded mostly in name by three co-leaders, two from Clinton campaign plus local immigrant center leader.</td>
<td>Not clear any formal group meeting ever happened.</td>
<td>Co-heads cooperate with Action Together NEPA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WI-03 Indivisible</td>
<td>Tomah woman doctor sent email to overlapping local liberal/progressive networks; co-leader in Sparta.</td>
<td>Tomah meeting of 16 people on Feb 26/2017 with both Tomah and Sparta participants.</td>
<td>“Basic inspiration” was Women’s March. Group website says “we follow the <em>Indivisible Guide</em> and the <em>Resistance Manual</em>.” Coordination for some events with Indivisible LaCrosse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two of these grassroots groups split off from previously formed larger organizations or networks. But in all of the originally created groups, leaders started becoming active right after November 8 and moved during late 2016 toward connecting with one another and making organizational plans. Founding meetings for the groups happened from late November 2016 to late February. Well before the spring of 2017, these groups in the eight pro-Trump counties were all up and running, with leaders, plans, projects, Facebook pages, and often periodic newsletters.

We found that most local groups had founders and participants who, early on, took some inspiration and tactical advice from the *Indivisible Guide*, especially when it was widely disseminated as a Google doc from December 2016 through early 2017. However – and this is an important finding – our comparison of national and local timelines suggests that much of Indivisible’s impact on local resistance organizing may have occurred long before the national political advocacy organization was legally incorporated in March of 2017. What is more, much of the impact seems to have occurred before the new national organization amassed a large budget and built up a paid staff of dozens of D.C. staffers and regional organizers. In the early weeks, “Indivisible” was just the *Guide* offering ideas and inspiration, letting people who read it in communities across America see how they could immediately organize locally to engage in nationally consequential activities such as contacting the local offices of Congressional representatives. Our findings suggest that the *Guide*’s early moral and tactical inspiration – conveyed through the Internet and advertised on MSNBC cable news and by national publications such as The Nation – may have been what mattered most to the formation of the cross-local resistance. The cues for local action the *Guide* offered may have been just as important, or more important, than any formal support Indivisible as a professionally run advocacy organization has offered since it became legally incorporated as a 501(c)4 starting in March 2017. Similarly, the relationships formed through the Pantsuit Nation Facebook group were established long before the group’s creator depoliticized the group by establishing it as a nonprofit. If our tracking of groups in the eight pro-Trump counties is any indication, most of the local resistance groups registered and linked on the Indivisible map or affiliated with Suit Up were probably under way well before national staffing was set up.

**How Widespread are Grassroots Resistance Groups?**

A crucial issue for this section has to do with the geographic scope of grassroots organizing in the anti-Trump resistance movement. Given the geographical realities of partisan polarization in U.S. politics today, we wondered at the onset of this research whether local resistance groups would tend to cluster in the most liberal states and in the more liberal cities and college towns of conservative “red” states. But that is not what we find. Since early 2017, the interactive U.S. map on the national Indivisible website has listed and linked to
thousands of local resistance contacts. As we have discussed, the Indivisible map does include many links to entities that are not actual groups, so we cannot simply add up listings as if they were groups. Instead, our research group has used multiple methods to pin down actual groups in various states and counties, so we can juxtapose post-2016 resistance groups to previously launched local Tea Parties. Our basic Tea Party data were obtained from Skocpol and Williamson (2012, figure 3.1, p. 91) and then supplemented by additional web searches for any more Tea Parties existing at any point since 2009. For both resistance groups and Tea Parties, our mapping efforts are time-consuming and ongoing, but we have developed overviews for North Carolina and Pennsylvania, as displayed in figure 2.

Figure 2. Grassroots Resistance Groups and Tea Parties in Pennsylvania and North Carolina

The state of North Carolina has 100 relatively compact counties, and we have uncovered one or more Tea Parties in forty-six of them, compared to one or more resistance groups in 52 counties. Crucially, both Tea Parties and resistance groups have been organized all across the state: thirty-two North Carolina counties have had both types of groups, and resistance groups
formed since 2016 have been located (and mostly are still operating) in more than half of the state’s counties spread from east to west, north to south. Counties far from the bluest liberal areas of North Carolina have resistance groups in operation. The same is true across Pennsylvania’s 67 counties. Both local Tea Parties and grassroots resistance groups have been organized in forty-four Pennsylvania counties, nearly two-thirds of them. As figure 2 shows, the statewide spread of resistance groups is even more striking than the previous spread of Tea Parties. Tea Parties appeared in a total of 49 Pennsylvania counties, fewer than the 55 that have generated home-grown resistance groups.

Table 3. Anti-Trump Resistance Organizations and Activities in Pro-Clinton and Pro-Trump Pennsylvania Counties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Any resistance groups late 2016 to 2018</th>
<th>Indivisible Map listings August 2017</th>
<th>Women's Marches January 2017</th>
<th>Planned Parenthood health centers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clinton 2016 counties (11)</strong></td>
<td>11 (100%)</td>
<td>11 (100%)</td>
<td>7 (64%)</td>
<td>9 (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trump 2016 counties (56)</strong></td>
<td>44 (79%)</td>
<td>36 (64%)</td>
<td>13 (23%)</td>
<td>7 (13%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Resistance groups and Indivisible listings from authors’ databases; marches with 30 or more participants from Chenoweth and Pressman; centers from Planned Parenthood website.

Lastly, how does the spread and partisan reach of ongoing local resistance organizations compare to other indications of anti-Trump activity since November 2016? This is an interesting question because the longer-term impact of any movement may depend on moving from sporadic protests to consistent efforts to transform electoral politics and government decisions. Officials have become increasingly adept at ignoring and weathering even major public protest events (as the anti-Kavanaugh protests in the fall of 2018 revealed); and some recent left movements such as Occupy Wall Street have not fed into extensive and persistent organized political activities. By contrast, the anti-Trump resistance has done exactly that – and the local organizations it has helped to inspire are much more widespread across the U.S. political geography than even the (themselves remarkably widespread) early 2017 Women’s Marches. In the state of Pennsylvania, as table 3 shows, local groups have taken shape more widely across conservative as well as liberal counties than other indicators of anti-Trump resistance activity. The nationwide feminist advocacy and service organization Planned Parenthood was, for example, an early and prominent sponsor of the 2017 Women’s Marches, and its presence in various metropolitan areas was used as an indicator of organizational resources in McKane and McCammon’s (2018) study of the marches. Seventeen out of 67 Pennsylvania counties have one or more Planned Parenthood health centers; according to Crowd Consortium data, twenty counties had January 21, 2017 Women’s Marches involving thirty or more participants. Counties with marches only partially overlapped those with Planned Parenthood centers, but both lists include far fewer than the 55 Pennsylvania counties that have generated one or more indigenous resistance organizations. Furthermore, the health centers and marches are much more concentrated in the eleven Pennsylvania counties that went for Hillary Clinton in 2016, compared to the 56 counties that voted for Trump. Even contacts listed on the August 2017 Indivisible map were less widespread and more concentrated in liberal counties than grassroots Pennsylvania resistance groups whose members have actually met and worked together on resistance activities. The data in table 3 are convincing evidence that remarkably widespread local groups are at least as important for students of the anti-Trump resistance to investigate as waves of urban protest events.
From all indications, grassroots organizing in America’s current anti-Trump resistance upsurge is not restricted to liberal states or to “blue enclave” areas where voters mostly support Democrats. Even in places where Democrats or liberals are a beleaguered minority, women and men stepped forward after November 2016 to speak out and band together in resistance groups, gaining some visibility in local media in the process (Griffin 2017; Rundio 2017; Shindledecker 2017). Indeed, we find many indications in our field visits, interviews, and questionnaire responses that centrist and liberal residents of conservative counties may have felt an even stronger need to come together than their counterparts in liberal-leaning areas. “In the community I live, especially” said one resident of a conservative Ohio county, “I hoped to share some thoughts with like-minded people – to feel a local connection.” In the most conservative places we visited, local resistance groups have taken pride in mounting public displays of their values – by supporting new candidates for public office, marching in Fourth of July parades, setting up booths at local fairs, and demonstrating in town centers about issues ranging from the Charlottesville killing to the separation of immigrant children from their parents at the southern U.S. border (Bailey 2017; Wilshire 2017). In one such county, interviewees told us that their local resistance group responded to a request for support from local high school students, which then organized a public protest against lax gun laws in the wake of the February 14, 2018 shootings at Florida Parkland High School. The group helped give local young people courage to speak out amidst a sea of gun owners and Second Amendment enthusiasts.

GROUP STRUCTURES AND ACTIVITIES

Resistance group launches depended on the interplay of interpersonal networks and internet-based social media connections. Specifically, users of the Pantsuit Facebook site who were upset by Trump’s 2016 victory were able to find each other, connect, and plan in-person local meetings through the explosion in specialized Facebook groups following the election. Facebook’s platform for open communication via the sharing of direct website links and news article postings allowed Pantsuit Nation members and their followers to see and read about the emotional and political responses to the election. In turn, self-appointed local leaders could use Facebook’s tools to form groups on their own rather than standing down as Pantsuit Nation shifted away from overt political activity.

As local groups organized, Facebook’s format lent itself well to the desires and capabilities of the majority groups whose members we surveyed. Participants could connect with others online as well as face to face, and online connections are especially valuable for retirees, mothers, and others who need to stay at home or miss meetings. Social media has also been a major tool to connect members to one another and inform them about news, resources, and educational opportunities. As one leader explained, “we use Facebook for group discussion, sharing letters or call to action requests and event announcements.” At least three-quarters of the grassroots resistance organizations surveyed in this project have used the sharing and communication capabilities of Facebook to develop or expand membership and deepen membership engagement. Facebook also allows multiple groups to co-host events, creating a digital map of the many ways in which local resistance groups ally with other groups in marches, voter drives, and educational programming. “We have a very active Facebook page with over 650+ members,” one leader reported, and “we use it for a weekly call” to take actions.

While local groups took their first steps toward formalization – by holding founding meetings, setting up Facebook pages, and working out network affiliations – members were simultaneously organizing for instant political action. The start of the Republican-dominated Congress and Trump’s presidency left resisters feeling that they had to contend with many emergencies at once. Because so many U.S. Congressional and state legislative districts are highly gerrymandered to parcel parts of cities and counties into separate jurisdictions, local
resistance groups founded in natural communities soon realized they had to learn jurisdictional codes and establish teams or subgroups to make regular visits and direct phone calls and mailings to multiple legislative office. In a typical move, Action Together Stark in the Canton, Ohio area, set up separate teams for Districts 7 and 16, each led by one member of the overall leadership team. And in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, many Action Together members joined with compatriots from neighboring counties to send people each week to “Tuesdays with Toomey” visits at Republican Senator Tim Toomey’s regional office.

Scholars who study civic engagement have found that the development of a division of labor and subdivision of tasks is a very effective way to encourage member participation and develop new citizen skills (Andrews, Gans, Baggetta, Han, and Lim 2010; Baggetta, Han, and Andrews 2013; Han 2014). This is exactly the sort of thing that happened in most of the groups we studied as they gathered steam in 2017. In many cases, dividing up tasks was a natural step for these new groups to take, because participants arrived at (initially frequent) face-to-face meetings with varied passions, skills, and issue priorities. Virtually all were horrified at threats they perceived from the Trump administration and the GOP Congress; and most wanted to fight to try to save the Affordable Care Act from repeal once Trump and the Congressional leadership made this a top 2017 priority. But beyond that, various subgroups of resisters cared most about the environment, were especially determined to push for gerrymandering reforms, or were worried about education spending cutbacks at the local and state as well as national levels. Local leaders often told us that in the early weeks and months their groups defined certain group-wide priorities and, at the same time, set up task forces or subcommittees to focus on specific issue areas or to take charge of particular tasks or tactics. Maintaining internal communication thus became an additional pressing priority – to let people know about events, meetings, and national developments. Communication was often formalized not just on group Facebook pages but through the regular dissemination of newsletters via email or Google docs.

Almost every one of the several dozen groups we have followed devoted considerable participant energy to the early year-long fight to save the Affordable Care Act. That fight was ideal for a combination of local organizing and national purpose, because it involved repeated critical junctures as each house of Congress took steps toward repealing or eviscerating the landmark 2010 law that extended health insurance coverage to millions of Americans. Resistance efforts on this front were especially intense and relentless during the spring and summer of 2017, when local groups used tactics like letter writing and “post card parties,” calls or visits to elected officials and their staffs at district offices, writing opinion pieces, and holding public demonstrations and “die-ins” (for accounts, see Griffin 2017; Weigel 2017; Zremski 2017). Defending health reform was a common challenge around which disparate local resisters could organize, build ties, and hone skills. Members of grassroots resistance groups were engaged at all levels and quite intensely; and even as efforts across many places were nationally attuned, local networks of resisters could take steps to inform their neighbors and local news outlets about what the Affordable Care Act does and what would be lost if it were repealed. Because this “all hands on deck” struggle went on for quite some time, it taught local members and regional networks ways to engage the media and press their representatives on other issues.

Finally, the fight to block health reform repeal boosted the widespread resistance because it ended up “winning” in two important ways. Congressional votes to repeal the Affordable Care Act ultimately fell just short in the Senate, and grassroots efforts at least contributed to this outcome. Those efforts prodded the GOP Congress to keep trying different variants of repeal over many months. Secondly, they pushed Maine Senator Susan Collins to become one of three Republican senators who blocked the repeal (Cassidy 2017; Levin, Greenberg, and Padilla 2017b). What is more, in a larger sense, during 2017 U.S. public support for the Affordable Care Act shifted from net negative to net positive (Kaiser Family Foundation 2018). Whether or not widespread local resistance agitation directly caused either the
Congressional repeal failure or the shift toward more favorable public views of health reform, these coincidences were encouraging to resistance members, who learned vital lessons about how to act locally to affect national outcomes.

THE QUESTION OF GROUP PERSISTENCE

Volunteer-led civic groups are often dismissed by political professionals who argue that they have trouble sustaining themselves without paid staffers or leaders. Volunteers can be passionate at first, the story goes, but soon burn out, decide to turn to other private or public endeavors, or undercut their group’s effectiveness by falling into interpersonal feuds. Group meetings, moreover, are hard to schedule and sustain. In our ongoing research, we have made an effort to track local resistance groups, to discover whether most or many fall victim to such risks and to learn how those that have sustained themselves manage to do it.

After the rush of engagement in their first weeks and months, most of the groups we have followed met face to face less often – usually they convened about once a month. To keep going, many groups have developed divisions of labor to allow subcommittees or task forces to push forward with parts of their overall activities. By the fall of 2017, many groups faced a watershed as they moved on from efforts to save the Affordable Care Act to focus on other events or issues about which members were less uniformly passionate. At various points in their evolution, moreover, volunteer leadership teams experienced inevitable shifts. Perhaps one leader in a close-pair or team got burnt out or faced a family emergency – predictable sorts of developments that can leave volunteer leaders without accustomed partners and, as in many of the groups we have tracked, force a redesign of leadership roles and responsibilities. Some groups have suspended activities, including one whose core participants simply shifted their commitments to other ongoing party and progressive efforts in their area. But most of the local resistance groups we have studied have kept going.

Although we have not found any single pattern of group evolution or any uniform formula for persistence, we can suggest some recurrent patterns. Longevity for these voluntarily formed grassroots resistance groups does not seem dependent on exactly when or how groups formed in the first place; nor does it depend on their maintaining consistent ties to any regional or national network. Most groups in our study that formed in late 2016 or early 2017 have persisted ever since. Other groups formed by splitting from larger area organizations to become more convenient for a local cluster of resistance participants. Local organizational persistence has not depended on the original leadership team remaining intact. But virtually all local groups have, sooner or later, had to revamp their original leadership teams – either to address shifting member interests or to surmount a crisis when a key leader pulls back or departs. Persistent organizations use such junctures as occasions to recruit new leaders. As the following vignettes suggest, some groups in our study have reacted to changing circumstances by redesigning activities, divisions of labor, leadership teams, and meeting formats:

From a Pennsylvania group leader: “The original structure was a small handful of people making stuff up as we went along. Now we have captains in each congressional district, an IT guy, a person concentrating on state legislation, a blog master. And we're about to do some strategic planning which will result in a more developed team structure and decision-making system.”

From a North Carolina group leader: “We started out running for the first four months on “disgust,” then focused on organizing for “the long run” with a ten-person administrative committee that divided up responsibilities.”

From an Ohio group leader: “After the initial period, the group meets as a whole every three to four months, and otherwise works through “six issues groups” focused on Diversity and Immigration, Women’s Issues, Healthcare, Elections, Education, and Environment.”
Our early 2019 Pennsylvania group leader questionnaire results offer further insights on group persistence. Even with redistricting in that state, only one of the leaders who responded to our 2019 survey stated that an original organization had shuttered, while two said groups had merged. Men have reportedly taken on more leadership responsibilities. Despite more difficulty holding in-person meetings, groups continue to use Facebook and social media as well as email and newsletters to communicate with adherents. Various Pennsylvania groups have incorporated as nonprofits, and two have instituted regular dues to self-fund events or support phone banking or canvassing for favored candidates. Overall, our questionnaire results indicate that the dozens of groups whose leaders responded plan to remain active at least through the 2020 elections.

**ELECTORAL ACTIVITIES AND EVOLVING POLITICAL TIES**

By early 2018, leaders of national organizations like Indivisible and the Women’s March were calling for grassroots resistance groups to focus on upcoming primary and general elections (Alter 2018; Chenoweth and Pressman 2018; King, Hernandez, and Hughes 2018; North 2018). However, evidence from our sources and many others suggests that most grassroots resistance groups had already incorporated electoral activities into their regular repertoires. Like the local Tea Parties headed into 2010, today’s grassroots anti-Trump resistance groups take a “do everything” view of politics. To be sure, they stress policy campaigns such as defending health reform or pushing against Trump environmental rollbacks. Yet from early in their existence many groups have also looked ahead to the next rounds of elections.

*Running for Office and Getting Out the Vote*

Initially, explained one Pennsylvania leader, her group followed the *Indivisible Guide’s* advice to agitate against Trump era policies, but eventually “we had so many people running for local offices we switched to an offense vs. defense approach where people could choose if they wanted to focus on resistance throughout the week or focusing on trying to help get [Democrats] elected.” Early on, agreed another Pennsylvania group leader, it became clear that her group would do more than lobby against Trump initiatives. As she explained, “to make policy we had to govern and to govern we had to win elections. So, since we live in a very Democratic area, we are partnering with Red districts. We have ‘adopted’ a PA House race [in order] to unseat the Republican as part of Turn PA Blue. We are also supporting Wolf and Casey with fundraisers, etc.” In a more conservative area of North Carolina, meanwhile, some resistance group participants backed a local doctor running to unseat the incumbent Republican representative in the U.S. Congress. A group in Ohio decided to prioritize collecting signatures on petitions to get an anti-gerrymandering referendum on the November 2018 ballot. Virtually everywhere, moreover, members of resistance groups attended workshops to learn about voter registration procedures in anticipation of mounting such outreach for future elections.

As trusted sources for information and spaces for civic engagement, resistance groups and networks were well positioned not just to get out the local vote but also to support candidates – or even to generate them from their own ranks. Especially in areas where Democrats had previously ceded offices uncontested to the GOP, resistance group members either ran for office themselves or worked on behalf of reform-oriented Democrats appearing on the ticket for the first time in years. In more liberal areas, resistance groups sometimes ran reform-oriented people in Democratic primaries but, win or lose at that stage, usually delivered many kinds of support to Democrats in the general election.
Responses to our Pennsylvania-wide 2019 questionnaires indicate that dozens of groups in forty-nine (out of 67) counties engaged in an impressive array of electoral activities during the 2018 midterm elections. Respondents said that all but four of their 82 groups engaged in election-related activities, and the vast majority reported that the group itself or many members got involved in either four to six types of activities (forty-five groups) or seven or eight types (thirty groups). By far the most prevalent activity was canvassing, a very time-consuming and emotionally demanding kind of volunteer work in which resistance group members repeatedly sallied out into the surrounding community to knock on doors and start conversations. Some groups got started early, with the aim of asking their neighbors about important issues in an open-ended way prior to working for any particular candidate. Eventually most groups generated canvassers to work for Democratic candidates they endorsed, or on behalf of all Democratic candidates running in their county or area.

Figure 3. Activities in 2018 Elections Reported by 82 Grassroots Resistance Groups in 49 Pennsylvania Counties

Number of groups reporting activity by organization or many members

Local resistance groups, in short, provided the woman-power and man-power to greatly expand the number of Americans who could be contacted face to face in this pivotal election, the first after Donald Trump’s victory. All of this started in 2017 and 2018 in special elections or state-level contests. From then through the 2018 midterms, resistance groups mostly led by women played major roles in fueling Democratic victories or greatly improving the vote shares of Democratic candidates all over the United States (Bethea 2017; Hayes and Lawless 2017; Lewis-Kraus 2017).

Relations with the Democratic Party

Our research has also probed the evolving relationships of grassroots resistance groups to local Democratic Party organizations – usually county organizations but also town or precinct organizations in more densely populated areas. Although more than nine of ten of their
participants identified (more or less strongly) as Democrats, local anti-Trump resistance groups were originally organized independent of formal Democratic Party channels. In some localities we have studied, vibrant Democratic Party women’s groups lent early encouragement, and sometimes the county party office was the site of an initial resistance organizing meeting. But in most places, local Democratic Party organizations were either moribund or unfriendly to the new organizers, leaving resistance groups and networks to take shape entirely on their own.

Tellingly, even resistance groups that originated with some help from local Democrats decided, like those founded on their own, to establish their own names and identities. Everywhere, local resistance leaders have told us that they see advantages in standing somewhat apart from the formal Democratic Party, for one of two opposite reasons – either because this gives them greater freedom of political action on the “progressive” left, or because their group includes some members who do not consider themselves Democrats. Especially in conservative areas, resistance groups see real advantages in presenting themselves as “concerned citizens” reaching out to neighbors, friends, and coworkers who share worries about Trump and current U.S. policy directions but do not feel comfortable joining an openly partisan venture.

The desire of many resistance groups to organize somewhat apart from party structures resembles earlier Tea Party stances toward the GOP. Nevertheless, there may be a key difference. Tea Partiers have always operated to the right of the Republican Party, viewing themselves as stronger, truer “conservatives” pushing for a purified GOP whose candidates and officials would refuse to compromise with President Obama or Democrats (Parker and Barreto 2014; Williamson and Skocpol 2012). But today’s grassroots anti-Trump groups and many of their members span a wider range from centrist to far left, and group outreach efforts are often directed to middle-of-the-road fellow citizens. Furthermore, in contrast to Tea Party pressure on the GOP to refuse any and all governing compromises, we do not see much evidence that most local resistance groups are pushing maximalist far-left stands, let alone insisting that Democrats shun all forms of compromise. In special elections, resistance participants were among those knocking on doors and getting out the vote to help elect moderate Democrats – including Connor Lamb in Pennsylvania’s 18th Congressional District (Franke-Ruta 2018; Putnam 2018) and Doug Jones in the Alabama Senate contest (Bethea 2017).

Relations between resistance groups and party organizations also matter. In the early phases of grassroots resistance activity during 2017, interactions were often tense or standoffish, but a lot depended on the initial reactions of local Democratic Party chairs and committees. In the online questionnaire responses we collected in 2017 from leaders of thirty-six groups in counties all across Pennsylvania, more than half of the groups reportedly had cooperative ties with local Democrats, but fourteen said they had hostile or wary relationships, or no ties at all. One local resistance leader reported that “local Dems are not very interested in us. Believe it or not.” If Democrats in a given area were disorganized or hostile to newcomers, emerging anti-Trump resistance groups could not readily work with them. As one local resistance leader explained, “Any outreach to the party… to get them to attend or even just promote our event has been rebuffed.” Some places had many vacant precinct or committee posts and “old boy” Democratic chairs who viewed their skeletal county organizations as little more than arms of their own campaigns for endless reelection to local government positions.

Field visits to two counties apiece in North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin made it possible for us to explore resistance group ties to Democrats in greater depth. In one county, local Democrats were fragmented in 2017 and the county chairman rarely responded to anyone who tried to contact him; many county posts were vacant and some local Democratic leaders and officeholders had probably supported Donald Trump in 2016. Not surprisingly, new resistance groups got the cold shoulder from that county’s Democratic
Mobilization

Party, and in fact moved in 2018 to run their own candidates for party offices. At the opposite extreme, in other counties we visited in mid-2017, local parties were welcoming the new energy from resistance groups and had moved to co-sponsor events or initiatives with them. Across most counties, relationships between local parties and resistance groups initially fell between these extremes.

By early 2018, many local Democratic Party chairs and officials had adopted overtly friendly yet hands-off attitudes toward nearby resistance groups, allowing the two sides to push in the same direction during the 2018 midterms. At the same time, Democratic candidates for national or state offices often bypassed local parties to reach out directly to the resistance networks, eager to tap volunteer canvassers for their campaigns. We saw such direct ties between resistance groups and campaigns in Ohio and northeast Pennsylvania; and other observers have documented similar ties in other places (Frank 2019; Putnam 2018).

As 2018 marched on, relations between resistance groups and local and state Democratic parties remained standoffish in some places but became more cooperative in most places. Overall, respondents to our early 2019 questionnaire said that thirty-eight groups had close, excellent, or good relationships with their local parties, and another thirteen groups reportedly had improved their relations with local Democrats over the past year. Some groups provided little information, but only twelve said they had no ties at all to local Democrats or described their relations as tense or downright hostile. However, cooperation and conflicts often play out at the same time, as one Pennsylvania group leader eloquently explained in an email:

Many of our members, especially board members and others on the planning committees, are simultaneous members in the democratic party (district members, local and state) and work with advisory groups for many democratic candidates, so we have our tentacles branched out into the democratic party... much to the chagrin of some who hold the power in the local party. Again, this is not so much about the candidates themselves (although there are a few that know we are working to replace them with progressive candidates), as it is the power structure within the democratic party itself. There is definitely a 'competitive' feel and some drama between us and the base of the party, but I feel this is understandable and a good sign that we are having an influence! We are the hardest group of workers during elections, and the [D]emocrats know it. The candidates we endorsed love us. We are bold and are not going away.

From our vantage point as research observers, ties between local and state party committees and resistance networks are deepening everywhere, despite complex and shifting reactions on both sides. Whether relations are wary or warm at any given juncture, the fact is that large numbers of resistance activists are running for and winning local and state Democratic Party posts – pushing an ongoing transformation that seems inexorable. In one Ohio county, for example, a resister ran for a state legislative office she did not win, and then agreed to become the new Democratic county chair with the blessing of an older incumbent who, only a year before, had regarded the upstart resistance in her area with trepidation. By early 2019, the outgoing county chair saw the value of the new activist energy and willingly handed the reins to her successor.

Meanwhile, in Pennsylvania, elections to Democratic Party posts are held every four years; and the first such contests after 2016 happened in the spring of 2018, when resisters across the state ran for precinct posts and county and state committee slots. Data on the results must be collected county by county, an arduous process we are only starting to conduct. But preliminary indications from our field visits and questionnaires suggest many gains for newly installed local and state party leaders from resistance backgrounds. In larger counties, posts newly filled by resisters are clustered in particular precincts where grassroots anti-Trump groups have been active (Frank 2019, chapter 3). In smaller counties, party leadership and committee positions are few enough in number that resistance group members have been able to win all or most of them. In one rural county in the middle of Pennsylvania, resistance activists simply moved into the party. “We have become the local Democratic Party,” a leader
responding to our questionnaire said, “at least its local leadership: the Chair, Secretary, and two of four District Representatives.” Conflicts will surely keep happening as resisters move into Democratic Party offices, but party organizations are likely to be strengthened in the process.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have presented a rich array of new evidence about the founders, participants, structures, and activities of local grassroots groups that came into existence across many states and communities starting right after the November 2016 election. Like a parallel conjuncture in 2008 when Tea Parties proliferated after one political party won control of both the presidency and Congress, this grassroots, voluntary citizens’ movement galvanized many Americans to step up their activism well beyond occasional voting by setting up new organized resistance groups in their communities. Our work goes beyond previous research on the anti-Trump resistance by focusing on sustained groups rather than protest events, and by extensively documenting the activities of local groups rather than focusing on professionally run national advocacy organizations. As we show, local resistance groups have emerged and been active in communities of all sizes and partisan orientations, and they are much more widespread across the U.S. political geography than multi-city protest rallies and marches have been during the Trump presidency. We also have reason to believe that grassroots resistance organizations formed after November 2016 are just as geographically widespread and perhaps more numerous overall than the local Tea Parties founded all across the United States starting in 2009.

Contrary to some national media portrayals, we find that most of the protagonists in this locally-rooted yet widespread resistance have been middle-class, higher-educated white women. Their efforts have not only sustained opposition to Donald Trump’s presidency (Balz 2018), but have also encouraged a remarkable upsurge of female Democratic candidacies for state and national offices (Alter 2018; Carlsen and Liu 2018; Dittmar 2017; Hayes and Lawless 2017; Lewis-Kraus 2017). Today’s female-led, anti-Trump resistance represents a 21st-century reincarnation and updating of longstanding female citizen activism in American democracy (Carpenter and Moore 2014; Goss 2013).

Not until 2020 and beyond will scholars be able to assess the full impact of the current anti-Trump resistance on the liberal end of the U.S. political spectrum, or determine whether the resistance impact is similar or different from the earlier impact of Tea Parties on the right. It also remains to be seen whether new ties between these local citizen groups and Democratic organizations, candidates, and office-holders will prove sufficiently extensive or enduring to fashion a new “anchoring movement” (Schlozman 2015) for the 21st-century Democratic Party. Whatever unfolds, our research so far suggests that movement sparked by the Trump election will not push U.S. liberal politics toward the uncompromising far left. The kinds of grassroots resistance groups we have discovered and studied do not espouse the sorts of purist ideological stances sometimes taken by professionally run progressive advocacy groups. Grassroots groups have strong local connections, and their participants are closely engaged with candidates and officeholders with varied backgrounds and views. If these predominately female-led voluntary groups persist as an important part of center-left politics in the United States, they are unlikely to promote further ideological polarization. As before throughout American history, women’s civic activism may revitalize democratic engagement and promote a new birth of responsive government in communities across the land.
NOTES

1 See Gose, Skocpol, and Williamson (forthcoming) for a full comparison of the grassroots Tea Party and the grassroots anti-Trump resistance.

2 Twelve of the local Pennsylvania groups that responded to the 2019 questionnaire had also filled out the 2017 organizational questionnaire. Although that is not much overlap, the dozen repeat responses add to what we learned about 2018 developments from all the 2019 questionnaire responses.

3 Although beyond the scope of evidence we can systematically present here, we have noted instances in which local resistance groups disaffiliate from supra local networks to which they previously belonged, including Indivisible. Local leaders also pick and choose what to take from various national organizations offering support, and we frequently see them parry or simply ignore directives from above, if those directives do not make good sense in their local contexts.

4 In Skocpol, Putnam, and Tervo (forthcoming), we provide much more detail and discussion of the election involvements of Pennsylvania resistance groups and their evolving ties to Democratic Party committees, as these processes have played out in varied contexts ranging from inner cities and declining rust belt areas, to suburbs and exurbs, and rural counties.

REFERENCES


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Gose, Leah, Theda Skocpol, and Vanessa Williamson. Forthcoming. “Saving America Once Again – from the Tea Party to the Anti-Trump Resistance.” In Upending American Politics, edited by Theda Skocpol and Caroline Tervo.
APPENDIX A.

National Resistance Groups and Events Timeline

We have identified five national level organizations formed between October 2016 and January 2017 to inform, guide, or coordinate local groups. These are Pantsuit Nation, Suit Up Nation, Indivisible, the Women’s March, and the Action Together Network.
Pantsuit Nation was the first group to form as a secret Facebook group on October 20th 2016. The secret group had over 1.5 million members by Election Day, with new members being added by other, likely female, members with the hopes of sharing encouraging stories about Hillary Clinton’s then-expected win. After Trump’s win, the group became more a support group. In December 2016, the group’s creator, Libby Chamberlain, signed a book deal and made the group into a formalized nonprofit organization. The book deal meant that she took the stories posted to the page and used them under the umbrella of a nonprofit she founded with the same name. Because of this shift, members of Pantsuit Nation were forced to find new platforms to express support for political candidates as the nonprofit status of Pantsuit Nation rendered political support impossible.

In response to the change in status of Pantsuit Nation, Suit Up Nation was founded December 1st, 2016. Suit Up Nation began online with the focus on the hashtag phrase “Love Trumps Hate.” It supports a call-to-action list that is similar to the Unity Principles of the Women’s March (see below). The group supports gender equality and intersectionality, spreading to Canada in early 2017. Many of the groups that formed under this title are very active in supporting political candidates of their choosing.

The Women’s March began with the simple idea of a holding a march in Washington the day following Trump’s inauguration. The March organizers secured permits December 9th, 2016 and worked through a month of seeking out a diverse set of organizers that fulfilled their main message of “women’s rights are human rights and human rights are women’s rights.” The March was wildly successful, attracting millions across the globe. The group faced challenges in pushing out pro-life groups that wanted to march, as their Unity Principles supported pro-choice policies. The Women’s March hosted a Women’s Convention in Detroit Fall 2016 with 5,000 plus participants. Power to the Polls was the nationwide efforts on the March’s anniversary. Many groups organized marches across the nation, but some could not get the Women’s March seal of approval because they were not in alignment completely with the Unity Principles or they were not using the correct language to market the event with the Women’s March logos and images.

The Indivisible movement came about following the election when Democratic campaigners posted a guide to Google Docs about how liberal progressives could use methods of the Tea Party to promote their ideas and create lasting change. These ideas are mostly aimed at members of congress and hoping to limit the scope of Trump’s reach. The guide was picked up by almost 1,000 individual groups in 2016, some coming together from two strangers reading the guide or friends sharing it and inspiring a group to form. The guide encourages a defensive strategy, which means candidate selection has not been their main focus—though this will likely change. The group’s national presence was felt with the National General Strike on February 17th, 2017, with a call to action to “do nothing” all day and have their economic force be felt. Thousands of Indivisible chapters exist across the nation.

The Action Together Network serves, as its name implies, to connect group leaders and provide tools. We do not have a specific founding date. Action Together can be made up of other organization’s chapters or have its own (some of which exist in PA). This network group is national and still active.