

# Towards Fair Wages

**Minimum wage wins and the labor coalitions that drive them**

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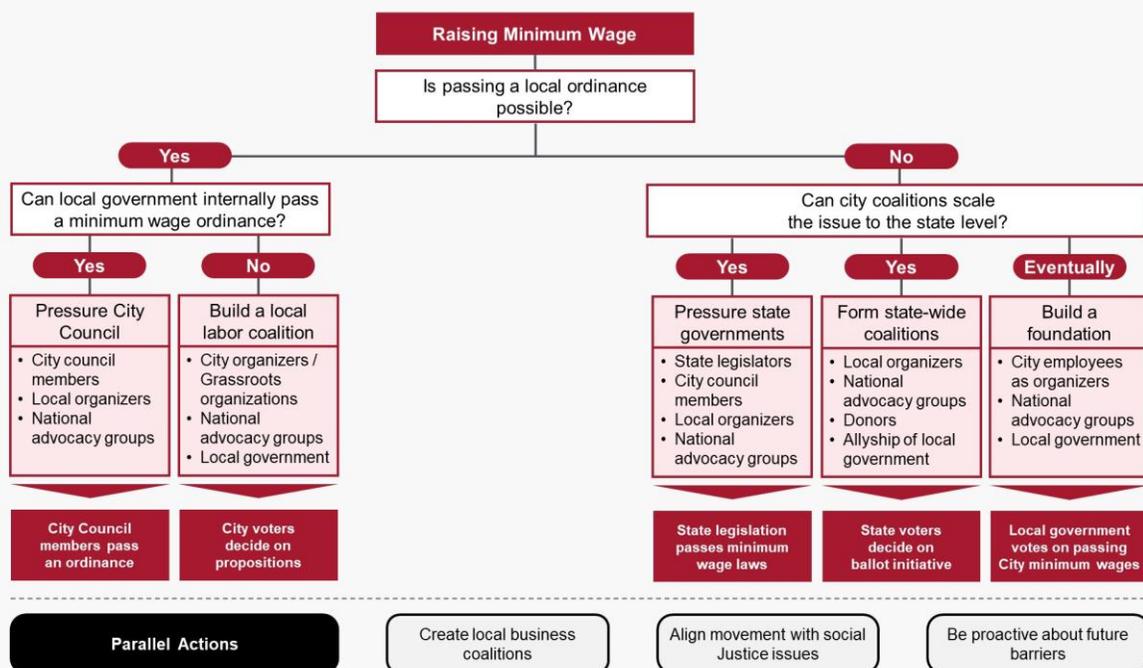
# Executive summary

Wages for middle- and low-wage workers have stagnated or fallen since the late 1970s with the only reversal against this trend coming from state and local minimum wage increases (Mishel et. al., 2015; NELP, 2020). Minimum wage State preemption laws inhibit local minimum wage movements across 26 states (Economic Policy Institute, 2019). As such, workers across the country are increasingly unable to afford rising costs of living in urban localities.

This reality poses both political and economic obstacles for city managers as local business communities experience higher turnover rates, and greater funding must be allocated to municipal social programs where hourly wages fail to meet the cost of living. In response to the common scenario of state preemption in the context of minimum wage, this study provides four case studies: Flagstaff, Arizona; St. Louis Missouri; Tampa, Orlando, and Miami, Florida; and Greensboro and Durham North Carolina. In each case, urban minimum wage movements realized raised wages in fiscally conservative subnational environments. The city level is a promising stage for these initiatives, because cities house advocacy networks that can force legislative change either at the state or local levels and can lead ballot initiatives. This study finds that coalitions of workers, advocacy groups, and supporting government officials, referred to as “labor coalitions” throughout the report, are crucial to raising wages.

Forming and bolstering these coalitions should therefore be central to any minimum wage increase movement. This report’s main contribution comes in the form of a set of strategies that labor coalitions can use to achieve minimum wage increases, as depicted in Figure 1 below (reference page 5 for more details).

**Figure 1: Local government strategies to achieve minimum wage increases**





# Parameters & Case Studies

## Parameters

### Framework

We used the following framework to understand **how** these coalitions were formed and the **level of government** at which success was achieved:

1. History and Context
2. Relevant Stakeholders
3. Coalition Formation
4. Coalitions' Political Strategies
5. Level of Government

### Geographies

We chose seven cities that represent different minimum wage increase strategies used in states hesitant to increase minimum wages:

- Flagstaff, AZ
- St. Louis, MO
- Miami, Tampa, & Orlando, FL
- Greensboro & Durham, NC

### Sources

We used a mixture of public information and interviews

- Public Information: local news, academic literature, social media, advocacy group websites
- Interviewed individuals for: background information, Flagstaff case study, Florida case study

## Case study summaries (linked to detailed case studies in appendix)

### [Case Study #1: Flagstaff, Arizona \(2016\)](#)

In 2016, local organizers led a legislative effort against state preemption, resulting in a wage increase through a ballot initiative (Prop 414). This scheduled a minimum wage raise to \$15 by 2021. Two years later, in 2018, the same coalition defended the raise against an oppositional amendment (Prop 418). Eva Putzova, a City Council member, headed the coalition. Support came from college students involved via the Sustainable Communities Department at Northern Arizona University, as well as from activists from the Flagstaff immigrant community, many of whom worked in hospitality. Secondary support came from nonprofits and labor

organizations, such as the National Employment Law Project and ROC United. The coalition's strategy emphasized voter education through social media outreach and door-to-door canvassing to secure the ballot initiative in 2016. The outcome was the passage of local Prop 414 and the defeat of local Prop 418, with local wages scheduled to reach \$15 by 2021.

### [Case Study #2: St. Louis, Missouri \(2017\)](#)

In 2013, a fast-food worker incident prompted organizing under the guidance of SEIU and JWW, leading to the City passing an ordinance in 2015 to raise the minimum wage incrementally to \$11.00 by 2018. This increase was contested for two years until the Missouri Supreme Court upheld it in May 2017.

# Case studies (cont'd)

However, the Missouri state legislature preempted the ordinance in August 2017. This was followed by two movements. First, the Mayor, along with coalitions that had been fighting for the increase (Fight for 15, JWJ), ran and promoted a campaign called Save The Raise, asking business owners to raise their minimum wage voluntarily. This resulted in around 100 businesses pledging to do so. At the same time, movements on the state level started gaining momentum. The state movement, Raise Up Missouri, collected signatures to enter a proposition on the ballot titled Prop B. The St. Louis mayor at the time, along with local level advocates and unions, supported this action and advocated for their residents to sign the petition. This led to the state-level Prop B winning the vote for a minimum wage raise to \$12 by 2023.

## **Case Study #3: Tampa, Orlando, and Miami, Florida (2020)**

Amendment 2, a Florida ballot initiative that will phase in a \$15 minimum wage by 2026, passed in 2020. A state-wide coalition consisting of grass-roots urban organizers, state-level advocacy groups, national unions and union-like organizations, such as SEIU or Fight for \$15, and some city representatives acting as private citizens led the movement. John Morgan, a wealthy Florida attorney, also donated an estimated \$6 million, although he was less involved in voter outreach (Associated Press, 2020). Florida's example of urban labor coalitions in Tampa, Orlando, and Miami coalescing at the state level is especially noteworthy because voter outreach took

place during the coronavirus pandemic and because organizers ensured that the amendment was put forth to voters, despite the state introducing legislation that increased the cost of sponsoring a ballot initiative (Eskamani, 2020).

## **Case Study #4: Greensboro (2015) and Durham (2016), North Carolina**

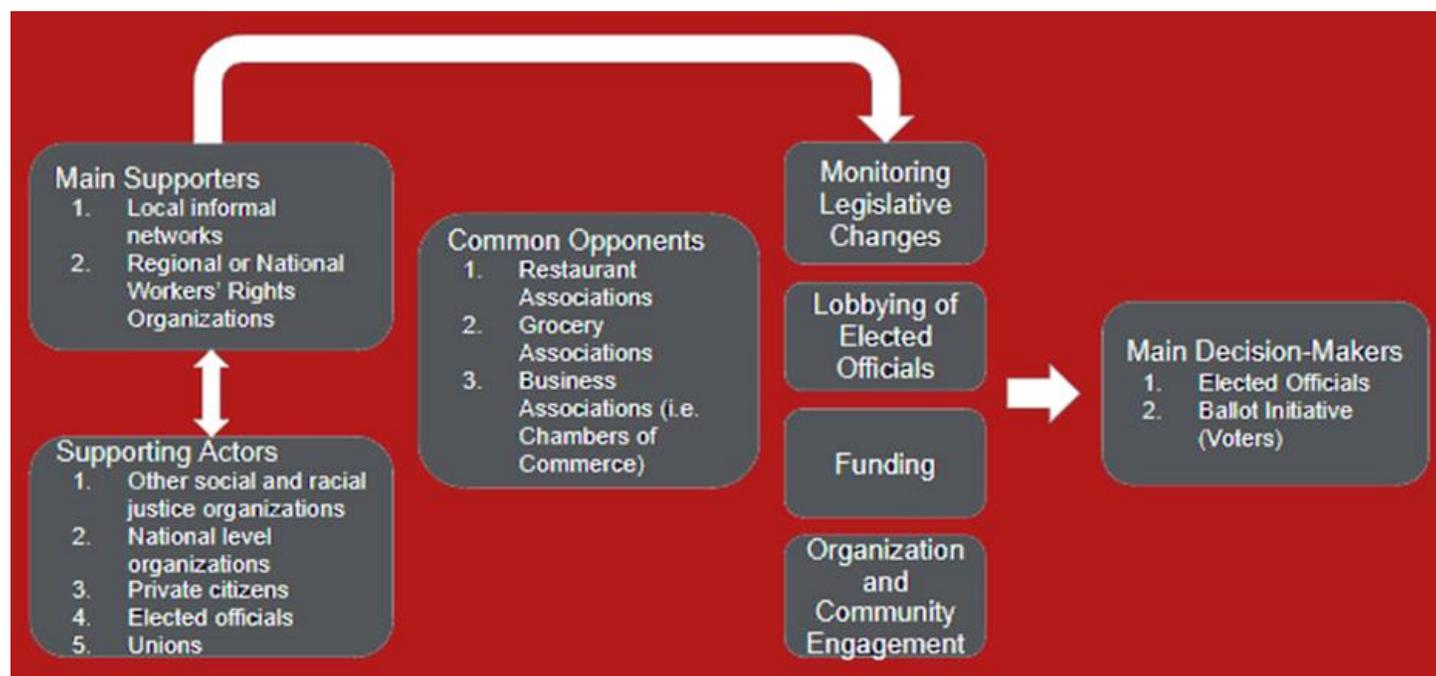
Local governments in North Carolina only have control over the wage rates of their own employees. They are unable to enact legislation raising the minimum wage above the state minimum for private sector workers. Greensboro coalition members included Working America, the community affiliate of AFL-CIO, and multiple single-issue grassroots organizations. Durham coalition members included Raise Up, the southern arm of Fight for \$15, and UE Local 150, the North Carolina Public Service Workers Union. Coalition members worked to convince city council members to increase the minimum wage for municipal employees, and in Durham organizers campaigned for private businesses to voluntarily pay a living wage. In 2015, Greensboro city council adopted a \$15 minimum wage for city employees by 2020, with Durham city council following in 2016. Interestingly, council members claimed moral instead of political authority when discussing their decisions and expressed hope that local government could act as an example for private businesses to pay a living wage. The voluntary campaign in Durham resulted in nearly 100 businesses signing on to pay their workers a living wage.

# Key findings

## Process of coalition success

Proponents of minimum wage increases that are part of coalitions can be separated into main actors and supporting actors. These two categories are not mutually exclusive and specific actors depend on each individual situation. More generally, the main actors involved in these coalitions comprise of local informal networks and regional or national workers' rights organizations. Supporting actors often include social and racial justice organizations, national level organizations, private citizens, elected officials, and unions. Expanding the coalition to include social and racial justice organizations provides a broader base of support to fight for increased minimum wages outside of major cities where workers' rights organizations may not be as well established. Common opponents to minimum wage increases include restaurant associations, grocery store associations, and business associations such as chambers of commerce. Proponents take actions such as monitoring legislative change, lobbying elected officials, providing funding and fundraising, and organization and community engagement to convince the main decision-makers to increase the minimum wage. Main decision makers can be either elected officials or voters. In cases where elected officials are unable or unwilling to act, success has been achieved by bringing the issue to the voters through ballot initiatives.

**Figure 3: Process of coalition success with actors and actions they take to convince decision makers**



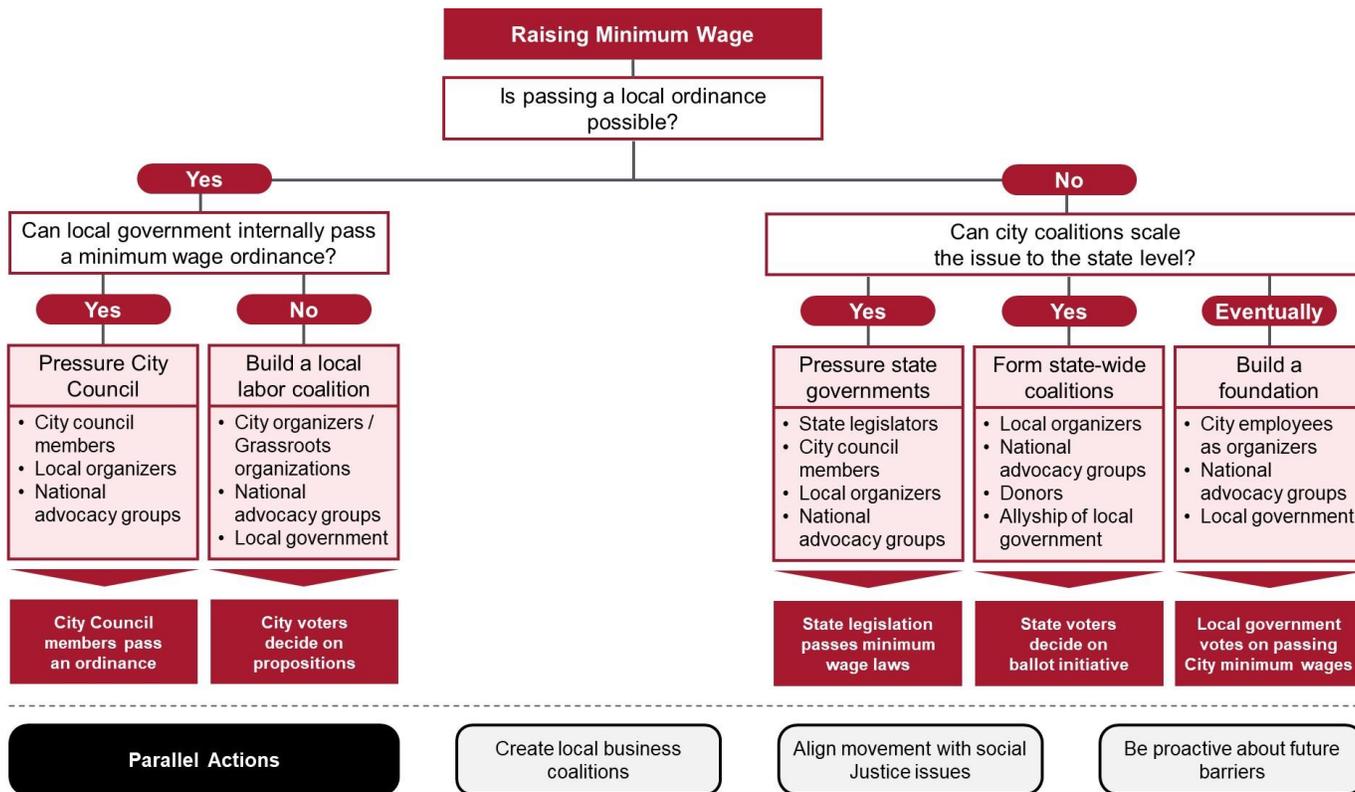
# Conclusion

## Takeaways for local labor coalitions

Despite potential barriers, local governments and advocacy groups can pursue strategies to achieve minimum wage increases (see Figure 3). These strategies depend on whether passing a local ordinance is possible and are as follows:

- ▶ Local ordinance is possible: coalitions should investigate whether city council can pass the ordinance
  - ✓ **If so:** Labor coalitions can pressure city council to pass a fair wage ordinance
  - × **If not:** Labor coalitions can present a proposition to voters
- ▶ Local ordinance is not possible: Labor coalitions should first investigate if scaling up to the state level might be successful
  - ✓ **If so:** (1) Local labor coalitions can expand and pressure state governments to pass minimum wage laws, or (2) Labor coalitions can bring the issue to voters
  - × **If not:** Cities can raise minimum wages for their employees and influence local and state processes, which can raise a discussion around fairer wages
- ▶ In parallel to the above strategies, local governments and advocacy groups should:
  - ▶ Unite with advocacy groups with aligned goals (ex: racial justice groups, unions)
  - ▶ Educate local business coalitions on how to phase in fair wages
  - ▶ Prepare for barriers to minimum wage implementation or future voter initiatives

**Figure 4: Local government strategies to achieve minimum wage increases**



# Appendix

Detailed case studies

# Case Study #1: Flagstaff, AZ (2016)

## **(1) Minimum wage history and context**

Prior to the 2016 general election, Arizona's state-mandated minimum wage was \$8.05. In 2016, Flagstaff passed the Minimum Wage Act (Proposition 414) which scheduled a gradual increase in minimum wage to \$15 by 2021. Further, the ordinance proposed a concurrent increase in the wages of tipped employees from \$3 below the minimum wage to the full wage amount by the year 2026 (Ballotpedia 2018). Following a robust campaign spearheaded by local progressive actors, this initial ordinance passed with nearly 54% of the vote. In 2017, Proposition 414 was amended by Flagstaff's city council, scheduling the wage increases at \$11 in 2018, \$12 in 2019, \$13 in 2020, \$15 in 2021, and \$15.50 in 2022 (Ballotpedia 2018). Two years later, Proposition 418 proposed a revision to the prior 2016 ordinance by mandating that Flagstaff's minimum wage match that of the state's, which would result in reduced wages as well as the cancellation of scheduled wage increases for tipped employees (Ballotpedia 2018). This measure was defeated when city council members voted against holding a special election in May 2017.

Our team interviewed Eva Putzova, former member of the Flagstaff City Council and one of the architects of the dual Flagstaff minimum wage campaigns. Her leadership allowed the city to pass one of the largest minimum wage increases in the country in addition to securing a successful NO campaign against Proposition 418. The history of Flagstaff's passage of the 2014 Minimum Wage Act and subsequent defeat of the 2018 Proposition 418 is especially relevant in future cases of rural localities that lack substantial infrastructure for organizing progressive coalitions. Ultimately, Flagstaff community members' successful efforts to sustain a living wage can be attributed to extensive involvement among a few core individuals, with contributions from peripheral non-profit organizations in shaping the language of the initiative. Local parties exist, though are predominantly consumed by electoral politics. Thus, relevant stakeholders in the campaign for minimum wage stemmed from discrete, progressive factions that existed outside of the city's political sphere.

## **(2) Relevant stakeholders:**

Supporting Organizations:

- Living Wage Coalition (LWC) - an informal progressive coalition whose core members included students at the local university (many of whom were involved through specific programs such as the Master's in Sustainable Communities) as well as members of Flagstaff's immigrant community, many of whom were originally from Mexico or Central America and were employed in the hospitality industry.
- Friends of Flagstaff's Future - Flagstaff's local non-profit organization for progressive, multi-issue platforms, such as land use, community education, environmental sustainability, and social justice.

# Case Study #1: Flagstaff, AZ (2016) (Cont'd)

## **(2) Relevant stakeholders (Cont'd):**

Supporting Organizations:

- Flagstaff Needs a Raise - a collection of Flagstaff residents, businesses, workers, and other small organizations coordinating to effect positive changes in labor policy, the ultimate goal of which is to enable all working people to earn wages that support a high quality of life (Ballotpedia 2018).
- Other Supporting Organizations: National Employment Law Project (NELP), Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC United), United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)

Opposing Organizations:

- Elevate Flagstaff - a business coalition of Flagstaff citizens, small business owners, employees, community and nonprofit organizations who proposed the Sustainable Wages Act (Prop 418) as an alternative to the increase in wages in the Flagstaff community.

## **(3) Coalition formation**

Flagstaff's progressive minimum wage campaigns occurred largely outside of the local government, and thus Flagstaff organizers saw virtually no engagement from city council members. In many ways, this lack of institutional engagement and partnerships in strategizing enabled organizers to create a more progressive ordinance than if such partnerships had occurred (E. Putzova, personal communication, November 2020). Flagstaff's progressive coalitions formed as a result of the deployment of a core group of members on the ground (i.e. students and immigrant activists), supplemented by expertise from occasional newcomers from the peripheral organizations mentioned in (1) Relevant Stakeholders. For example, in 2015, the LWC was contacted directly by NELP, whose legal expertise proved instrumental in crafting the language of the ordinance as well as introducing previously unconsidered policy approaches such as enforcement and tipped wage elimination.

## **(4) The development of coalitions' political strategies**

Political strategies were developed at two specific levels: (1) media outreach and (2) voter education. (1): Social media, and particularly Facebook for the older electorate, allowed a channel for the LWC to relay strategic branding, messaging, and easy-to-read slogans as a means to mobilize those most affected by minimum wage constraints (E. Putzova, personal communication, November 2020). During the initial 2016 campaign, the LWC spent \$24,000 in Facebook ads, mailers, and external campaign consulting. In terms of (2) voter education, Eva utilized her prior experience from the city council race to seek voters out individually, knocking on doors as well as collecting signatures from a predetermined voter list. Progressive actors faced little resistance from the business

# Case Study #1: Flagstaff, AZ (2016) (Cont'd)

## **(4) The development of coalitions' political strategies (Cont'd)**

community during their initial campaigning for the passage of Prop 414; the real fight began after the ordinance passed, and those on the repeal side began pouring dark money into opposition efforts (E. Putzova, personal communication, November 2020). Ultimately, due to the progressive organizers' lack of equivalent resources, the element of voter education took precedence over buying votes and occurred through direct seeking out of constituents.

## **(5) The level of government through which coalitions were ultimately able to achieve change**

In both the 2016 passage of the Minimum Wage Act and the 2017 amendment to the ordinance, Flagstaff organizers succeeded in effecting a wage hike at the city level only.

# Case Study #2: St. Louis, Missouri (2017)

## (1) Minimum wage history and context

In 2015, the mayor of St. Louis passed an ordinance to increase the minimum wage incrementally to \$11 per hour by 2018. Due to two years of litigation, it did not go into effect until May 2017 with the 2017 scheduled rate (\$10 per hour). However, shortly afterwards the Missouri state legislature passed a preemption law in August 2017, pushing St. Louis's minimum wage back down to the state minimum wage at \$7.70 per hour (von Wilpert, 2017).

One year later, the fight for minimum wage scaled up in an impactful way to the state level. Missouri voters voted to pass Proposition B, the \$12 minimum wage initiative, with a majority vote of 62.34% (Ballotpedia, 2020). This means that Missouri is now on schedule to increase the minimum wage to \$12 by 2023 and is the first increase based on a ballot vote since 2006 (Ballotpedia, 2011). Missouri's Jobs with Justice (JWJ) filed the initiative with the secretary of state, leading to a campaign called Raise Up Missouri, supported by other organizations such as The Fairness Project, Sixteen Thirty Fund, and the National Employment Law Center. Additionally, support came from multiple officials, including Mayor Lyda Krewson of St. Louis and Mayor Sly James of Kansas City. They joined rallies and advocated along with Raise Up Missouri for signing the petition to get Proposition B on the ballot. The campaign received around 200,000 signatures for its petition, more than the needed amount. The formation of a coalition in St. Louis advocating for a minimum wage increase at the local level played a role in the passage of Proposition B at the state level.

## (2) Relevant stakeholders:

Supporting organizations:

- Missouri Jobs with Justice: A chapter of the national union rights organization, Jobs with Justice, Missouri JWJ played a major role in co-leading the movement for the minimum wage hike (Jobs with Justice, 2020). It was also prevalent in Missouri before the Fight for \$15 campaign started and played a role in the first fast food worker movement organizing in 2013 in St. Louis (Humphrey, 2015).
- Show Me \$15 (the local branch of Fight for \$15): Show Me \$15 serves as the campaign name of the local chapter of Fight for \$15. Show Me \$15 organized protests and increased awareness of the proposition to raise minimum wage in St. Louis.
- Additional organizations and supporters: Service Employee International Union (SEIU) played an earlier role in assisting during the 2013 incident (later explained) as well as a supporting role for the state-level campaign, academic members also joined the Show Me \$15 coalition and spoke during one of the City Council hearings.
- City Council (Alderman Shane Cohn & Francis Slay): Alderman Shane Cohn was the lead sponsor of the proposed ordinance to raise minimum wage. Francis Slay, the mayor of St. Louis at that time, showed support through the media and by showing up to City Council hearings.

# Case Study #2: St. Louis, Missouri (2017) (Cont'd)

## **(2) Relevant stakeholders (Cont'd):**

Opposing organizations:

- Missouri Restaurant Association: Released a study right before one of the hearings on this proposal, stating that Alderman Cohn's bill would possibly cost around 3,100 jobs (Rosenbaum, 2015).
- Missouri Grocers Association: Most importantly, House Rep Dan Shaul, who is also the executive director of the Missouri Grocers Association, sponsored the first preemptive law in Missouri. He initiated a bill to roll back the Supreme Court's decision (Rosenbaum, 2015).

## **(3) Coalition formation**

The 2015 St. Louis ordinance was a product of various protests and marches that ultimately led to passage. The movement started to gain traction after the first fast-food worker organizing and protest in 2013. Although some of the events that happened between 2013-2015 were separate, they all collectively built momentum that led to the bill proposed at the City Council in 2015. Additionally, the events that happened starting in 2013 helped increase the membership and leadership of St. Louis workers in local union coalitions.

### A. Food Organizing

An incident that happened to an employee at a local McDonalds sparked the employee to organize. Most of the action in this movement was done through protests as it was seen as a way that could not be shutdown or considered illegal. Coalition through faith-based (JWJ - Jobs with Justice), labor-based, and community-based organizations were most important in providing strength and knowledge on how to organize. The employee that received negative treatment at the local McDonalds received support from these organizations (JWJ, SEIU) on how to organize and show protests (Humphrey, 2015). This incident launched into the annual fast-food worker protests that consistently occur.

### B. Show Me \$15

Support for the increased minimum wage grew with the involvement of Show Me \$15. After the fast-food employees got organized and started organizing demonstrations in 2013, the St. Louis organizers reached out to other low-wage workers, including home health care workers and retail workers. Support also came from university communities (Petrin & Phillips, 2015).

# Case Study #2: St. Louis, Missouri (2017) (Cont'd)

## **(3) Coalition formation (Cont'd)**

### C. Discussion with the City Council

The culmination of these events of organizing and demonstration led to the City Council designing an ordinance to raise the minimum wage in 2015. Sponsored by Cohn, one of the aldermen, the bill was brought to the aldermen for consideration. The approval of this bill also went through several challenges, with one being the deadline where it seemed (although proven to be wrong later), that any city ordinance before August 28, 2015, would be exempted from the house bill preemption law. The other challenge was one of the aldermen cancelling all hearings related to the minimum wage ordinance. Cohn maneuvered and did two things: compromise to a lower increase target (get to \$11 in 2018 instead of \$15 by 2020) (Pistor, 2015), and to call for a discharge petition to push for a decision on the ordinance (Lippmann, 2015).

## **(4) The Development of coalitions' political strategies**

The coalitions on the local level focused more on organizing protests and talking at City Council hearings. The collection of low-wage workers from fast-food workers, to health workers, to academic institutions built the size of the local coalition chapters and the pressure for the city to respond. Alderman Cohn took the role as the lead sponsor for this bill and pushed it to the City Council. Upon the litigation it faced that held it back from 2015 to 2017, the Mayor and the Fight for \$15 campaign then built another follow-up campaign called Save the Raise, asking that people continue to show support for the bill, as well as for business owners that were already supporting the cause to keep paying their employees accordingly as proposed.

## **(5) The level of government through which coalitions were ultimately able to achieve change**

The St. Louis ordinance passed, with 15 aldermen voting yes, and 6 aldermen voting no in 2015 (Pistor, 2015). This was immediately contested to the Missouri Supreme Court and was tied up in litigation for 2 years. The Supreme Court upheld the ordinance in May 2017. However, the State Legislature passed a preemption law that went into effect in August 2017 overruling the City ordinance. Although the St. Louis campaign was ultimately unsuccessful due to state preemption, it raised awareness for hourly workers and drew in workers to be more involved and taking leadership roles in the local chapters of organizations involved. Additionally, by the time the preemption went into effect, around 100 businesses had already pledged to keep the minimum wage at \$10 (the scheduled rise in minimum wage for that year) (The St. Louis American, 2017). Lastly, the Raise Up Missouri campaign that started at the same time the St. Louis' ordinance was preempted, managed to collect enough signatures for Proposition B through the support of the coalitions that built overtime locally and state level, as well as officials like the Mayor of St. Louis that advocated for the campaign. The culmination of these events led to the Prop B winning majority vote in 2018.

# Case Study #3: Tampa, Orlando, and Miami, FL (2020)

## **(1) Minimum wage history and context**

In November of 2020, 61% of Florida's voters supported Florida Amendment 2, or the \$15 Minimum Wage Initiative, which will phase in a \$15 minimum wage incrementally between 2021 – 2026 (Balletopedia, 2020). Strategies used in the State of Florida can serve as an example for future minimum wage movements for several reasons, some of which include: (1) Organizers created a cross-city movement that was scaled up to the state level, (2) Organizers focused on, and received funding from a donor for advancing a ballot initiative, and (3) Voter education continued despite having to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The passage of Amendment 2 is especially relevant to future minimum wage advocacy because of the challenges it was able to overcome. Prior to Amendment 2's passage, the State increased its minimum wage in 2004 to \$6.15 an hour, indexed to inflation each year (Balletopedia, 2004). In 2016, Florida's Supreme Court invalidated an attempt by Miami Beach to set a minimum wage ordinance of \$13.31 by 2021, stating that the State's 2003 preemption law prohibited local governments from passing higher minimum wage laws (NELP, 2017). Furthermore, since the State's government has a right-leaning legislature, labor coalitions have historically and currently focused on passing ballot initiatives instead of attempting to pass legislative changes. A 2019 state-wide ban limiting ballot initiatives from compensating petition workers for the signatures they receive, as well as added fines on petitions that were not filed within 30 days of being signed, further challenge the ability of coalitions to pass ballot initiatives (Bousquet, 2020).

Finally, labor coalitions had to double their efforts to reach out to voters during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several of the workers fighting for fair wages were deemed essential workers given that they were employed in the fast food or healthcare industries. Thus, during the pandemic, not only were these workers not being paid fair wages, but they were exposed to greater physical risk from their employment (Cardona, 2020). In Florida, the majority of wage workers were people of color, meaning that prevailing wage conditions further deepened racial divides. To this extent, the Black Lives Matter movement, which gained nation-wide support in response to the death of George Floyd, stood in solidarity and bolstered the Fight for 15 movement at the local and the state-level (Fight for 15 Florida, 2020b).

## **(2) Relevant stakeholders:**

Supporting organizations:

- Florida Fight for 15 and SEIU: Statewide organization through which local labor coalitions, most notably fast-food workers, organized the minimum wage movement, voter education, and advocacy, most significantly in Miami, Tampa, and Orlando (Fight for 15 Florida, 2020a)

# Case Study #3: Tampa, Orlando, and Miami, FL (2020) (Cont'd)

## **(2) Relevant stakeholders (Cont'd):**

Supporting Organizations:

- Florida for a Living Wage – Organization funded by Orlando attorney John Morgan, which sponsored the ballot initiative (Balletopedia, 2020).
- Other supporting organizations: Democracy for America, Florida AFL-CIO, Florida Business for a Fair Minimum Wage, League of Women Voters of Florida, Organize Florida, Miami Dade Democratic Party (Balletopedia, 2020).

Opposing Organizations:

- Save Florida Jobs: Organization largely funded by the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association, representing hotel and restaurant chains, which provided arguments in opposition to the minimum wage hike (Balletopedia, 2020; Eskamani, 2020).

## **(3) Coalition formation**

There are three levels of coalition formation that are of note for the passage of Amendment 2: local advocacy combined with business and city representative support, cross-city collaboration with support from nationwide organizations such as Fight for 15 and SEIU, and financial support provided by John Morgan. At the local level, research has shown that fast food workers, most notably McDonalds employees, organized strikes against their employees' minimum wage policies. These organizers, in turn, were supported by select government officials, sometimes as private citizens (Perry, 2015; Fight for 15 Florida 2020a). Fight for 15 and SEIU have both provided support for organizers to convene at state and national levels to coalesce around minimum wage strategies. Finally, much of the recent financial support for Amendment 2's passage seems to have come from John Morgan and his law firm via Florida for a Living Wage, although he refrained from being a direct advocate (Eskamani, 2020).

## **(4) The development of coalitions' political strategies**

Given Miami Beach's difficulties in passing a local minimum wage law, organizers scaled the passage of Amendment 2 to the State Level. Furthermore, instead of relying on government officials within the state legislature to pass the law, organizers brought forth a ballot initiative and spent their efforts on voter education, organizing strikes, and other types of outreach to ensure that they would receive over 61% of Floridians votes for the amendment. They appealed to a diversity of voters through using language of autonomy. Current state minimum wage policies did not allow workers to be self-sufficient and forced them to rely on wages from other jobs (Eskamani, 2020).

## **(5) The level of government through which coalitions were ultimately able to achieve change**

Given a state-wide preemption law that was upheld in 2016, affecting a minimum wage hike was only possible at the state-level.

# Case Study #4: Greensboro (2015) and Durham (2016), NC

## **(1) Minimum wage history and context**

Local governments in North Carolina retain the ability to increase the minimum wage of their own employees, an action that provides tangible benefits to municipal employees and an example for private businesses in their jurisdiction. Increasing the minimum wage of city employees is an action possible in multiple other states with minimum wage preemption laws (for example Missouri and Florida), providing an avenue for local government action when operating within a hostile state context. Raising the wages of local government employees enables local government officials to claim the moral high ground when advocating for living wages for all workers, may inspire private businesses to voluntarily pay living wages, and ensures that local governments offer competitive wages.

In August 2015 Greensboro, NC was the first city in the US South to adopt a \$15 minimum wage for city employees by 2020 (Brown, 2017). Durham followed in 2016, and Winston-Salem has announced plans to raise the minimum wage of its employees to \$15 per hour by 2021 (Craver, 2019). These increases represent a way that cities can show their support for a higher minimum wage while offering competitive wages in states where preemption laws exist (Brown, 2018). Although it may not affect many workers if the municipality is small, raising the minimum wage for municipal workers can bring a variety of coalition actors to a geographic area and lead to future efforts to expand the fight for labor policies beneficial to workers at the local and state levels.

While a clear link between local action on raising municipal worker wages and state action on raising state worker wages is not evident, it should be noted that in 2018 the North Carolina Republican legislature raised the minimum wage of all state workers to \$15 per hour (Cournoyer, 2018). Returning to the local level, Greensboro municipal workers organized further and now have a paid parental leave policy and are working with the city to build in a step-wage system past \$15 per hour (Working America, 2016; Elk, 2018). These examples illustrate the potential for coalitions to expand policies beneficial to workers past the minimum wage at the local level and the potential to affect minimum wage increases at the state level.

## **(2) Relevant stakeholders:**

Supporting organizations:

- Working America: The community affiliate of the AFL-CIO. Began organizing Greensboro municipal workers in 2015. Attempts to organize those who do not have a union on their job which encompasses many workers in North Carolina.
- Raise Up: Southern arm of the Fight for \$15 movement. Helped to organize the \$15 minimum wage increase for Durham city workers.

# Case Study #4: Greensboro (2015) and Durham (2016), NC (Cont'd)

## **(2) Relevant stakeholders (Cont'd):**

Supporting Organizations:

- UE Local 150: A union that represents municipal employees and state health workers even though the state of North Carolina does not allow public sector collective bargaining (Brown, 2017). The union was heavily involved in the municipal wage increase in Durham and filled the void when Working America left Greensboro to organize workers there and create a union for Greensboro municipal workers (Brown, 2018).
- Groups aligned with the labor movement: The Fight for \$15 partnered with NAACP State Chapter President Rev. William Barber. Greensboro organizers also partnered with many issue-specific grassroots campaigns, such as holding meetings at the Central Carolina Worker Justice Center (Brown, 2017).

There was no significant opposition because the ordinance did not affect private business.

## **(3) Coalition formation**

The formation of coalitions was slightly different between Greensboro and Durham. In Greensboro, Working America had been active and organizing workers in early 2015 before the minimum wage increase was passed in August (Brown, 2018). However, Working America only coordinated one public forum in support of the minimum wage increase before the vote, which passed on a 7-2 margin. The ease of passage surprised many activists and even the policymakers themselves (Brown, 2018). In Durham, it was a slightly different story, as the national level Raise Up organization partnered with UE Local 150, a local union organization, to collaborate on an initiative called the "People's Budget" which called for many social justice issues to be addressed in the municipal budget, including an increased minimum wage for city workers. Although not all budget items passed, the increased minimum wage sailed through with a 9-0 vote (Brown, 2018).

The formation of a coalition between Raise Up and UE Local 150 in Durham allowed the national level to partner with the local and create a space for intersectional issues of racial, social, and economic justice to occur. UE Local 150 is a Black-led and democratic union which adopted the platform of a \$15 minimum wage at their 2016 convention (Brown, 2018). The movement in Greensboro involved multiple single-issue grassroots movements and the Fight for \$15 movement (of which Raise Up is an extension) partnered with NAACP North Carolina State Chapter President Rev. William Barber. Greensboro and Durham are small cities, and when transferring labor movements from big cities like Seattle and Chicago to smaller cities in less hospitable state government environments there needs to be an expansion of organizer engagement with low-wage workers like this expansion into racial justice issues through the partnership with the NAACP (Doussard, 2016).

# Case Study #4: Greensboro (2015) and Durham (2016), NC(Cont'd)

## **(4) The development of coalitions' political strategies**

In terms of political strategy, the clearest examples come from the statements of Greensboro and Durham city council members themselves. All council members discussed their decisions in almost exclusively moral terms, which reflected the political strategy of claiming moral instead of political authority. Supplementary arguments included providing competitive city wages to ensure the city had the best people working for them and to serve as a broader example for other actors (Brown, 2017). In tandem with the political framing by council members, organizers also engaged in a campaign to have private businesses adopt a living wage for their workers in Durham. This effort was successful, with almost 100 businesses signing on (Elk, 2017).

## **(5) The level of government through which coalitions were ultimately able to achieve change**

The coalitions were ultimately able to achieve success on the local level within the context of state preemption, and some measure of success on a state level. At the local level, the work done by these coalitions shows that an action that is well within reach of many local governments helps its own workers tremendously, gives local government the moral authority to advocate for higher minimum wages in the private sector, and provides a means to move towards a \$15 minimum wage symbolically (see Doussard and Schrock, 2021). The fight for increased minimum wage in these cities also mobilized activists to go to businesses in the city to create individual voluntary agreements that they would pay a minimum wage (Elk, 2017). Furthermore, these minimum wage coalitions led to an expansion of workers' rights in Greensboro with the passage of paid parental leave in 2016 (Working America, 2016). At the state level, there is a coalition of many national and local organizations called Raising Wages NC of which Working America, Raise Up, and UE Local 150 are a part. In 2018 the state legislature enacted a \$15 minimum wage for state employees (Cournoyer, 2018).

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