

Shifting Grounds of Collaboration in Changing Contexts: Evolving Environmental Networks in the Basque Country

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Submitted: 31 January 2025 **Accepted:** 18 September 2025 **Published:** 22 October 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue “The Politics of Environmental Networks” edited by Petr Ocelík (Masaryk University), Monica Di Gregorio (University of Leeds), Carlos Bravo-Laguna (Leiden University), and Eva Fernández G. (University of Geneva), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i440>

Abstract

Interorganizational collaboration is crucial for collective action and political activism, particularly in environmental advocacy. Social network analysis tools are increasingly used to study collaboration among civic and political actors outside traditional institutions. While the literature has examined multiple factors influencing collaboration, less attention has been paid to how their predictive power evolves over time in response to contextual political shifts. This article aims to fill this gap by exploring the impact of rapid political changes on collaborative relationships in collective action. Using data on interorganizational collaboration within the environmental collective action field in the Basque Country (Spain) between 2007 and 2017, we analyze how large-scale transformative events and cycles of contention moderate the influence of various predictors of collaborative ties. More specifically, we use statistical network analyses to examine the relative impact of seven determinants of event co-attendance across six yearly observations. Our findings indicate that during the last years of violent conflict, shared identification with Basque nationalism facilitated collaboration, while disagreements over ETA's armed struggle hindered it. However, in the post-conflict phase, ideological factors lost relevance, suggesting a shift from a model of “militant confrontation” to one of “pragmatic cooperation.” Nonetheless, pragmatic considerations did not completely replace ideological commitments as the main drivers of collaboration. Instead of a straightforward shift, this transition is characterized by the blurring of previous boundaries, not by the establishment of clearly defined new structuring factors. As a result, the collaboration network has become more pluralistic but also less predictable.

Keywords

collective action fields; cycles of contention; environmental activism; interorganizational collaboration; polarization; political context; social boundaries; social movement coalitions; social network analysis; transformative events

1. Introduction

Collaborative networks among organizations have long been recognized not only as key features of collective action processes but also as constitutive elements of social movements (Diani, 1992; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Interorganizational collaboration is a vital pillar of collective action and political advocacy, significantly influencing the endurance and eventual political success of these efforts. Unsurprisingly, coalition building has drawn increasing attention within the subfields of contentious politics and social movement studies (e.g., McCammon & Moon, 2015; Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010). Mapping patterns of interorganizational ties allows analysts to understand how diverse actors align, prioritize issues, and navigate ideological or strategic tensions.

Environmental movements have been a particularly fertile terrain for examining these dynamics. Whether the focus is on offline interaction (Di Gregorio, 2012; Diani, 1995a) or online communication networks (Ackland & O'Neil, 2011; Lusher & Ackland, 2011; Simpson, 2015), environmental collective action exemplifies the challenge of sustaining alliances across lines of ideological, organizational, and tactical divides. Addressing public issues not easily tied to specific social groups or interests, organizations face the challenge of mobilizing broad and heterogeneous constituencies and must construct and diffuse worldviews that transcend dominant societal cleavages—whether class-based, nationalist, or religious. Their trajectories, moreover, depend not only on activists' strategic choices but on shifting contextual conditions. Adopting this perspective, this article examines how transformations in the “contextual structure” (Rucht, 1996) interact with identity, interest, and interpersonal linkages to shape collaboration patterns in environmental activism. In doing so, we move beyond purely *dispositional* or *structural* explanations (Desmond, 2014) and consider the dynamic interplay between perceived organizational (in)compatibility and fluctuating contexts, contributing to recent calls to integrate network perspectives and temporality (Crossley & Diani, 2018). To this end, we present a new analytical framework that synthesizes insights from prior research on social movement coalitions and apply it to a dynamic empirical setting.

Empirically, we investigate how sudden changes in the political landscape alter the grounds on which collective actors promoting environmental demands collaborate with one another, building on earlier applications of network analytic techniques to environmentalism (Di Gregorio, 2012; Diani, 1995a; Lusher & Ackland, 2011; Saunders, 2013; Simpson, 2015). Our case is a longitudinal network study of interorganizational collaboration in the environmental collective action field (ECAF) in the Basque Country (Spain). We employ Quadratic Assignment Procedure (QAP) regression models to assess the relative salience of various determinants of co-attendance at environmental collective action events across six yearly observations from 2007 to 2017. This period encompasses two pivotal contextual changes: a downturn in the cycle of environmental contention with demobilization starting in 2009, and the end of a 40-year ethno-national armed conflict in 2011. Essentially, we observe a transition from a model characterized by “militant confrontation” to one defined by “pragmatic cooperation” (Ibarra & de la Peña, 2004). Over time, the weight of shared ideology-based identities diminished, while pragmatic and strategic interests took center stage.

These findings show that collaborative logics are contingent on broader sociopolitical shifts and that relational patterns evolve alongside political changes, albeit not always predictably. Rather than responding uniformly to shifting conditions, collaboration logics are reweighted over time as macro-political

transformations interact with organizational identities, issue agendas, and prior ties. We advance an interactive perspective on collective action networks, showing how different grounds for collaboration—ideological, pragmatic, interpersonal—gain or lose salience across changing contexts. In the Basque case, we find both continuity and transformation: enduring patterns of pragmatic cooperation persisted even as ideological boundaries were reconfigured after the end of the armed conflict. These results contribute to broader debates on the resilience and adaptability of (environmental) political networks, highlighting how political shifts recalibrate the grounds on which collaboration is built.

2. What Explains Collaboration Between Activist Groups?

In recent decades, a new area of research has focused on how and when collective actors establish different forms of collaboration or “coalitions” between them in pursuit of their demands. Viewing coalitions as instances where distinct activist groups agree to cooperate towards a shared goal (McCammon & Moon, 2015, p. 326), this developing subfield has identified multiple factors that facilitate or hinder collaboration among collective action organizations. To organize our literature review, we distinguish between relational (or dyadic) factors—i.e., properties of the relationship between two actors or entities—that act as facilitators or barriers towards collaboration between specific pairs of groups, and external contextual conditions that can either promote or hinder certain types of political collaboration at a given time and place.

2.1. Dyadic Incentives and Disincentives for Interorganizational Collaboration

The first strand of research examines the broad spectrum of factors that influence organizational decisions to collaborate with one another. Existing literature on social movement coalition-making (for reviews, see Brooker & Meyer, 2018; McCammon & Moon, 2015; Van Dyke & Amos, 2017; Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010) has identified various factors thought to facilitate or hinder collaboration between specific pairs of collective actors. These can be classified into three groups: (a) identity-based congruence; (b) pragmatic and instrumental incentives; and (c) interpersonal relationships. Although presented separately for clarity, these categories are, in practice, interrelated and often influence one another in complex ways.

Identity-based congruence refers to the degree of similarity between collective actors’ socio-political identities, understood as “broader representations of actors’ position in relation to other actors and to broader representations of social life than those associated with issue agendas” (Diani & Pilati, 2011, p. 266). These typically “relate more or less explicitly to broader societal cleavages and systems of meaning” (Diani, 1995a, p. 9). When organizational identities are congruent, solidarity and attribution of similarity are more likely to emerge between collective actors, increasing the likelihood of joint collective action. Conversely, dissimilarity between identities can feed animosity and prejudice, hampering collective action coordination (Saunders, 2008). A wide range of organizational identities can be relevant as solidarity-generating bonds influencing coalition formation, including membership in a specific social category (Tajfel, 1978), ideological identities (Diani & Pilati, 2011; Diani et al., 2018), or shared values and discourse (Di Gregorio, 2012). For instance, in the case of environmentalism, Saunders (2007b, 2013, pp. 31–35) distinguishes between four main ideological strands (conservationism, reformism, political ecology, and radical ecology) that generate collective (sub)identities and shape interorganizational relationships.

Pragmatic and instrumental incentives refer to perceived organizational similarities and differences that actors regard as potentially beneficial or detrimental to achieving their goals. For example, groups pursuing similar objectives often have a strong incentive to collaborate, even without identity-based bonds (Diani et al., 2010, p. 220). These pragmatic alliances can be viewed as “strategic transactions” (Tilly, 2005), based on a rational cost-benefit calculus aimed at maximizing the impact of collective action, usually in the short term. However, establishing and maintaining collaboration between groups is potentially “a costly business, requiring time and other material resources as well as the capability to come to terms with potential partners’ orientations, interests and even foes” (Diani, 1995a, pp. 101–102). Accordingly, it cannot be taken for granted, even when sharing common programmatic goals and demands. These investments and potential costs may be overcome by the presence of strong group solidarities grounded in a shared collective identity (see Diani, 1995a, p. 102, 2015) or by pragmatic structural facilitators (such as similar organizational structures or styles of organizing, or geographic proximity) that help reduce coordination burdens even in the absence of deep solidarity.

Finally, *interpersonal relationships* can also play a crucial role in facilitating or hindering collaboration between organizations. Interpersonal affinity between members triggers specific trust mechanisms able to sustain cooperation (Diani, 2023), while interpersonal antagonism and rivalry, especially among leaders (e.g., Tejerina et al., 1995, p. 134), can sometimes impede it. In addition, some activists hold multiple organizational affiliations, enabling them to act as brokers or bridges between groups (e.g., Obach, 2004; Reese et al., 2010; Rose, 2000). These shared members can act as conduits for information exchange, trust-building, and coordination between organizations, shaping the broader patterns of interorganizational cooperation.

2.2. Relational Facilitators and Barriers in Context: An Analytical Framework to Understand How Contextual Conditions Influence Interorganizational Collaboration

Beyond dyadic factors that can facilitate or hinder collaboration, the literature on social movement coalitions widely agrees that “the broader political context can have an important influence on whether activist groups form coalitions” (McCammon & Moon, 2015, p. 329). Yet this assumption is often not paired with a clear specification of what specific contextual factors matter and how.

But let us take a step back and first ask: what is “context”? Building on Rucht’s (1996) notion of “contextual structure,” context can be defined as the set of conditions that lie beyond the immediate control and influence of collective actors but that shape various aspects of mobilization. Rucht distinguished three key macro-categories that can facilitate or constrain interorganizational ties: political-institutional, socio-economic, and cultural. The first category largely aligns with the widely used concept of “political opportunity structure” (POS), typically operationalized through variables such as the openness of political procedures to non-institutional actors, the stability of elite alignments, the presence of allies and opponents within the political establishment, and the capacity and propensity of authorities to repress dissent (McAdam, 1996). This institutional political dimension has received the bulk of the attention, also in studies of environmental mobilization (de Moor & Wahlström, 2022). The socio-economic context refers to structural societal features—such as inequality, demographic composition, and occupational structure—that influence mobilization and collaboration. Finally, the cultural context considers factors such as the strength of different values and cleavages at a given time and place (Diani, 1995a, 2015) or the historical legacies that shape informal political practices both within and outside institutions (Fishman, 2019).

Many studies have examined the role of abrupt contextual changes in shaping interorganizational collaboration, but most limit their analyses to assessing whether collaboration increases or decreases overall within a given field (e.g., Obach, 2010; Staggenborg, 1986) or how a contextual shift deepens or alleviates an existing divide (e.g., Van Dyke, 2003). Rather than merely asking how contextual changes—such as new opportunities or threats—affect collaboration levels in general, we argue for a more nuanced approach: examining how contextual change shifts the relative weight of distinct collaborative logics and alters the relative salience of different dyadic facilitators and barriers associated with them. In this light, collaborative ties should be understood as “consecrations of contingency” (Martin & Gregg, 2015, p. 52), products of both stable organizational traits and volatile conjunctural conditions that amplify or diminish their relevance. Accordingly, the challenge becomes to understand why “sometimes, differences may be emphasized and turned into an effective barrier to intergroup co-operation; [while] at other times, their power in this respect can be rather low” (Diani, 1995a, p. 14). To address this, we present a new analytical framework aimed at synthesizing and reconciling various insights from existing research on the determinants of social movement coalitions, which is illustrated in Figure 1.

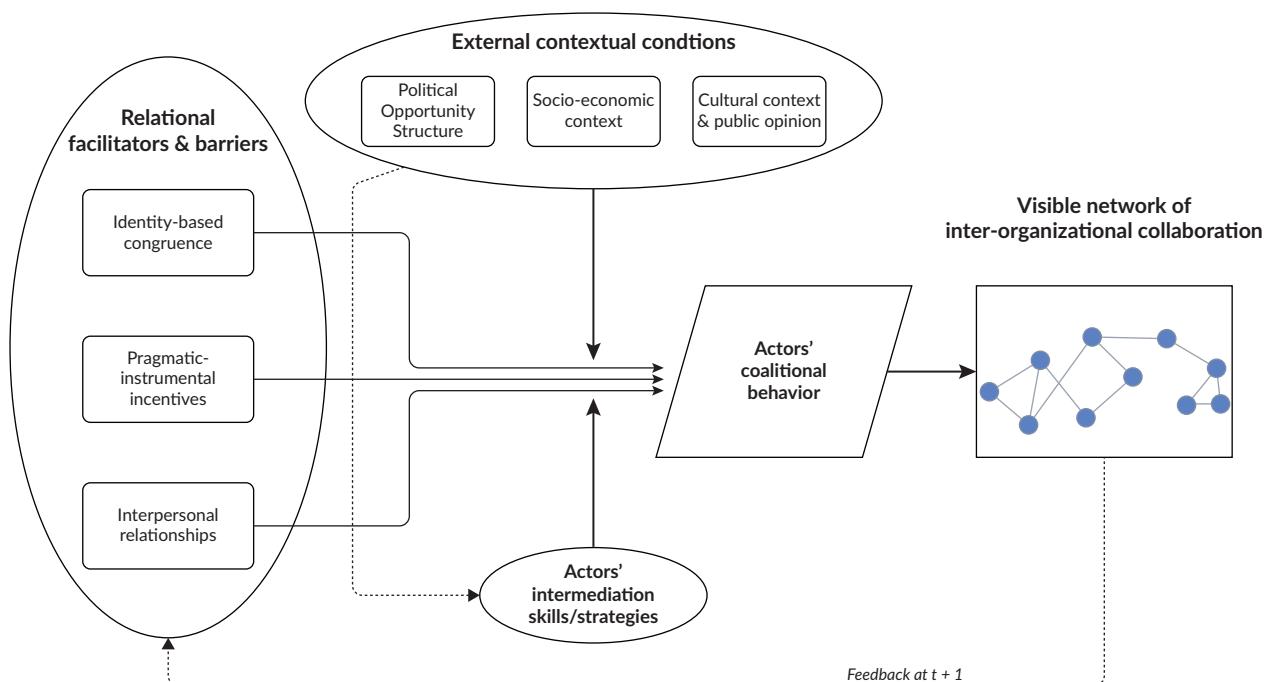


Figure 1. Analytical framework for the dynamic study of interorganizational collaborative networks.

On the right-hand side, the reader can find what the main *explanandum* is: the visible civic network made up of interorganizational collaborations within a field. The specific configuration of this network is considered to be the result of the discrete decisions—yet not completely independent from one another—of each of the organizations that form part of the network (Diani, 1995a, p. 7). These decisions are influenced by two types of factors. First, the presence or absence of certain organizational traits and personal relationships encourages or hinders collaboration between specific pairs of actors. We categorize these influences into three main types, each reflecting different, sometimes conflicting, logics of collaboration: identity-based solidarities, pragmatic-instrumental interests, and interpersonal relationships. However, as emphasized above, collaboration decisions are also deeply shaped by context. Timing and setting can amplify certain facilitators and barriers over others, making previously unlikely potential collaborations much more feasible,

and vice versa. Additionally, external contextual conditions also affect collaborative behaviors in an indirect way, by influencing at the micro-level how individual activists interact on a daily basis (Mische, 2003, 2008).

Finally, it is crucial to recognize that while the factors that facilitate or hinder collaboration tend to remain relatively stable, the organizational traits and interpersonal relationships that act as facilitators or barriers can also evolve. This is represented by the dashed line at the bottom of our diagram. For instance, the crystallization of collaborative interactions into consolidated relationships of alliances or coalitions is likely to foster (or solidify) shared perspectives, develop new strategies, and forge stronger interpersonal bonds. These evolving relationships, in turn, can significantly influence coalition decisions in the future.

3. Case Study: The Environmental Collective Action Field in the Basque Country

To examine how contextual transformations moderate patterns of interorganizational collaboration, we analyze the evolution of event co-attendance networks within the ECAF in the Basque Country (Spain) over 11 years, between 2007 and 2017. In line with previous studies (e.g., Barcena & Ibarra, 2001; Casquete, 1996), we use the term “Basque Country” to refer exclusively to the four territories of the “Southern Basque Country” within Spanish borders (Araba, Biscay, Gipuzkoa, and Navarre), even though the most encompassing use of the term (*Euskal Herria*) also includes the three northern provinces located in France that are not considered within the scope of this study.

Drawing on Diani and Mische’s (2015, p. 307) definition of collective action fields, we define the ECAF as a localized arena encompassing diverse actors engaged in various forms of collective action who share a broad mutual orientation toward environmental protection and sustainability. These actors, while not always cooperating, share general orientations and sometimes engage in joint action. The notion of ECAF thus provides a more comprehensive lens than traditional notions such as “environmental movement” (Rootes, 1999, 2004) or “environmental social movement industry” (Rucht, 1989). While the latter terms restrict the analysis to environmental social movement organizations (ESMOs)—i.e., organizations whose core objective and activities center on environmental demands—the ECAF as a “social movement exchange field” (Zietsma et al., 2017) also includes, when regularly involved in environmental collective action (Diani, 2022), members of allied movements and other types of collective actors, including highly institutionalized entities such as political parties and trade unions. Social network analysis concepts and tools have proven especially suitable for representing and analyzing various types of interorganizational collective action fields (e.g., Diani & Pilati, 2011; Hoffmann et al., 2025; Oncini & Ciordia, 2024).

The Basque Country offers a particularly compelling case for our study for three main reasons. First, environmental activism has historically played a central role in the region’s contentious politics since the Spanish democratic transition (1975–1978). The anti-nuclear struggle, particularly opposition to the Lemoiz nuclear power plant, dominated mobilization in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Barcena & Ibarra, 2001; Barcena et al., 2003). Since then, Basque environmentalism has diversified significantly in terms of issues while maintaining high levels of mobilization (Barcena & Ajangiz, 2011; Ciordia, 2020a; Martínez Palacios & Barcena, 2012). Some scholars even argue that the Basque Country experiences a much higher per capita volume of socio-environmental conflicts than the rest of Spain and many other European regions (Martínez Palacios & Barcena, 2013, pp. 16–19). Second, the Basque ECAF reflects the broader pattern of ideological polarization and sectarianism that has historically shaped collective action in the region. Environmental

contention has been particularly affected by the ethnonational violent conflict (Alonso et al., 2014, p. 19), with divisions over Basque nationalism and ETA's (*Euskadi ta Askatasuna*, or Basque Country and Freedom) armed struggle deeply influencing collaboration dynamics (Barcena & Ibarra, 2001; López Romo, 2008; Tejerina et al., 1995).

Finally, the Basque Country underwent two distinct, though temporally overlapping, contextual transformations during the period under study, as summarized in Figure 2. These transformations provide a crucial empirical setting to investigate how changes in the broader political context influence patterns of interorganizational collaboration within collective action fields.

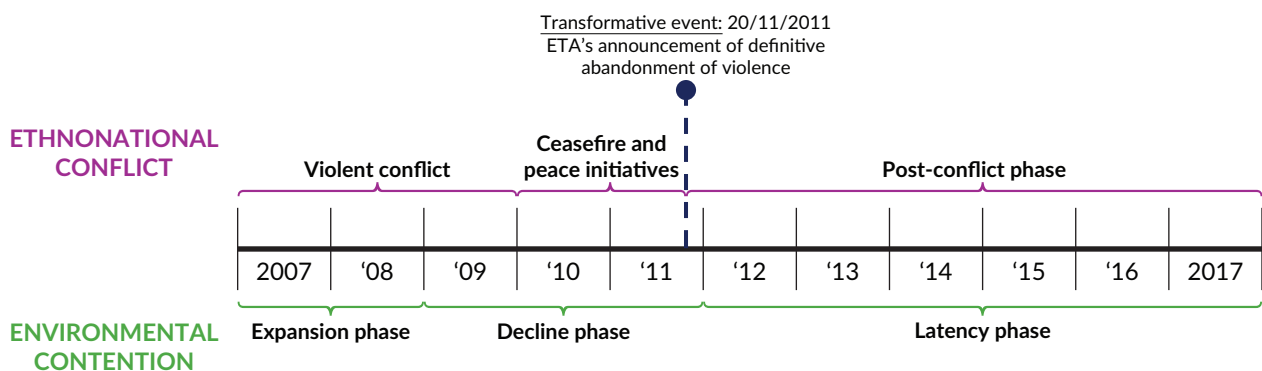


Figure 2. Timeline of main contextual changes during the period of study.

The first major transformation was the end of the long-standing violent conflict (1968–2011) between the Spanish state and the separatist militant organization ETA. ETA's unilateral announcement of its abandonment of violence on October 20, 2011, is widely considered a pivotal moment in Basque institutional and extra-institutional politics, representing a “critical” (Staggenborg, 1993) or “transformative event” (McAdam & Sewell, 2001; Sewell, 1996) that significantly reshaped collective action dynamics in the post-conflict period (Letamendia, 2019). Recent research suggests that ideological divisions within Basque social movements have become less rigid, with more conciliatory discourses emerging and new spaces for convergence being created (Iraola et al., 2023). Similarly, a prior study on ideological divisions within the Basque ECAF found that “traditional incentives (Basque nationalism) and disincentives (disagreement over ETA's armed struggle) for interorganizational collaboration” faded in the years immediately following ETA's disarmament (Ciordia, 2021, p. 229). However, these earlier analyses focused exclusively on identity-related predictors, leaving other types of predictors unexplored.

The second key transformation concerns the fluctuating dynamics of environmental contention in the Basque Country between 2007 and 2017. The period begins with the peak of the anti-high-speed train (HST) campaign, a wave of protest fueled by opposition to the large-scale infrastructure project to build a new high-speed railway line connecting Madrid with the major Basque cities and France through the mountainous Basque countryside. While the anti-HST campaign had existed since the early 1990s, the actual commencement of construction in 2006 triggered a massive wave of protests, reaching its apex in 2008. However, this period also saw increased state repression and internal tensions within the movement, which were significantly exacerbated when ETA incorporated opposition to the HST into its agenda, culminating in the assassination of businessman Inaxio Uria in December 2008 (Barcena & Larrinaga, 2010).

This event caused widespread disaffection among activists and contributed to a gradual demobilization of the anti-HST campaign beginning in early 2009. Importantly, this turning point in the environmental cycle of contention preceded ETA's final ceasefire in October 2011.

By 2012, a combination of declining grassroots mobilization and the reduced prioritization of the project from the Basque and Spanish governments due to the public debt crisis had pushed the conflict to the margins of the Basque political agenda. The Basque ECAF entered a period of limited mobilization or latency that continued throughout the decade. Yet despite this decline in large-scale environmental contention, this latency period was marked by a diversification of environmental issues and actors. As the anti-HST struggle lost momentum, previously overshadowed environmental conflicts—such as waste incineration, climate change mitigation, renewable energy policies, and the closure of the Garoña nuclear plant—resurfaced as prominent concerns. Additionally, a major new environmental conflict emerged around hydraulic fracturing (fracking) for shale gas extraction, dominating the Basque environmental agenda between 2012 and 2015 (see Orbegozo Terradillos et al., 2020). During this time, new, smaller environmental organizations appeared, and non-environmental actors—including political parties, trade unions, and civic organizations focused on other issues—became increasingly involved (see Ciordia, 2020a). As a result, although public mobilization remained relatively low, the Basque ECAF became more heterogeneous, with a broader range of actors actively engaging in environmental collective action.

3.1. Research Questions and Hypotheses

As the context in which Basque environmentalism operated throughout the 2007–2017 timeframe was shaped by major changes in two contextual dimensions that could influence how political actors make collaborative decisions, we ask the following two research questions:

RQ1. How did the weight of different types of relational drivers of collaboration evolve across phases of the cycle of contention?

RQ2. How did the weight of different types of relational drivers of collaboration evolve across phases of the region's ethnonational conflict?

As previous studies on social movements' coalitions have examined similar questions (e.g., Cinalli, 2003; Diani, 2015, Chapter 6; Saunders, 2007a), we can build on their theoretical propositions and empirical findings to formulate case-specific expectations.

3.1.1. Drivers of Collaboration at Different Phases of a Cycle of Contention

Moments of conflict expansion play a crucial role in redefining social boundaries between collective actors, increasing or decreasing their relevance through mechanisms of boundary activation or deactivation (Tilly, 2004). It has been shown that peaks of contention serve as "relational catalysts" capable of fostering wider interorganizational collaboration (Steinhilper & Hoffmann, 2024). This happens through a process of network "amplification," where previously disconnected actors come together (Diani & Mische, 2015, p. 319), often overcoming existing ideological differences (e.g., Saunders, 2007b) but also through the expansion of previous identity boundaries (Wang et al., 2018).

For example, reactions to sudden threats, generalized repression, or temporal resource constraints can foster ad-hoc transversal coalitions by momentarily elevating the value of shared interests and goals while simultaneously backgrounding ideological disagreements (e.g., McCammon & Campbell, 2002; Meyer & Corrigan-Brown, 2005; Van Dyke, 2003) or social identity differences (e.g., Okamoto, 2010). Conversely, while political openings are generally less likely than threats to foster broad-based coalitions (McCammon & Van Dyke, 2010; Poloni-Staudinger, 2009), favorable circumstances, such as unusual openings of the institutional system to the movement's demands (Staggenborg, 1986, p. 382) or a sudden influx of resources available to collective actors (McCarthy & Zald, 1977)—common during the growing phase of a cycle of contention (Diani, 1995a, p. 15; Saunders, 2007a)—can also spur cross-cutting collaboration. Consequently, we anticipate that:

H1. Identity-based congruence had the weakest influence on collaboration at the peak of the cycle of contention (2007) and grew stronger in subsequent periods of demobilization (2009–2011) and latency (2013–2017).

H2. Pragmatic-instrumental incentives had the strongest influence on collaboration at the peak of the cycle of contention (2007) and weakened during subsequent periods of demobilization (2009–2011) and latency (2013–2017).

Conversely, during periods of relative inactivity or latency in between more visible contention waves, collective actors continue forming relationships and coordinating action, laying groundwork for future more visible mobilizations. Expanding upon the classic observations of Melucci (1989) and Taylor (1989) on the key role of submerged interpersonal networks during phases of *latency* or *abeyance*, we expect interpersonal connections to gain prominence as facilitators of coordinated efforts in low-mobilization contexts (e.g., Rupp & Taylor, 1987; Valiente, 2015). Following this reasoning, we anticipate that:

H3. Interpersonal boundaries had the strongest influence on collaboration during the latency phase (2013–2017) compared to the earlier peak (2007) and demobilization (2009–2011) phases.

3.1.2. Drivers of Collaboration Before and After the End of the Violent Ethnonational Conflict

So far, we have approached our questions by observing how cycles of contention, considered as relational junctures, can become a contextual factor capable of reshaping the boundaries between actors within the ECAF. Similarly, we argue that the relative strength of identity-based boundaries between organizations is shaped by how strongly certain ideological divides are politicized and contested within the broader society. In deeply divided societies—"in which a fault line that runs through society causes political polarization and establishes a force field" (Guelke, 2012, p. vi)—organizational identities tend to align with overarching sociopolitical camps. As a result, membership in civic or political organizations often mirrors societal divisions, even when actors mobilize on issues seemingly unrelated to the societal fault line. These cleavages, when reflected in collective action fields, establish what Tilly (2004) calls "social boundaries." When these are well-established, actors on each side interact more frequently and densely with one another than across the divide, while also constructing shared narratives and logics of action specific to their own side. This fosters clustering patterns along Simmelian "concentric circles" (Diani, 2000), contributing to the consolidation of distinct and often antagonistic political subcultures.

Crucially, the salience of these divides is not static. The degree to which a society is polarized along any given cleavage can shift over time. While such changes tend to be rooted in long-term, incremental processes and therefore often unfold gradually—sometimes imperceptibly for activists and observers—they can also occur abruptly over short periods. These sudden shifts can be triggered by large-scale transformative events, understood as a “relatively rare subclass of happenings that significantly transform structures” (Sewell, 2005, p. 100), reshaping political opportunity structures and disrupting established interaction patterns. In the realm of collective action, such “critical events” (Staggenborg, 1993) may influence a wide range of organizational opportunities and strategies, including coalitional behavior. They create “moments of heightened contingency that tip movements towards cohesion or fragmentation” (Gunzelmann, 2024, p. 6), potentially leading to diverging alliance-building paths (e.g., Portos & Carvalho, 2022).

In this sense, changes in overarching conflict structures, such as the end of armed struggle in a formerly polarized society, can shift the calculus of collaboration. For instance, in highly polarized contexts where certain ideological cleavages are paramount, collective actors tend to adopt rigid stances to preserve internal coherence, resisting engagement with ideologically distant others (Cinalli, 2003; Diani, 1995a; Diani et al., 2010). This results in them prioritizing the preservation of their core beliefs over pragmatic alliance-building (Diani, 1995b, p. 363). In these contexts, groups become rigidly anchored to their positions, making ideological disagreements hard to tolerate (Taraktas, 2022), hindering the formation of strategic alliances and fostering segmentation along ideological lines. In contrast, in less polarized contexts, collective actors tend to be less bound by ideological orthodoxy. Political identities loosen, and willingness to compromise increases, enabling cross-cleavage collaboration (Diani, 1995b). In such settings, ideological disagreement becomes negotiable, and collaboration in pursuit of shared objectives becomes more feasible (Taraktas, 2022). Based on these dynamics, we anticipate that:

H4. Ideological boundaries associated with the contentious issue of Basque national self-determination and the armed struggle had a stronger influence on collaboration before ETA’s abandonment of violence in 2011 and weakened in the post-conflict phase.

Applying the same logic to pragmatic-instrumental ties, we expect collective action collaboration to be more pragmatic in less polarized contexts than in highly polarized ones (Diani, 1995b; Taraktas, 2022). Therefore:

H5. Pragmatic-instrumental boundaries had a weaker influence on collaboration before ETA’s abandonment of violence in 2011 and became stronger in the post-conflict phase.

Moving to the role of interpersonal relationships, it is also essential to recognize how activists’ involvement in multiple organizations or existing friendships might facilitate the emergence of trust between different groups, potentially helping to overcome ideological barriers. For instance, Diani (2023, pp. 529–531), comparing collective action fields in South African and British cities, found that interpersonal trust mattered more for interorganizational alliances in polities where cleavages were still salient, as in South Africa, than in cities where cleavages were largely pacified, as in the UK. Interpersonal relationships, thus, may play a compensatory role where polarization is high, offering informal communication and trust channels that would otherwise be blocked at the organizational level. Accordingly, we anticipate that:

H6. Interpersonal boundaries had the strongest influence on collaboration when ideological conflict was at its peak, before ETA's rejection of armed struggle in 2011, and weakened in the post-conflict phase.

4. Data and Methods

For this study, retrospective data on event co-participation were collected indirectly and unobtrusively (see Ciordia & Perego, 2024), using an original newspaper-based dataset covering 419 environmental collective action events in the Basque Country across six alternate years between 2007 and 2017. Collective action events are defined as nonroutine public physical gatherings held outside of institutional political channels to promote causes or demands on behalf of broader publics (Sampson et al., 2005, pp. 682–683). This definition includes not only conventional protest forms but also under-researched civic and hybrid events (e.g., community festivals, teach-ins, etc.). The selection criterion centers on physical collective action events with a public-sphere projection—i.e., those aimed at engaging broader publics beyond internal organizational life—and focuses on issues related to environmental protection. This includes both protest events that articulate explicit claims or grievances, as well as civic or hybrid events with less overtly contentious aims but still requiring collective decisions to appear together in public. While the forms included vary greatly in visibility and contentiousness, we treat them as public expressions of symbolic alignment and coordination (Diani & Mische, 2015), making co-attendance a meaningful expression of interorganizational collaboration (Diani, 1995a, p. 99, 2015, pp. 107–141). In highly polarized contexts like the Basque Country, even participation in non-contentious public events can reflect strategic relational positioning along salient societal cleavages. We acknowledge that this operationalization excludes less visible or informal forms of coordination—such as joint grant applications, co-signed statements without public events, or online-only campaigns—which fall outside the scope of this analysis. Still, this approach provides a robust and comparative lens for capturing visible collaboration dynamics over time. For more details on this operational definition and its implications, see Appendix 1 in the Supplementary File.

The dataset draws on four local newspapers as sources and covers six alternate years between 2007 and 2017. The start date coincides with the onset of ETA's final campaign of violence, while the endpoint captures a consolidated post-violence phase. The alternate-year sampling balances analytic resolution with feasibility, reducing the number of articles to screen and code while still tracking meaningful change over time. Despite their well-documented limitations, newspaper sources remain the most widely used and systematically accessible source for protest event analysis (Hutter, 2014; Koopmans & Rucht, 2002). Prior research on media biases shows that local news sources offer a strong comparative advantage in sub-state regions, particularly when these are geographically distant from the city of edition of the state-wide newspapers, in this case Madrid (e.g., Barranco & Wisler, 1999, pp. 307–308; Fillieule & Jiménez, 2003, pp. 265–268; Hocke, 1999, pp. 149–152). Moreover, in comparison with state-wide sources, local newspapers can be expected to report a much higher share of all events actually occurring, including many of small size and dealing with low-profile issues (Daphi et al., 2024). To enhance coverage and mitigate selection biases, data collection relied on four ideologically diverse local newspapers—*El Correo*, *El Diario Vasco*, *Diario de Navarra*, and *Gara*—which together offer strong territorial coverage across the Basque provinces and span a range of political perspectives (see Appendix 1 in the Supplementary File for details). Systematic queries were built around a curated list of eleven prominent ESMOs, identified through previous literature, expert interviews, and online searches. The queries returned 2,848 hits, which were screened by

the first author (after developing and validating the screening protocol, including intercoder reliability testing and procedures for handling the limited number of Euskara-only articles; see Appendix 1 in the Supplementary File). The screening yielded 812 relevant newspaper articles reporting on environmental collective action events. Further details on the timeline, source selection, media bias, article retrieval procedures, and screening procedures are provided in Appendix 1 in the Supplementary File.

The 812 articles were downloaded as text files and analyzed using the Discourse Network Analyzer (DNA) software (Leifeld, 2017), a program that supports qualitative content analysis and the export of output as structured relational data. DNA enables coders to retrieve the original text excerpts linked to each coded entry, enhancing transparency and auditability. Coding was conducted by the first author, except for 38 events reported exclusively in Euskara, which were reviewed by a native speaker with expertise in protest event analysis, who confirmed the accuracy of initial codes and identified only two minor omissions (see Ciordia, 2020b, pp. 86–88). All coding followed a detailed protocol and codebook (Appendix 2 in the Supplementary File), and original DNA files are available upon request. In total, 419 unique environmental collective action events were identified across the six years examined. Each event was assigned a unique ID and coded across 13 variables covering six dimensions: date, location, issue, size, form, and target, along with the names of all organizations mentioned as participants in press coverage.

Leveraging this dataset, six yearly collaborative civic networks were constructed in three steps. The first step involved defining the network boundary, that is, deciding which collective actors should be considered members of the Basque ECAF during a given period. While hundreds of organizations participated in at least one environmental event each year, the analysis focused on those that repeatedly engaged in environmental collective action, defined as those mentioned in at least two events within a given year. This criterion yielded a total of 70 organizations identified as members of the Basque ECAF in at least one of the six years examined, with network sizes ranging from 21 to 32 nodes, depending on the year. Second, for each year, we constructed one-mode co-affiliation matrices reflecting the number of events co-attended by each pair of active organizations. Third, raw tie values were normalized using the Jaccard coefficient, which expresses co-attendance as a proportion of all multi-organizational events involving at least one member of the dyad (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011, p. 421). The resulting networks are weighted, with tie strength reflecting frequency-adjusted collaboration intensity. Table 1 reports key network metrics, while sociograms for each year are provided in Appendix 3 in the Supplementary File.

To identify which dyadic factors shaped the structure of collaboration in different years, we used QAP linear regression models, estimating co-attendance intensity between all organizational pairs given a multiplicity of dyadic predictors. Analyses were conducted using UCINET 6 (Borgatti et al., 2002), applying the Double-Dekker Semi-Partialling procedure (Dekker et al., 2007) with 10,000 random permutations. We included seven explanatory networks as potential predictors, representing different kinds of theoretically relevant interorganizational linkages derived from three types of information: ideological profiles, organizational characteristics, and interpersonal ties. Four networks capture dyadic (dis)similarities in four relevant ideological dimensions: (a) *Basque nationalist orientation*, which differentiates organizations that are signified in support Euskal Herria's self-determination from those that are ambiguous or neutral on the national cleavage; (b) *public stance towards ETA's violence*, distinguishing actors that were publicly critical of armed struggle from those perceived as lenient or supportive (thus operationalized as a dissimilarity network); (c) *far left-wing orientation*, identifying groups that position themselves to the left of social

democracy and share strong anti-capitalist stances; and (d) *environmentalist orientation*, a field-specific ideological cleavage distinguishing conservationists, reformists, and political ecologists based on their framing of environmental issues and their broader societal implications. Each of these networks tests whether ideological affinity—or divergence in the case of ETA-related positions—shapes patterns of interorganizational collaboration. In addition to identity-based congruence, two networks capture pragmatic-instrumental incentives for collaboration: (e) *overlapping issue agendas*, which measures the extent to which organizations prioritize the same environmental causes in their mobilization efforts, and (f) *organizational model similarity*, derived from classification into three ideal-types—communitarian-egalitarian, structured-voluntary, and professionalized—based on formalization, and reliance on paid vs. voluntary labor. Finally, (g) *interpersonal ties* are captured through overlapping memberships, where activists belonging to multiple organizations create latent connections that may facilitate collaboration. For further explanation and operational details, see Appendix 5 in the Supplementary File.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of event co-attendance networks.

	2007	2009 [^]	2011	2013	2015	2017
Total events	116	79	60	54	58	51
Events with 2 or more orgs	47	41	33	32	41	34
Network composition						
Nodes	28	20	21	23	32	30
Environmental organizations	13	9	11	13	13	11
Political parties	6	7	3	5	6	3
Trade unions	7	4	6	5	9	10
Other civic organizations	2	3	1	0	4	6
Network structural properties						
Average degree	11.214	12.000	10.286	8.261	15.313	17.333
Average distance	1.598	1.374	1.510	1.684	1.542	1.430
Diameter	3	3	3	3	3	3
Density	0.415	0.632	0.514	0.375	0.494	0.598
Centralization	0.55	0.351	0.426	0.385	0.402	0.357
Closure	0.661	0.843	0.781	0.681	0.707	0.803
Edge values: range	0–1	0–1	0–0.75	0–1	0–1	0–1
Edge values: mean	0.096	0.171	0.127	0.102	0.111	0.162
Edge values: std. deviation	0.171	0.217	0.167	0.178	0.156	0.182

Notes: In the 2009[^] network, one outlier event (30+ organizations) was excluded to avoid skewing density and clustering. Full results, including all 80 events, are in Appendix 4 in the Supplementary File.

In addition, three control variables were included to account for structural constraints that might bias observed collaboration patterns. These are: (a) *block attendance by political parties and trade unions*, which captures the tendency of political parties to co-attend with other parties and of trade unions with other unions, due to competitive dynamics within these highly institutionalized arenas; (b) *geographic disconnection*, which captures dyads composed of organizations with non-overlapping territorial scopes—such as local groups based exclusively in different Basque provinces—who are unlikely to co-attend the same event; and (c) *second-order node membership*, accounting for a couple of instances of structurally precluded ties between

umbrella coalitions and their constituent organizations due to the applied coding rules (the so-called Basque Trade Union Majority and the short-lived electoral platform *Irabazi*). By incorporating these three controls, we ensure that observed collaboration patterns are not artifacts of structural constraints but rather reflect meaningful interorganizational dynamics. Full operational definitions, attribute codings, and yearly descriptive statistics of these controls are detailed in Appendix 5 in the Supplementary File.

5. Results

Table 2 presents the results of the QAP regression analyses of the event co-attendance matrices for the six alternate years in the dataset. Figure 3 complements these results by displaying the share of explained variance (R^2) accounted for by each predictor over time. Dashed lines show the R^2 for individual predictors, while solid lines show their aggregated contribution by group.

Table 2. QAP regressions of event co-attendance across six alternate years.

	2007	2009 [^]	2011	2013	2015	2017
Intercept	.011	.061	.089	.021	.072	.128
<u>Identity-based congruence</u>						
Shared Basque nationalist orientation	.017	.111**	.080*	.037	.008	.050
Different public positions towards ETA	-.034*	-.115***	.067**	.007	-.016	.023
Similar left-right orientation	.033	-.003	-.040	-.050**	.028	-.023
Similar environmentalist orientation	-.016	-.030	-.056*	-.038*	.016	-.057*
<u>Pragmatic-instrumental incentives</u>						
Overlapping issue agenda	.085**	.258**	.224***	.153***	.066*	.190***
Similar organizational model	.076**	.079*	.027	.086**	-.012	.005
<u>Interpersonal relationships</u>						
Shared active members	.060*	-.048	-.022	.056**	.021	-.003
<u>Controls</u>						
Block attendance by political parties and trade unions	.187***	.186***	.134**	.284***	.233***	.184***
Geographic disconnection	-.089**	-.129*	-.089**	-.086**	-.076***	-.106**
Specific second-order nodes and members	-.384***	—	-.268***	—	-.365***	—
N (dyads)	378	190	210	253	496	435
R^2	.194	.297	.312	.302	.239	.190

Notes: Values of collaborative ties normalized using Jaccard similarity measures. Unstandardized regression coefficients. Significance levels: * $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$ (one-tailed tests).

5.1. Identity-Based Congruence

Figure 3(a) shows the unique explained variance of ideological boundaries considered distant from environmental issues: shared Basque nationalist orientation and divergent stances on ETA's violence. During the demobilization phase (2009–2011), these factors strongly influenced collaboration, especially in 2009, when they jointly explained nearly 7% of variance. In contrast, their influence was negligible during the

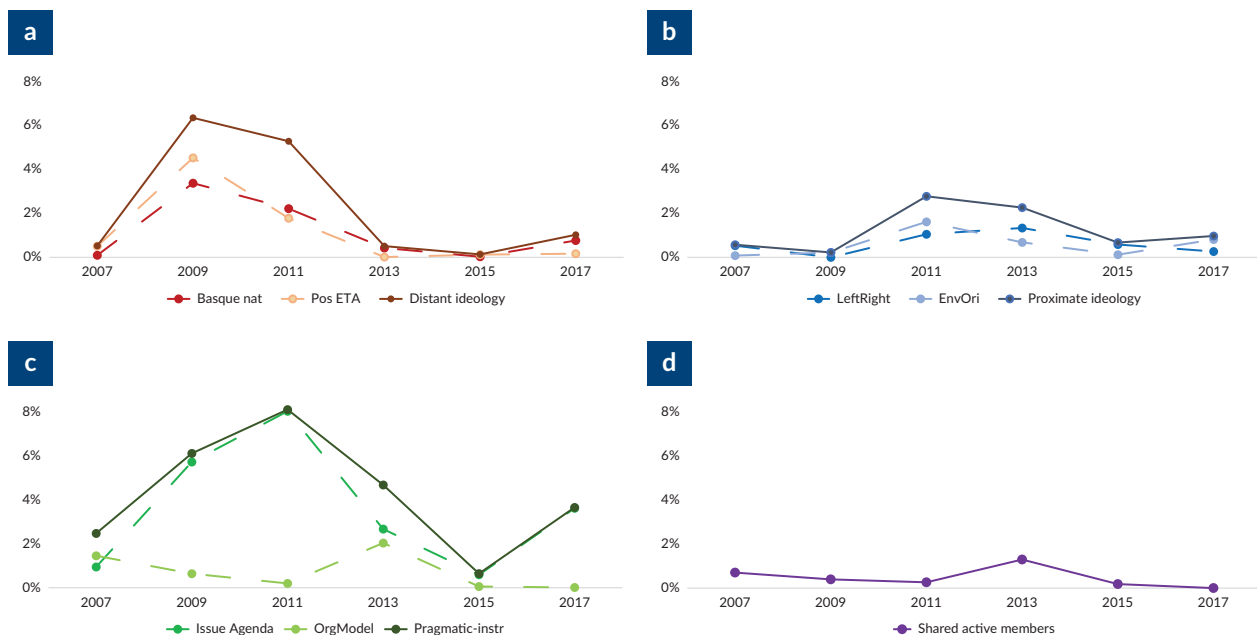


Figure 3. Explanatory variance (R^2 values) of each predictor over time: (a) Identity-based congruence: Distant ideology; (b) Identity-based congruence: Proximate ideology; (c) Pragmatic-instrumental incentives; and (d) Interpersonal relationships.

high-mobilization period of 2007 and disappeared entirely post-conflict. Regression coefficients in Table 2 reinforce this interpretation and add further nuance. The coefficient for shared Basque nationalist orientation rises sharply in 2009 (0.111, $p < .05$) and remains significant in 2011. Simultaneously, opposing stances on ETA had the expected negative effect on collaboration in 2007 (-0.034 , $p < 0.10$) and especially in 2009 (-0.115 , $p < 0.01$). Notably, the effect reversed in 2011, turning into a significant positive association (0.067, $p < .01$) in 2011, when a ceasefire was in place and informal peace initiatives were underway. This indicates that radical Basque nationalist organizations traditionally lenient towards ETA became more integrated in this collective action field, a pattern already observed in two previous de-escalation phases in other collective action fields (Fernández Sobrado & Antolín Iria, 2000, p. 162; Letamendia, 2011, pp. 165–167).

In contrast, Figure 3(b) shows that similarity on more proximate ideological dimensions—left-right and environmentalist orientation—played a minimal role. Table 2 report no consistent significant effects, except for a small negative effect of left-right similarity in 2013 (-0.050^{**} , $p < .05$) and environmentalist similarity in both 2011 (-0.056 , $p < .10$) and 2013 (-0.038 , $p < .10$). These findings suggest that cross-ideological collaboration was common, and at times more likely than within-group collaboration. One plausible explanation is that the Basque environmental field was already ideologically skewed—particularly dominated by far-left actors and political ecologists—leaving little room for variation in these two ideological dimensions to exert any effects.

Taken together, the results support H1, which anticipated weaker identity-based effects at the cycle's peak (2007) and stronger effects during the demobilization phase (2009–2011), especially for distant ideological cleavages. They also confirm H4, which expected a declining influence of nationalist and violence-related identities in the less polarized post-conflict period after 2011, as both factors became non-significant predictors of collaborations in the post-conflict phase.

5.2. Pragmatic–Instrumental Incentives

Figure 3(c) shows that pragmatic–instrumental incentives had the most robust and consistent influence on collaboration. Table 2 supports this, showing highly significant coefficients for overlapping issue agendas in every year, peaking during demobilization in 2009 and 2011 (0.258 and 0.224, respectively, both $p < .01$). In contrast, similar organizational models had weaker, less stable effects, statistically significant in 2007, 2009, and 2013 but never explaining more than 2% of the variance. This contrast suggests that while organizational compatibility may help, shared issue priorities were the principal pragmatic driver of collaboration across the period.

These findings contradict H2, which expected pragmatic aspects and programmatic alignment to matter most during the peak of contention (2007). Instead, they were stronger during demobilization (2009–2011), particularly for programmatic overlap. They also challenge H5, which anticipated an increased weight of pragmatic-instrumental logics in the post-conflict period. Although overlapping issue agendas remained the most consistent predictor during those years—at times the only significant one (2015)—their explanatory power declined compared to earlier years. Overall, these results caution against interpretations of pragmatic collaboration as a response to shifting political opportunities alone. Despite contextual changes and slight fluctuations, actors in the environmental field consistently forged alliances based on substantive issue compatibility, reinforcing the idea that environmental collective action remains grounded in programmatic interests (Borbáth & Hutter, 2020) and tends to persist over time on these grounds, even amidst high political and social volatility (Diani, 2015, Chapter 6).

5.3. Interpersonal Relationships

Figure 3(d) tracks the influence of interpersonal linkages, proxied by overlapping memberships. Their effect was marginal and inconsistent: positively associated with collaboration only in 2007 (0.060, $p < .10$) and 2013 (0.056, $p < .05$), and never explaining more than 1.5% of the variance. These results fail to support H3, which expected interpersonal ties to become more influential during the latency phase of environmental mobilization (2013–2017), when mobilization declined and identity cleavages weakened. They also fail to support the contrasting H6, which anticipated their importance to peak in the years before ETA's abandonment of armed struggle (2007–2011). In short, overlapping memberships proved a poor predictor of interorganizational collaboration across the period. This may reflect a context in which ideological, organizational, or programmatic criteria outweighed personal familiarity, or, alternatively, that more informal or ad hoc interpersonal channels of coordination were simply not captured by this particular indicator.

5.4. Summary of Results

In sum, these results show a shifting interplay of collaboration drivers. The influence of divisive identity cleavages diminished sharply after 2011, while programmatic alignment remained a consistent—though also fluctuating in predictive power—basis for collaboration. Interpersonal relationships and internal structural similarities played only a secondary role. These findings refine earlier work (Ciordia, 2021; Iraola et al., 2023) by showing how distinct dimensions of (dis)similarity evolve and interact differently with mobilization phases and shifts in the context structure. Most importantly, they underscore the value of a multidimensional, relational, and diachronic approach to understanding alliance dynamics in environmental contentious politics.

The findings illustrate how collective action in contentious settings cannot be explained by a single logic, but rather emerges from an unstable balance between organizational identities and issue interests.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

This study offers a diachronic perspective on interorganizational collaboration, foregrounding the moderating role of the broader political context on various drivers and barriers of collaboration. By tracing event co-attendance networks within the Basque ECAF from 2007 to 2017, we shed light on how shifting phases of the mobilization cycle and wider societal polarization reweight the influence of different dyadic predictors of interorganizational collaboration. In doing so, the study offers a new angle for understanding environmental collective action networks—one that moves beyond systemic and dispositional perspectives to propose a more interactive account of how organizational (dis)similarities gain or lose salience over time in complex and non-linear ways.

The clearest transformation concerns the deactivation of long-standing ideological boundaries following ETA's abandonment of violence in 2011. Until then, stances on Basque self-determination and political violence shaped patterns of interaction within the field, with Basque nationalist alignment fostering collaboration and divergent positions inhibiting it—even during high-mobilization years like 2007. This echoes Diani's (1995a) findings on 1970s Italian environmentalism, where strong left-right polarization constrained broad alliances despite rising contention. Yet the Basque case also shows that peak mobilization moments can soften ideological boundaries, enabling limited cross-cutting collaboration even in deeply polarized contexts. Still, the transformative event of 2011 marked a much deeper shift: ideological determinants of collaboration waned, allowing for broader, more heterogeneous partnerships—similar to patterns observed in post-conflict Northern Ireland (Cinalli, 2002, 2003). This shift is also congruent with recent comparative policy network studies (Gronow et al., 2020; Kammerer et al., 2021; Satoh et al., 2025), which show that belief alignment plays a diminished role in more consensual governance contexts.

Conversely, the failure to confirm hypotheses concerning pragmatic-instrumental boundaries (H2 and 5) and interpersonal relationships (H3 and 6) raises important questions. First, our findings caution against overly reactive models of collective action driven primarily by short-term incentives. Despite contextual turbulence, organizations continued to form ties based on shared issue agendas. Although the predictive power of issue alignment fluctuated—from 8% of tie formation in 2011 to less than 1% in 2015—its consistent significance underscores a core continuity in coalition logic. Second, our data also suggests a qualification to the argument that declining mobilization (i.e., 2009 and 2011 observations) pushes organizations toward ideological radicalization and sectarianism, hoping that a more distinct ideological profile would help recruit new members from a shrinking constituency. This point has been famously formulated in reference to the radicalization of new leftist groups in Italy during the late 1970s demobilization phase (della Porta & Tarrow, 1986), but should not be automatically extended to any type of collective action (incidentally, this was never the proponents' intention). Organizations without a radical culture, like most environmental groups, are not likely to react to a contraction in their mobilizing capacity by radicalizing but may instead double down on pragmatic collaboration, as our results suggest. Rather than being epiphenomenal to protest cycles, instrumental collaboration appears to rest on more stable alignments of issue agendas, reinforcing recent claims that protest politics is shaped by stable "mobilization networks dominated by organized actors" (Borbáth & Hutter, 2024), where collaboration is underpinned by long-term

alignments and previous collaboration history (e.g., Diani, 2015, Chapter 6) rather than shifting incentives alone. Still, the precise basis of this sustained collaboration in the later post-conflict period remains an open question, but one possibility is that the concurrent anti-austerity cycle initiated by the 15M movement (Portos, 2021) helped forge new alignments around redistributive or social justice themes. These results highlight the need to complement opportunity-based models with more fine-grained micro-level (e.g., Beamish & Luebbbers, 2009; Mische, 2008) and perception-oriented accounts (e.g., de Moor & Wahlström, 2019; Saunders, 2009; Saunders et al., 2025).

Our results also speak to the resilience of the interorganizational collaborative networks within the Basque ECAF: despite a radical transformation of the broader sociopolitical context after 2011, the topology and density of collaborative networks remained remarkably stable (see Table 1) and the field continued to perform its core function (Ingold et al., 2022)—sustaining pro-environmental collective action—even as traditional ideological drivers waned and even issue agreement lost some explanatory power. One plausible interpretation is that the field transitioned from a “deep core advocacy coalition” logic (Weible et al., 2025), in which collaboration is rooted in macro-level non-environmental political identities (nationalist and ETA stances), toward more flexible and issue-specific coalitions structured around shared specific environmental objectives. Furthermore, it is also worth noting that the post-2011 period was also marked by some relatively eco-friendly policy outcomes in the Basque region, especially in the Basque Autonomous Community (Conversi & Ezeizabarrena, 2019), including the non-extension of the Garoña nuclear plant’s license (2015), the refusal of fracking (2015–2016), and a recent bill on the energy transition and the climate emergency (2024). While we refrain from drawing direct causal links between collaboration and policy outcomes, the shift toward more flexible, cross-cutting coalitions may have facilitated favorable conditions for such decisions, consistent with evidence that broad, diverse coalitions can enhance efficacy and policy influence (e.g., Almeida, 2008; Banaszak, 1996; Jones et al., 2001). In the Basque case, coalition-building across ideological divides may have helped the movement shed prior associations with radicalism or abertzale exclusivity (Barcena & Ajangiz, 2011), gaining legitimacy in the eyes of both the public and decision-makers. This hypothesis on the potential political benefits of broader coalitions warrants further investigation.

While we provide a novel framework and empirical demonstration of the contextual modulation of coalitional drivers, several limitations remain, and the approach can be further developed and extended. First, our focus on public, visible collective action leaves other forms of collaboration—such as joint projects or online campaigns—outside our analysis. Including these would offer a fuller picture of frontstage and backstage network dynamics. Second, we could not incorporate tactical (dis)similarity as a potential collaboration driver, due to both data limitations and limited tactical heterogeneity within the Basque ECAF (Ciordia, 2020a). Yet tactical disagreement can be a key obstacle to collaboration (della Porta & Tarrow, 1986; Hadden, 2015; Wang & Soule, 2012), making this an important aspect to be incorporated in future studies. Third, methodologically, our data allowed only cross-sectional comparisons of six discrete yearly observations. With access to continuous protest event data and more processual hypotheses on tie creation, persistence, and dissolution, future work could employ dynamic network models better suited to unpack the specific relational processes at play. Promising techniques include stochastic actor-oriented models (SAOMs; Snijders, 1996; Snijders et al., 2010), temporal exponential random graph models (TERGMs; Cranmer & Desmarais, 2011; Krivitsky & Handcock, 2014), relational event models (REMs; Butts, 2008; Lerner & Lomi, 2023), or event sequence analysis (ESA; Spekink & Boons, 2016). Fourth, future research could

disaggregate collaborative patterns by the specific policy issues around which collective action occurs. While we aimed to map the broader collaborative structure of the ECAF—rather than examine issue-specific coalitions—different issues likely vary in their capacity to bridge ideological divides. While certainly interesting and in line with recent calls for problem-centered approaches towards environmental and climate movements (de Moor, 2025), this objective falls outside of the scope of this study. Exploring these dynamics would require a different analytical strategy, potentially adopting a multimodal network approach that accounts for how actors relate not just to each other, but to particular event characteristics, such as demands, frames, or degree of contentiousness (Knoke et al., 2021). Such work would offer a promising path to extend our framework by incorporating issue-specific heterogeneity within a collective action field. Finally, to enhance the generalizability of our findings on contextual modulation of collaboration patterns, future comparative research could examine environmental collective action fields across national or subnational cases with varying conflict trajectories and institutional configurations, thereby clarifying the conditions under which ideological, pragmatic, or interpersonal drivers gain prominence and when they fade.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of considering time and context when analyzing interorganizational collaboration. The Basque case illustrates how political change can recalibrate not only field-level opportunities for cooperation but also the social boundaries that determine who collaborates, under what terms, and for how long. While our findings resonate with long-standing theories that emphasize political opportunity structures (McAdam et al., 2001), they also highlight the evolving nature of relational mechanisms and their interaction with macro-level shifts. This more contextualized and less deterministic account of environmental collective action networks provides important insights not only for political sociologists and political scientists but also for activists and practitioners. Fostering collaboration may require different strategies depending on the prevailing political climate. Ultimately, while shared identities and goals remain important, the choice to cooperate is shaped by an ever-shifting terrain—demanding strategic adaptability from the actors navigating it.

Acknowledgments

We thank the organizers and participants of the Political Networks section at the 2024 ECPR General Conference in Dublin, where an earlier draft of this article was presented. We are also grateful to the thematic issue editors and anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback throughout the review process.

Funding

The data analyzed in this article were originally collected as part of the first author's doctoral research, supported by a doctoral grant from the Doctoral School of Social Sciences at the University of Trento. Publication of this article in open access was made possible through the institutional membership agreement between Maastricht University and Cogitatio Press.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The data are available from the authors upon request.

LLMs Disclosure

The first author used ChatGPT for grammar and style improvements. All suggestions were carefully checked to ensure that the substance of the text remained unchanged. The authors have edited the text as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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