Grassroots for Hire

Public Affairs Consultants in American Democracy

EDWARD T. WALKER

Grassroots for Hire

Although "grassroots" conjures up images of independent citizen organizing, much mass participation today is sponsored by elite consultants working for corporations and powerful interest groups. This book pulls back the curtain to reveal a lucrative industry of consulting firms that incentivize public activism as a marketable service. Edward Walker illustrates how, spurred by the post-1960s advocacy explosion and rising business political engagement, elite consultants have deployed new technologies to commercialize mass participation. Using evidence from interviews, surveys, and public records, *Grassroots for Hire* paints a detailed portrait of these consultants and their clients. Today, *Fortune* 500 firms hire them to counter-mobilize against regulation, protest, or controversy. Ironically, some advocacy groups now outsource organizing to them. Walker also finds that consultants are reshaping both participation and policymaking, but unethical "astroturf" strategies are often ineffective. This path-breaking book calls for a rethinking of interactions between corporations, advocacy groups, and elites in politics.

EDWARD T. WALKER is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Business and Public Policy

Series Editor:

ASEEM PRAKASH, University of Washington

Series Board:

Vinod K. Aggarwal, University of California, Berkeley
Tanja A. Börzel, Freie Universität Berlin
David Coen, University College London
Peter Gourevitch, University of California, San Diego
Neil Gunningham, The Australian National University
Witold J. Henisz, University of Pennsylvania
Adrienne Héritier, European University Institute
Chung-in Moon, Yonsei University
Sarah A. Soule, Stanford University
David Vogel, University of California, Berkeley

This series aims to play a pioneering role in shaping the emerging field of business and public policy. Business and Public Policy focuses on two central questions. First, how does public policy influence business strategy, operations, organization, and governance, and with what consequences for both business and society? Second, how do businesses themselves influence policy institutions, policy processes, and other policy actors, and with what outcomes?

Other books in the series:

TIMOTHY WERNER, *Public Forces and Private Politics in American Big Business*
HEVINA S. DASHWOOD, *The Rise of Global Corporate Social Responsibility: Mining and the Spread of Global Norms*
LLEWLYN HUGHES, *Globalizing Oil: Firms and Oil Market Governance in France, Japan, and the United States*

Grassroots for Hire

Public Affairs Consultants in American Democracy

EDWARD T. WALKER
University of California, Los Angeles

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

For Evelyn

Contents

Figures

Tables

Acknowledgements

Studying how organizations mobilize political participation has instilled in me a deep appreciation of how individual and group actions are made possible by particular social contexts. Intellectual production is no different, as ideas about how best to understand social life require a fertile context in which to take root. Accordingly, this study would not have been possible without the support of those colleagues, students, research collaborators, family, and friends who helped me as I overhauled what started as a dissertation into a finished book.

First, I thank the public affairs consultants who took the time to sit for an interview with me, respond to my survey, and/or provide feedback on the project. Although our confidentiality agreements do not, of course, permit me to offer personal thanks here to the many who took time out of their (often incredibly) busy schedules to participate, I hope all of my interviewees and respondents know how much I value their support of this research.

This work was made possible with the support of a number of grants and fellowships. As a doctoral dissertation, this research was awarded a Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant from the National Science Foundation (#SES-0527344). This grant was used to collect the baseline data on the population of consultants. In order to assess which of these consulting firms survived, I received a small seed grant from the University of Vermont College of Arts and Sciences. This allowed me to write the grant proposal for the surveys and interviews of the firms that survived, which, in turn, was funded jointly by the NSF's Sociology and Political Science programs (#SES-0851153). Support through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF) Scholars in Health Policy Research program provided me with a leave from teaching and time to complete this book. Of course, although I am exceedingly grateful for support from these funders, they bear no responsibility for the analyses reported here.

I was also fortunate enough to receive thoughtful questions and feedback on various portions of this project during talks at Harvard

Business School, New York University, the Ohio State University, Pennsylvania State University, Institut d'études politiques de Paris (Sciences-Po), University of Connecticut, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, University of California-Los Angeles, University of California-San Diego, University of Michigan, University of Vermont, and the University of Western Ontario's Ivey School of Business.

This project would not have been possible without the hard work of a number of research assistants and peers at Penn State, Vermont, and Michigan who helped with data collection, including Simon Boehme, Benjamin Dube, Heather Ellis, Dara Ewing, Rebecca Falkenstern, Jasmine Fledderjohann, Katie Johnson, Kirstin Kapustik, Marie Krouse, Kathryn Lindenmuth, Daniele Loprieno, Leslie MacConnell, Jennifer Matson, Jessica Pavel, Heather Seitz, Coryn Shiflet, and Rachel Smith.

Colleagues at each of my institutional homes since this project began have helped in some fashion. At Penn State, the dissertation committee who helped me to launch this project deserves particular thanks: John McCarthy, Alan Sica, Lee Ann Banaszak, Roger Finke, and Nancy Love. Alan's unrivaled knowledge of the history of sociological thought continues to serve as an excellent resource for his students. In John I found perhaps the best intellectual mentor that a junior scholar could be so fortunate to find. His commitment to rigorous, systematic, and yet creative forms of sociological inquiry are an inspiration, and his model as a careful mentor of graduate student research is one that I can only hope to emulate in some small part with my own students.

A number of peers at Penn State also read drafts, provided feedback, and offered moral support during the project's early stages: Amy Adamczyk, Latrica Best, Amber Boydstun, Cassie Dorius, Shawn Dorius, Dan Hawkins, Nathan Hess, Jacob Hibel, Kelly Innes, Erik Johnson, Andrew Lindner, Andrew Martin, Nivi Menon, Pat Rafail, Phil Schwadel, and Michael Stout. Frank Baumgartner also provided helpful resources as the project developed, both in our collaborative work and in his suggestions about this book. I am also grateful for his willingness to share data that he and John McCarthy collected from the *Encyclopedia of Associations* (used in Chapter 6).

The University of Vermont's sociology department served as a stimulating and collegial context during this project's adolescent stage. I received useful feedback on this project throughout my time there. Beth

time working on this project. I also thank Vincent Roscigno and Randy Hodson, who offered thorough feedback in their role as editors of the *American Sociological Review* when my article – the major findings of which are reproduced in Chapter 3 – appeared in 2009. Additionally, thanks are due to those who have supported my efforts to publicize this research, including former *Contexts* editors Doug Hartmann and Chris Uggen and also Sewell Chan at the *New York Times*.

My survey would not have been possible without the support of Penn State's Survey Research Center, especially Brian Sonak for his careful attention to programming details. I also received essential feedback on survey drafts from Frank Baumgartner, Daniel Kreiss, Michael Lord, John McCarthy, Beth Mintz, and Patty Strach.

Moving further into the past, I would like to thank those advisors who inspired my initial interest in sociology. Doug Porpora's love of ideas is contagious, and I know that I'm not the only one of his former students who credits their continuing excitement about sociology, in part, to those famous multi-hour conversations in his office. I also owe much to the early mentorship of Bob Brulle, Dave Kutzik, and Wes Shumar.

My particular thanks go to Business and Public Policy series editor Aseem Prakash, to John Haslam at Cambridge University Press, and to editorial board members Sarah Soule and David Vogel. Both Aseem and John have made considerable efforts to improve this manuscript and bring it into print. Additionally, I thank Aseem for hosting a thought-provoking session at the International Studies Association meetings in San Diego in 2012, highlighting recent or forthcoming books in the Business and Public Policy series.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family for their strong support during the writing of this book. My parents and brother – respectively, Joan, Edward, and Daniel Walker – were careful listeners and offered excellent suggestions for how to help the work reach a broader audience. Most of all, I thank Lauren Kusiv for her crucial support of me and of this project from the very start. Lauren has read draft chapters, helped me think through decisions along the way, and talked with me endlessly about the changing nature of public participation and advocacy. She has also been an exceedingly patient, supportive, and caring partner throughout multiple moves and during times when finishing this book and presenting its findings kept me away from home.

This book is dedicated to our daughter, Evelyn Rose Walker.

Sources

1 | *Grassroots from the top down*

The front stage of public participation

In 2010, a wave of student activism was under way on the campuses of for-profit colleges and universities across the US. Recognizing that new federal rules could effectively make many such institutions close their doors to the diverse non-traditional enrollees that call such schools home, students began to organize to make their case against the new regulations. Called the "gainful employment" rule, regulations proposed by the US Department of Education would cut off the flow of federal student loans and Pell grants to institutions in which a majority of students graduate with higher monthly student loan payments than they could be expected to comfortably repay in their selected profession.[1] Given that student loans are the lifeblood of higher education, many students felt threatened that they would no longer be able to attend their school of choice. Indeed, the way the regulation was written, a logical interpretation for many was not that the Department of Education wanted to reform the *practices of these institutions*, but instead that regulators wanted to take away *students' access to loans*.

One such student was Dawn Connor of Globe University in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. At the start of 2010, Dawn was just a regular college student, taking night courses to become a veterinary technician, while working during the day at a local shelter spaying and neutering dogs

---

[1] More specifically, the original rules proposed by the Department of Education in January 2010 would have required that "a majority of [an institution's] graduates' annual student loan payments under a 10-year repayment plan must be no more than eight percent of the incomes of those in the lowest quarter of their respective professions"; earnings data would come from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Gorski, 2010). This was later revised such that programs had to meet one of three criteria in order to maintain eligibility for student aid: at least 35 percent of graduates must be successfully repaying their loans, students' estimated annual loan payments must not exceed 12 percent of projected earnings, or payments must not exceed 30 percent of discretionary income (Lewin, 2012).

and cats.[2] She had been active in a variety of leadership roles around the university, including serving as student ambassador for the Veterinary Technology program, president of the Veterinary Technology club, and playing a role in meeting and welcoming new students to campus. She had graduated from high school early, then drifted from one traditional college to another, ultimately changing majors a few times and making progress without earning a degree. Globe University, a for-profit institution with eight branches throughout Wisconsin, Minnesota, and South Dakota, turned out to be a great fit for Connor. Despite the substantial tuition for a vocational degree – the two-year associate's degree in veterinary technology runs to over $44,000 plus lab fees and book expenses – the school had the advantage of being located in Connor's hometown and fit her other priorities. She especially liked that she was able to maintain a conventional job during the day while working toward her degree through night classes.

Catching wind of the Department of Education's proposed regulations, Dawn was happy to visit Washington to lobby on behalf of students at for-profit institutions in March 2010. She felt so strongly about her institution, in fact, that she became a force in helping to propel a national student campaign against the regulations, through an organization called Students for Academic Choice (SAC). The group, which described itself as an association of "proud students and graduates of private, post-secondary career-oriented institutions,"[3] was focused on ensuring "access to a quality education" and recognizing the value that "non-traditional learners" bring to the workforce. More specifically, the organization focused on the fear among many students at for-profit schools that they would lose access to the funding they need to pursue their education.

Only a few months later, SAC had an estimated 150 leaders and was working with a lawyer to gain official nonprofit status. The group was a co-sponsor of a rally in Washington that claimed to have assembled over two thousand students of private sector colleges to voice their opposition to the gainful employment rule.[4] More significantly, SAC became active in organizing college students across the entire for-profit university system, ultimately assembling some 32,000 signatures on a petition asking that the Department of Education avoid enacting the

---

[2] The following builds largely from Gorski (2010).
[3] Students for Academic Choice (2012).   [4] States News Service (2010).

gainful employment rule.[5] SAC's petition was framed to suggest that the rules change would harm disadvantaged groups including "single mothers, veterans, and adult students who work full time while attending school."[6]

After a fierce battle with the Department of Education, groups like Students for Academic Choice could claim some success in reshaping policy. Although the gainful employment rule was approved by the Obama administration in June 2011 – requiring that 35 percent of an institution's graduates must be repaying their loans – the regulations were much less encompassing than those originally proposed. In earlier draft proposals, the rules would have meant penalties against 16 percent of for-profit institutions, but the final rules were only projected to affect around 5 percent of for-profit institutions,[7] and schools would have to fail the regulation's test criteria for three or four consecutive years in order to be penalized.[8] And although the original rules were set to go into effect with new penalties beginning in 2012, the revised rules made it such that penalties wouldn't be imposed until three years later.[9] Students of career colleges and other proprietary institutions would have even more to celebrate in the following months, when a federal district court judge overturned a key component of the regulation.[10]

Behind the curtain

How was it that Students for Academic Choice came to be such a forceful player in the effort to fight against the gainful employment rule that was threatening students at for-profit colleges and universities? Conventional approaches to understanding the success of grassroots organizing would have us consider the importance of organization, resources, political opportunities, and the skillful deployment of cultural frames in crafting an advocacy message. When employed in the right combination, grassroots advocacy can be a "weapon of the weak" that allows new groups to have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives.

But to focus only on these factors would cause us to overlook a key factor behind student activism on behalf of the industry: the campaign was orchestrated as part of the for-profit education industry's

[5] Field (2010).   [6] Students for Academic Choice (2011).
[7] Lichtblau (2011).   [8] Lewin (2012).   [9] Lichtblau (2011).
[10] Lewin (2012).

multimillion-dollar lobbying campaign against the gainful employment rule. Despite its efforts to be seen as an independent, grassroots uprising of concerned students at for-profit colleges, the industry's backing was not far behind. Students for Academic Choice was, in fact, sponsored and supported by the Career College Association (CCA), which is the leading trade association representing for-profit colleges and universities.[11] Indeed, as Connor herself acknowledged, the idea to form the organization originated not with the students, but with representatives of for-profit schools.[12] Further, the group was formed at the Career College Association's lobbying day in Washington, and the SAC website and its initial resources were provided by the CCA.[13] As Connor put it, the trade group served as SAC's "grandfather," which gave the group its start and guidance. In her words, "they kind of got us going. But now they're taking the training wheels off and saying, 'Go for it and let's see what you guys can do.'"[14]

As it turns out, Students for Academic Choice was just one out of a veritable archipelago of industry-backed grassroots efforts created by for-profit colleges and universities to fight off the regulation, including the Save Access / Student Choice Coalition, the Coalition for Education Success, Let's Put Students First, and My Education, My Choice. These groups, like many active in contemporary advocacy campaigns, utilized the skills of advocacy professionals in order to both amplify genuine pre-existing concerns among the public and also to persuade and mobilize previously unorganized constituencies. In fact, much of the grassroots organizing done on behalf of for-profit colleges was facilitated with the support of elite lobbyists and public affairs consultants from both sides of the political spectrum, including the LawMedia Group, DCI Group, Global Strategy Group, and Clinton administration lawyer-turned-lobbyist Lanny Davis.[15] These consultants helped build the organizational infrastructure for student activism, helped turn staff

---

[11] CCA has since renamed itself the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU).
[12] Gorski (2010).   [13] Field (2010).   [14] Gorski (2010).
[15] See, respectively, Elk (2010); Malloy (2012); Network Solutions (2012); Thompson and Lipton (2010). Although these firms are listed by name, any firm I interviewed for this book has been given a pseudonym for both the firm and the consultants I spoke with. The first time any firm is mentioned in the book, I state whether the firm's name is a pseudonym; if not marked in the first instance, this is the firm's real name. I describe the book's confidentiality protocol in Appendix 4.2.

of the for-profit colleges into citizen lobbyists, and offered would-be activists a set of detailed talking points to repeat while suggesting venues where their voices could be heard. In so doing, the consultants themselves were following what has become a well-established set of practices through which elite political operatives facilitate public engagement on behalf of their paying clients.

This is a book about those consultants and the effects their campaigns are having on American democracy.

Today, more and more advocacy is being driven not by the local organizing of autonomous citizens, but by the efforts of paid consultants that organizations like these for-profit colleges hire to help them activate receptive members of the public on their behalf. *Grassroots for Hire* reveals an industry of consultants who work on behalf of companies, powerful interest groups, labor unions, and other organizations to shift public policies in their clients' favor by mobilizing mass participation. Their clients include many of the most powerful multinationals: 40 percent of *Fortune* 500 firms appear as their clients. The reach is vast: the leading campaign by an average consulting firm targets over 750,000 Americans for participation.[16] Their work is lucrative: consultants command hourly rates at (or at times well beyond) $400 per hour. Their campaigns are consequential: they go beyond the work of traditional lobbyists by showing to legislators and regulators that a client's concerns have motivated and organized constituencies mobilized to support them.

This book attempts to look behind the curtain, so to speak, to examine how much of the "front stage" of public participation has come to be organized "back stage" by public affairs professionals. In Goffman's classic treatment of this distinction in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, the front stage of social action involves performance before an audience, while backstage action removes the audience in order to engage in the complex coordination necessary for a performance to take place.[17] While scholars of social movements and civic engagement have both, in their own ways, examined what is "behind" much collective action – whether in studying organizing structures, resources, political coalitions, or strategic efforts to frame debates –

---

[16] See Appendix 2.3, Section 3e.   [17] Goffman (1959).

the "backstage" efforts of professionals working on behalf of paying clients has been largely overlooked.[18] These efforts have also been sidelined in the major debates about the modern restructuring of American civic life, which have generally neglected the increasing commercialization of advocacy through paid consulting firms and elite lobbying of the public.[19]

Public affairs consultants, sometimes known as "grassroots lobbyists,"[20] incentivize citizen participation through a variety of means, often using new information and communications technologies to facilitate the process. Their work goes beyond simple public relations strategies that focus on messaging without encouraging citizen action. Their campaigns may not be entirely replacing traditional forms of grassroots organizing, but they are undoubtedly helping to commercialize citizen advocacy, offering the repertoire of participation originally developed by advocacy organizations and social movements as a professional service in the political marketplace. To the extent that only select citizens are targeted for participation, this form of commercialized advocacy exacerbates participatory inequalities among the citizenry, and may be further decoupling citizen participation from the democratic norms, social networks, and feelings of institutional trust that undergird our civic life. In addition, although many consultants avoid such strategies, some engage in "astroturf" (i.e., fake grassroots) strategies on behalf of their clients through the use of heavy incentives, fraud, or misleading claims about their sponsorship. Their doing so may reduce citizens' trust not only in the political process but also in advocacy groups more broadly.

---

[18] Exceptions, mainly in work on corporate public affairs, are Lyon and Maxwell (2004); Lord (2000a, 2000b, 2003); Meznar and Nigh (1995); Getz (2002); Schuler (2002); Marcus and Irion (1987); Fleisher (2002).

[19] See Walker (2009).

[20] These terms may not be considered entirely interchangeable by practitioners. The practice of public affairs includes the management of interactions not only with civic groups, but also with legislatures, administrative agencies, the media, and even the courts, and may not always be, strictly speaking, political in nature (Lerbinger, 2006). The term "grassroots lobbying" casts many of the same practices in a more political light. Because of the considerable overlap between the activities described by these two terms, and because this book also describes some non-lobbying activities by these firms, this book favors the more encompassing term "public affairs consultant" over "grassroots lobbyist."

What is at stake, then, is the very means by which we, as a society, connect with one another in order to bring about change on those issues that matter most to us.

The argument: consultants and top-down participation

Cases like the one described above, while striking in many ways, will not surprise long-time scholars of mass mobilization, as theorists from Gramsci to Schumpeter were well aware of the means by which elites mobilize popular participation in order to enhance their standing, promote their agendas, and win contentious disputes.[21] As Gramsci once argued in his *Prison Notebooks*, "the superstructures of civil society are like the trench-systems of modern warfare."[22] Indeed, a mainstay in modern political research is the notion that grassroots lobbying tactics are central to interest groups' repertoires for gaining influence.[23] Similarly, scholars of social movements recognized a generation ago the tendency toward the professionalization of advocacy,[24] which is manifested today in the growing number of "associations without members" such as think tanks, policy institutes, and other largely staff-driven advocacy groups that tend to mobilize members and funds from the top down. Some worry that there has been a growth of advocacy without a corresponding expansion of citizen engagement.[25]

What *is* new, I will argue, is the extent to which public affairs campaigns are being used to commercialize and further professionalize popular participation, thereby borrowing the repertoire of grassroots mobilization and, in turn, offering this repertoire as a service to organizational clients like corporations, industry associations, government agencies, and even the very advocacy organizations from whom these tactics were learned in the first place.[26] As David Meyer and Sidney Tarrow have argued, grassroots advocacy repertoires are employed not only by those excluded from routine channels of political authority, but

---

[21] Gramsci (1959); Schumpeter (1942).   [22] Gramsci (1971: 235).

[23] Goldstein (1999); Kollman (1998); Caldeira and Wright (1998); Schlozman and Tierney (1986).

[24] McCarthy and Zald (1977); Jenkins and Eckert (1986).

[25] Skocpol (1999, 2003); Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner (2011); Jordan and Maloney (1997).

[26] On organizational repertoires, see Clemens (1993, 1997).

also by elites for their own purposes.[27] Repertoires of grassroots participation, originally developed by citizen advocacy organizations, have been adapted into the standard practices of a field of organizations that offer contracted advocacy services on the commercial market to a variety of organized interests.

The growth and institutionalization of the field of public affairs consultants makes possible, then, an increasingly *subsidized public*. Corporations, trade associations, wealthy advocacy organizations, and campaign groups utilize the services of public affairs consultants to lower the costs of participation for targeted activist groups. Organized interests have always sought to facilitate popular participation through offering publics various types of incentives to get involved.[28] But new communications technologies, professional practices for popular mobilization, and a changed field of advocacy organizations have combined to make it much easier for elites to recruit citizen activists.

The notion of a subsidized public differs, then, from what communications scholar Philip Howard describes as a public of "managed citizens,"[29] in that much of what public affairs consultants do is not so much to exercise strong control over participants, but instead to encourage only select groups of citizens to voice their opinions. Further, grassroots participation consultants often support and augment the activism of many who *would have been active in the policy process to begin with*, such as when they work with existing community-based organizations in order to broaden their issue advocacy coalition. Consultants bring their considerable financial and technical resources to bear in employing innovative methods for targeting and recruiting activists for their client's cause; the resources, and, to a lesser extent, professionalism that participatory consultants employ is what differentiates them from other types of grassroots advocacy campaigns by, for example, community organizations. Although the work of consultants on behalf of their clients does, at times, meet the definition of "astroturf" (i.e., is heavily incentivized, involves dishonest or fraudulent claims-making, or is less than fully transparent about its patrons), the main effect of consultants' practices on democracy lies in the selective targeting of citizens for their recruitment requests. As

[27] Meyer and Tarrow (1998).   [28] Clark and Wilson (1961).
[29] Howard (2006).

I make clear especially in Chapter 7, consultants' requests for citizen engagement are targeted primarily at pre-existing political activists, strong political partisans, likely voters, and the college educated; these tendencies exacerbate participatory inequalities.

While sociologists tend to think of mass participation as an antidote to elite- and expert-driven politics, the model of the subsidized public proposed here holds that mass participation is today used as a form of elite legitimation,[30] going beyond elite competition over votes or the endorsements of influential interest groups. Campaigns orchestrated by public affairs consultants, in fact, represent only one manifestation of the modern subsidized public. Although beyond the scope of this book, observers of contemporary institutional domains as diverse as public sector governance,[31] worker participation in flexible production regimes,[32] international aid, development, and micro-finance[33] have called attention to the increasing interest of elites in facilitating popular participation to suit elite agendas in a context of neoliberalism.

Habermas, in his classic *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*,[34] outlined a theory of public life dominated by the interests of state administration and market accumulation, an argument echoed and augmented by theorists in the years since its English-language publication, and further elaborated in the second volume of his *Theory of Communicative Action* in his discussion of system and life-world.[35] However, unlike the late modern public sphere described by Habermas, the "subsidized public" described here posits a model of citizenship that allows for a greater degree of citizen agency.

Those who are called upon by consultants to participate are typically not – although, as I make clear, there are certainly exceptions to this – duped, manipulated, or tricked into participation. Many readers of this book, I am sure, have signed a form letter, called a representative, or written a letter to the editor using talking points that were suggested by some sort of organized interest, and likely still agreed strongly with the issue position they were personally expressing therein. The aggregate influence of public affairs consultants on participation, similarly, is of a more subtle nature: although participants may fully agree with the

---

[30] On elite-driven collective action more broadly, see Aguirre (1984).
[31] Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary (2005). [32] Vallas (2003).
[33] Fisher (1997). [34] Habermas (1987, 1989).
[35] See, for example, Calhoun (1992); Mansbridge (2012).

message they are communicating, only certain individuals will be called upon to participate in the first place. Many would not have even thought of the issue as one of concern to them if they weren't the subject of a targeted request.[36] Overall, the subsidized public involves an increasing number of citizens having the chance to "have their say," but, even if diverse citizens are recruited, only those who are seen as worthy targets by a paying client will have their participation targeted and subsidized at all.[37]

The goal of the book, then, is to illustrate the causes and consequences of the adoption of grassroots participation repertoires by a field of organizations that sell public advocacy services on the commercial market to organized interests. They sell these services not only to groups like corporations that usually lack inherent capacities for mobilizing stakeholders, but also to the very citizen organizations from whom they borrowed these tactics, and who themselves now contract with consultants for support in motivating popular activism on issues of their policy interest.

In the process, I examine not only how this field got off the ground and running, but also how consultants are linked to certain sets of clients, how they target activists and deploy technologies to advocate their cause, and the ways that they incentivize citizens to take action and shape policy formation. I also explain in some depth the effects that these consultant-backed campaigns are having both on public participation and on the policy effectiveness of firms' clients. In particular, the book shows that campaigns that engage in so-called "astroturf" strategies – especially by being less than transparent – are not only unethical but also ineffective. Consultants are influencing civil society, yet are still limited by the force of contending civic and political interests. Like other organized advocates, consultants must navigate complex policy environments, study their opposition, and mobilize resources and allies to get behind their cause.

More broadly, the book tells a story of how the professionalization and commercialization of popular advocacy is changing the contours of democracy and the role of civil society in contemporary politics. To the extent that campaigns engage in selective targeting of citizens through carefully targeted appeals via mailing lists, television advertisements,

---

[36] Brady, Schlozman, and Verba (1999); Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995); Walker (2008); Jordan and Maloney (1997).
[37] See Schier (2000); Crenson and Ginsberg (2004).

or social networking sites, participatory inequalities may be exacerbated. The strategic mobilization of those already likely to say "yes" to requests for participation appears to make our democracy both more partisan and more unequal.

Yet this need not mean that we should simply accept the critiques of those who cast aside every campaign that involves the support of political professionals or the resources of an external patron as mere "astroturf," or fake grassroots mobilization. Consultants disproportionately, but not exclusively, target more advantaged citizens; thus, their campaigns do at times help to expand democratic engagement. Further, campaigns that do not develop the genuine support of an independent constituency are, as I argue in Chapter 7, often likely to fail. The most effective public affairs campaigns are those that make coalition with existing civil society groups who have a genuine and independent interest in the client's cause. Additionally, as the arguments in this book reveal, there are many continuities between the grassroots practices of public affairs consultants and those of grassroots organizers of other stripes. Finally, as resource mobilization approaches to social movements have long made clear, grassroots organizations of all types tend to require the patronage of outside elites and other resource providers.[38]

Approach

An emerging body of scholarship integrates insights from research on advocacy by scholars of social movements / collective behavior, political sociology, organizational theory, political science, and nonprofit studies. While scholars in these varied traditions often talk past one another when describing fundamentally similar phenomena, there is much to be learned by building from these diverse intellectual traditions. Toward a further integration of these approaches, I adopt throughout the book the innovative understanding of advocacy suggested by sociologists Kenneth Andrews and Bob Edwards.[39] Andrews and Edwards encourage a broad focus on all groups engaged in "either promoting or

---

[38] McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977); Walker (1991); for a contrasting perspective, see Ganz (2000).
[39] Andrews and Edwards (2004: 485).

resisting social change that, if implemented, would conflict with the social, cultural, political, or economic interests or values of other constituencies or groups." This need not imply that there is little difference between social movement organizations, interest groups, political parties, and other actors involved in making political claims.[40] On the other hand, this focus offers significant conceptual leverage in recognizing the similarities between the activities, structures, and constraints faced by various types of groups engaged in organized advocacy.

The focus of this investigation is primarily at the organizational level, as organizations help to subsidize the costs of individual-level participation and offer opportunities for engagement that would be unfeasible in their absence.[41] The scope of this study is restricted to the development of this field in the United States, although there is some initial evidence that industries of grassroots participation consultants have developed abroad, especially in the liberal market economies of the UK, Canada, and Australia.[42] This book tells a primarily organization-level story about how advocacy organizations became increasingly formalized and professionalized, leading to the perhaps ironic development of a field of consulting firms that offer public mobilization services to paying organizational clients. Once established, these firms have helped their clients to have significant new capacities for influencing participation and policy. In addition, these changes in the organizational structure of our society have had considerable effects on the means by which individual-level participation takes place.

Data sources

The dominant approaches to the study of advocacy in sociology and political science rely variously upon surveys of individuals, data files generated from aggregates of interviews with advocacy organizations, advocacy directories, or case studies of particular campaigns. Whether more quantitative or qualitative in orientation, existing studies have a strong tendency to focus on how advocacy strategies are developed in-house by grassroots organizers. Scholars have done so, of course, for good reason: until somewhat recently, it was relatively rare for grassroots campaigning to be outsourced in part to political professionals.

---

[40] On this issue, see Burstein (1998).   [41] Leighley (1996).
[42] Walker (Forthcoming); Grefe (2000)

Yet the development of this field of political professionals, which I describe in Chapters 2 and 3, offers the opportunity to utilize an important new data source regarding how these professionalized grassroots campaigns vary by client type, target, mobilization strategies employed, and more.

In order to collect information on consulting firms and their practices, I and a team of research assistants first collected all listings for public affairs firms in the directory listings of *Campaigns & Elections* (*C&E*) magazine, which is the leading directory in the marketplace for professional political services. The directory is, in its own words, the "only comprehensive directory of political consultants, political products and services, public affairs professionals, and lobbyists," and so it would therefore be unlikely for active firms to remain unlisted. Our research team collected all listings of firms under a selective set of relevant subheadings in *C&E* over the years from when the magazine started the listings (1990) to the time of initial data collection (2004), both in its "Political Pages" listings and in select pullout guides for buyers of grassroots lobbying and public affairs services. After combining all listings from these data sources and reducing them to a unique set of cases using a standardized process, a set of 712 public affairs consulting firms were located that were in existence at some point between 1990 and 2004. This set of cases is referred to as the *baseline data* in the discussion that follows, and additional detail about these data collection procedures is available in Appendix 1.

In 2009, a systematic review of these 712 organizations was completed in order to determine which organizations had survived, such that they could be surveyed and interviewed in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the organizational structures and processes of professional public affairs consultants. After excluding those organizations that provide only technical services (e.g., keeping mailing lists, providing software for constituent contacting, etc.), I administered a detailed survey to surviving consulting firms. The survey, entitled "Strategic Public Affairs and Political Consulting Organizations in the US" (hereafter referred to as the SPAPCO survey), was fielded in 2010. Survey procedures are described in Appendix 2.

I also spoke with representatives of twenty consulting firms in interviews ranging from twenty minutes to over two hours. I refer to these as the *interview data* (Appendix 4.1). These interviews were conducted both in person and also through prearranged telephone calls. The

consultants I spoke with were selected in order to represent a diverse cross section of firm sizes, client types, partisan affiliations, locations, and mobilization methods. I spoke with representatives of firms ranging from small boutique operations to those that are part of powerful multinational public affairs practices, and from those that work with *Fortune* 500 companies to those that help plan out the mass mobilization strategies of advocacy groups.

Although it would have been ideal to carry out an even greater number of interviews, public affairs consulting firms are often hesitant to talk with academics or journalists about their operations. As in the account given at the outset of this chapter, most public affairs professionals would prefer to remain back stage without drawing attention to their role in facilitating front-stage public participation. Nonetheless, in these interviews I promised not to provide identifying details about these consultants or their firms, and I was successful in obtaining quite detailed information about these firms. These interviews, then, offer insights into what goes on inside these elite firms, and they help to flesh out the findings of the quantitative analyses in the book.

Lastly, I made substantial efforts to uncover the client lists, partisanship, and staff profiles of consultants by examining and collecting data from their websites. This is referred to as the *website data* (Appendix 3), which includes all of the firms in the survey sample. I also collected further information on the corporations, advocacy groups, and trade associations that appear on their client lists, using corporate and associational databases (see, respectively, Appendices 5–7). In two chapters, I examine the factors that lead some individual corporations to hire public affairs consultants, as well as what influences associations to do so. These client lists help the book to offer a systematic account of which organizations find it necessary to mobilize a professional grassroots campaign with the help of a consultant, and how these patterns vary by sector and other characteristics of the client organization.

Plan of the book

In the chapters that follow, I make use of these several data sources to develop a systematic portrait of the field of public affairs consultants. Chapter 2 provides a more thorough introduction by defining the field of public affairs consulting and outlining the implications of this new domain for our understanding of modern democratic engagement. This

chapter makes clear that although these consulting shops have a professional staff, they share many characteristics with other professionals involved in grassroots advocacy. It further explains that consultants engage in strategic supply-side recruitment of activists. This chapter also identifies the book's contribution to sociological debates about the commercialization of democracy, the political role of elites, the encounter between social movements and organizational theory, and renewed understandings of social capital and participatory repertoires.

Then, taking a step back, Chapter 3 examines the historical context that allowed the industry of public affairs consulting to get off the ground. After offering a brief prehistory of the field, it follows the major social changes that helped to give rise to it. In particular, Chapter 3 describes how the "explosion" of organized advocacy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, along with the increasing political mobilization of business and widening political partisanship, provided fertile conditions for such political entrepreneurship. These firms began to appear in response to the changing political and media environment that valorized public participation while redefining lobbying for the modern era of seemingly more transparent American politics.

Following this, Chapter 4 considers what these firms do now that the field is established. It unpacks the strategies that consultants employ on behalf of their clients and considers how they are related to the organizational characteristics of the consulting firms. It shows that nearly half of firms are non- or bipartisan, and that the remaining firms in the field are about evenly split between those affiliated with the Democrats and those that are Republican. It also illustrates how public affairs consultants attempt to influence the public using a plethora of tactics and technologies in order to mobilize action. They provide services ranging from direct mail to door-to-door canvassing, from signature gathering to scheduling lobbying days, and from internet-based mobilization to "intercept" communications with policymakers.[43]

---

[43] An "intercept" is an effort by a constituent – particularly one with a previous connection to a policymaker – to lobby that policymaker in an informal, person-to-person setting. A goal of such communications is to appear unplanned and spontaneous, and public affairs consultants often seek out those with personal (e.g., family, friend, community) ties to policymakers in order to execute intercepts. In fact, one firm I interviewed provides elaborate technologies that help corporations and associations to identify ties to policymakers among their employees and other stakeholders.

Chapter 5 investigates the particular use that corporations make of public affairs consultants in their efforts to mobilize stakeholder groups, showing that corporate influence in public life goes much deeper than the new forms of covert corporate political spending made possible by the Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*. The chapter finds that those firms that face major public controversies, reputational problems, or operate in a heavily regulated industry are among the most likely to incentivize grassroots participation. Chapter 6, by contrast, looks at how citizen advocacy groups make use of these firms; the largest, most professionalized, and most well-resourced groups are among the most likely to "outsource" some portion of their grassroots campaigns to participation consultants. This chapter also finds evidence that these firms are integrated into both the contemporary conservative and progressive movements.

Chapter 7 examines the outcomes of consultant-driven campaigns, both in terms of meeting the client's desired goals and in shaping policy processes more broadly. Evidence from the survey and interview data reveals that consultants are often effective in shaping both public participation and policy outcomes. Regarding participation, this chapter reveals that consultants, on the one hand, increase participatory inequality in the US by focusing their recruitment efforts on those most likely to say yes, who tend to be the more educated and those with a history of political activism. Yet they also seek out constituencies who appear to be independent of elite consultants' paying clients (and, indeed, the consultants themselves), and these tend to be those from more disadvantaged backgrounds. On balance, consulting firms appear to be increasing participatory inequality more than they are working against it; evidence from the survey data reveals that consultants tend to see the recruitment of, for example, minority groups as only a secondary priority in their campaigns. Regarding policy outcomes, Chapter 7 compares a consultant-driven grassroots campaign by Wal-Mart with another by Canadian National to illustrate that campaigns that are authentic, transparent, and able to generate independent support in civil society are among the most likely to generate real policy change.

Chapter 8 concludes the book by highlighting the implications of this study for our understanding of public participation in a context of substantial business participation in the public sphere, advanced

communications technologies, and professionalized advocacy organizations. Building from the insights of the previous chapter, the conclusion highlights that although "grassroots for hire" campaigns are indeed commercializing participation, their influence is limited by the independent power of organized civil society. Campaigns that seek to "fake" the support of broad coalitions behind a paying client's interests through "astroturfing" or "sock puppeting" are of only limited effectiveness. Instead, public affairs campaigns tend to be more effective when consultants can help to facilitate the participation of genuine supporters who may not have been aware of the issue in question. Thus, although consultants are reshaping participation, they still must play by the same rules as community organizations, social movements, and other organized advocates in civil society.

2 | *Defining the field and its implications*

Introduction

The term "grassroots" calls to mind an image of citizen politics rooted in local community. For most, the term conjures up images of local residents joining together to pressure the mayor to support urban redevelopment and affordable housing, citizens in New England getting together on Town Meeting Day to hammer out their local budget, or neighborhood activists mobilizing local parents against undesirable changes to school district policies. Grassroots participation is often seen as a populist response to the failures of markets and ineffective bureaucracies.[1] All of these images hold in common the notion of citizen participation independent of the interests of elites, whether those elites are in government, industry, or powerful civic organizations like foundations or policy institutes. "Grassroots," then, carries with it an air of authenticity. To be truly "grassroots" is to be taken as legitimate in our democratic system. As the late *New York Times* columnist William Safire once put it in his well-known *Political Dictionary*,[2] the grassroots are "the ultimate source of power, usually patronized, occasionally feared." It carries an "up-from-the-people" meaning that is deeply rooted in American politics and culture, in which the porousness of the American state and rich traditions of civic organizing continually reaffirm the value of public engagement independent of the state and the marketplace.

But that image of grassroots is today – and, to some extent, always has been – more of an ideal than a reality. Consider, for example, the fact that community organizations with greater resources and the public support of local elites are significantly more likely to survive over the long term.[3] Much of the canvassing work done today on behalf of environmental and other public causes is carried out by

---

[1] Boyte (1980).   [2] Safire (1978: 289).   [3] Walker and McCarthy (2010).

20

paid, semi-professional canvassers.[4] Social movements, interest groups, and other forms of citizen political activism tend to require the sponsorship, resources, and/or political support of elite patrons.[5] However, throughout the literature on social movements and civic participation, the assumption remains that grassroots activism is predominantly a weapon of the weak, or a populist tool for everyday citizens to challenge the power of states, corporations, and other powerful organizations that make the decisions that affect their lives.

Grassroots participation is not, however, simply a tactic employed by those who are marginalized and refused a hearing. For many policy matters on which elite actors perceive themselves to be at a political disadvantage and which are amenable to framing as issues of broad popular concern, they too will adopt a populist posture and seek to mobilize mass publics.[6] This book examines the role of a field of consulting firms that offer what I call "grassroots for hire," or paid services to mobilize public participation on behalf of a business, industry group, professional association, labor union, government agency, or citizen advocacy organization. These firms provide a wide range of services to their clients to help them to improve their social and political standing, as well as to help them win legislative battles and influence the decisions of government agencies. And their activities are wide-ranging: they help sports teams to mobilize fans to fight new ticket taxes in the state legislature; they help telecommunications firms to fight unfavorable FCC decisions by recruiting community advocates; they work, on behalf of pharmaceutical manufacturers, with local community-based organizations to highlight the low-cost medicines that drug-makers make available to low-income communities; they help advocacy groups activate untapped sources of public support; they coach citizens on how to make their point to policymakers more effectively.

This book explores the work of these professional service firms from multiple angles, examining their client bases, the ways they target citizens for participation, and the effects these campaigns are having on civic and political life across the nation. In the process, this book tells

---

[4] Fisher (2006).

[5] McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977); Walker (1991); Jenkins (2006).

[6] On the differentiation between such issues, see Schattschneider's (1960) classic statement, as well as Baumgartner (1989: 45–46); Culpepper (2011); Smith (2000); Walker (2010).

a story about an overlooked aspect of how American civic and political life has changed since the 1970s.

Grassroots participation is no longer, if it ever truly was, an *exclusive* weapon of the weak; we now have an increasingly *subsidized public* in which select citizens are targeted and trained for participation. Although advocacy organizations of all stripes have long been recognized for their inherent capacity to train and educate citizens in the skills of democratic participation,[7] members of the narrowly subsidized public tend to be mobilized instead in a more ad hoc fashion in order to help elites win legislative, administrative, and other policy issues, thus challenging the notion that participation and social capital – that is, citizens' democratic norms, social networks, and feelings of trust in institutions[8] – go hand in hand.

Indeed, the model I develop of the subsidized public suggests that social capital and participation have become, to some extent, decoupled. The paid consultants in this study, in most cases, facilitate participation in letter-writing, fundraising, and viral political marketing campaigns that do not build new political networks among participants. These are not, then, unlike participation in what Robert Putnam calls "tertiary associations," in which individuals share support for the same cause without developing links or bonds to one another; as he puts it, this form of engagement is less like a gardening club and more like being a fan of the Boston Red Sox or Honda automobiles.[9] While the present case warrants a more measured description – especially because many campaigns involve co-opting pre-existing social networks in the interest of winning a particular issue – much of the activism facilitated by participation consultants fits this broader model.

In this chapter, I begin by defining and explaining the characteristics of a public affairs consulting firm, including their degree of professionalism, client base, targeting strategies, methods for the recruitment of activists, means of incentivizing participation, and use of communications technologies. I then elaborate the significance of firms' practices for our understanding of commercial interests in public participation, the role of elites in contemporary society and politics, the interaction between social movements and organizations, and the implications of

---

[7] de Tocqueville (1839); Almond and Verba (1963); Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995).
[8] Putnam (1995, 2000).   [9] Putnam (1995: 71).

the study for our understanding of social capital and participatory repertoires.

Defining the field of public affairs consulting

What are the key characteristics of the firms that are active in public affairs consulting? I begin with a definition of a public affairs consultancy, which I then unpack and elaborate:

A public affairs consultancy is a *professional service firm* that contracts with an *organizational client* in order to *manage the client's political and social environment strategically* through *campaigns* that *mobilize public participation*, often in coordination with traditional forms of lobbying ("government affairs"). As such, public affairs consultancies develop and execute issue campaigns that involve the *selective targeting* of *stakeholder groups* in order to achieve the client organization's *goals*, often using *information and communications technologies* (ICTs) both in how they *recruit activists* and in *incentivizing their engagement*.

Professional service firms

As Weber argued in his famous essay on "Politics as a Vocation," "politics, just as economic pursuits, may be a man's avocation or his vocation."[10] Although Weber's distinction between these two forms of engagement in political life was not, strictly speaking, a categorical and exclusive one, he maintained, "He who strives to make politics a permanent *source of income* lives 'off' politics as a vocation, whereas he who does not do this lives 'for' politics."[11] In modern capitalist societies, then, the capacity to live "for" politics is conditioned on attaining a certain wealth or status that allows for such independent engagement. At the same time, Weber expected that the growth of formal democratic institutions, suffrage, and modern party organizations would necessitate the expansion in number and power of a class of political professionals. Among these professionals, Weber referred primarily to latter-day professional politicians ("political officials") and functionaries ("administrative officials") and their historical antecedents in positions of religious, educational, judicial, and legal authority; however, he acknowledged that the domain of professionalism in

---

[10] Weber (1946: 83).   [11] Ibid.: 84. Emphasis in original.

politics would continue to be reconfigured as those with political talents would choose between overlapping professional domains of journalism, political staffing, and interest group politics.[12] His argument prefigures the ways in which the professionalization of politics would become increasingly pervasive and, perhaps more importantly, would extend well beyond electoral and administrative politics.

Politics, then, is increasingly a vocation for many, and the public affairs consultancies that seek influence for their clients in civil society represent one distinct niche among the diverse class of modern paid political operatives. At least since McCarthy and Zald's classic statement on the mobilization of resources in protest movements and advocacy politics,[13] scholars have recognized the particular role of professionals and civic entrepreneurs in issue advocacy. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw a massive expansion in the number of citizen advocacy groups in the US,[14] and with this came new and bright possibilities for careers in activism: from canvassing and fundraising to staff-driven political research institutes. And, as expected by McCarthy and Zald,[15] the skills developed by individuals in careers in advocacy, nonprofit, and social movement organizations are, at times, transferable to careers in professional advocacy consulting. The increasing formal organization of US national civic and political life helped to encourage the development of public affairs consultancies in the first place, as businesses and associations came to rely upon them for support in stirring up distant public participation.

Public affairs consulting can be differentiated from electoral *campaign consulting* in that although many public affairs consultants have campaign clients (approximately 26 percent of public affairs consultants' aggregate client base is comprised of candidate campaigns) and often complement a campaign's media strategy by providing paid Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) services, grassroots public affairs consultants also provide services beyond winning elections. Further, as I explain in Chapter 3, although many consultants in this field started out as electoral consultants, they often found that they needed other revenue sources to smooth out their uneven revenue between election cycles.

They also stand out from traditional *lobbyists* or "government relations" consultants in that they seek to gain influence through mobilizing

---

[12] Ibid.: 114.   [13] McCarthy and Zald (1977).
[14] Berry (1977); Walker (1991); Andrews and Edwards (2004).
[15] McCarthy and Zald (1977: 1235).

the public rather than limiting their political strategies to direct contacts with policymakers.[16] Further, they are distinct from *public relations* firms, who tend to be more involved in managing communication and messaging rather than seeking to mobilize public participation or build coalitions. Lastly, they stand out from specific *vendors* of services in advertising, political marketing, and polling/research, who more often assist in learning about, locating, and communicating with a target demographic group, but are also less likely to directly subsidize the activism of stakeholders or the broader public.[17] Despite these considerations, public affairs consultancies often overlap with the work of professionals in related sectors: campaign consultants often take up corporate public affairs during political off-seasons, public relations firms may contract with public affairs consultants when their client faces an outpouring of protest in a local community, and public affairs consultants often rely on political advertising firms in their efforts to get the message out to would-be citizen activists for their cause.

Public affairs firms represent a unique niche among political operatives and professional service firms more broadly. As the Public Affairs Council, the leading association for corporate public affairs professionals defines the practice, it "combines government relations, communications, issues management, and corporate citizenship strategies to influence public policy, build a strong reputation, and find common ground with stakeholders," all in the interest of assisting organizations in their attempts to "monitor and manage" their external environments.[18] Still, although grassroots public affairs consulting is professionalized in the sense used by scholars of advocacy, the field, of course, lacks the more complete professionalization of fields such as law or medicine. For a more detailed discussion on this point, see Appendix 8.

Organizational clients

These professional service firms can also be recognized by the presence of organizational clients, including individual corporations, trade associations, advocacy organizations, labor unions, government agencies,

---

[16] On the difference between these two forms of political action, most often distinguished between "inside" and "outside" lobbying, see Kollman (1998) and Goldstein (1999).
[17] However, vendors are included in the baseline data described in Appendix 1.
[18] Public Affairs Council (2010a).

and political parties. They work on behalf of these clients in a fashion
similar to other professional service firms, which, as organizational
theorists have recognized, have diffuse authority structures, do
knowledge-intensive work, and trade on their "intellectual capital and
expertise."[19] Having diverse clients, professional service firms generally
need to maintain a degree of flexibility in their client portfolio, and to be
ready to adapt to changing environments and diverse needs.[20]

A plurality of firms' aggregate client base includes individual corpo-
rations and trade associations, reflecting the fact that other organiza-
tions – such as citizen interest groups and labor unions – have a member
base that they can, more often, mobilize by using their internal organ-
izational mechanisms, thus negating the need to contract with a con-
sultant. Thus, despite the fact that grassroots advocacy techniques tend
to be employed at an overall higher rate by citizen groups,[21] the clients
of public affairs consultants are disproportionately for-profit organiza-
tions. However, a wide range of large and influential citizen interest
groups also contract with public affairs consultants, especially when
they need to mobilize participation outside their membership base and
in the general public.

As consultants, the principals of public affairs firms must gain the
confidence of new clients, whether that client is a multinational corpo-
ration targeting federal legislation or a regional water district seeking to
mobilize local residents for greater state-level utility subsidies. Unlike an
organization's in-house public affairs professionals, those who work in
stand-alone consulting shops must work to build and maintain the trust
of the organizations they aspire to represent. In this sense, they share
key characteristics with other types of consultants.[22] They, like manage-
ment consultants, public relations specialists, lobbying specialists, and
others who provide confidential counsel to organizations, help to stand-
ardize and routinize technical knowledge about best practices; given
that the consultants in this study assist in mobilizing public participa-
tion, the institutionalization of this field represents a new and important

---

[19] Greenwood, Suddaby, and McDougald (2006).
[20] Malhotra, Morris, and Hinings (2006).   [21] Kollman (1998).
[22] As Pieczka (2002: 322) puts it, consultancies hold "expertise which is distinctive
yet flexible enough to be applicable across a wide field, replicable, routinized as
schemes and available for hire … an outside agent who must, at least partly,
interact with clients by re-interpreting their needs in ways malleable to
professional expertise."

development in the further professionalization of public participation. Similar to the development and adaptation of participatory repertoires by turn-of-the-century interest groups as identified by Elisabeth Clemens,[23] public affairs consultants have adapted and commercialized the repertoire of citizen participation. I develop this argument further when describing the broader implications of this study at the end of this chapter.

Client goals and policy targets

Before deciding which citizens' participation to incentivize (or how they will do so), consultants need to determine precisely what the client's goals are. Such goals may range from the development of an ad hoc coalition to gain influence quickly, through an outpouring of support or dissent, to long-term strategies for building public and political support across a broad base.[24] Analysts and practitioners increasingly encourage, as a best practice for corporations and associations, the continuous development of constituency networks as a means of managing an organization's institutional environment.[25] Whether the campaign is part of a short-term or long-term strategy, clients must, like organizers for social change in general,[26] identify a policy target. Public affairs consultants advocate for their clients in six major domains: *legislative, administrative, electoral campaigns, ballot measures, public opinion, and non-state organizations' policies*.[27] An advantage of this perspective is that it moves beyond the over-emphasis on legislative lobbying, which continues to be dominant in the scholarly research on advocacy.[28]

This is not to say, of course, that the emphasis on federal *legislative* campaigns is unwarranted, as many of the most prominent and resource-intensive grassroots campaigns involve major federal

---

[23] Clemens (1993, 1997).   [24] Lerbinger (2006: 254–255).
[25] See, for example, Hillman and Hitt (1999); Lord (2001).
[26] Walker, Martin, and McCarthy (2008).
[27] A smaller set of campaigns also engages in electoral activity, particularly in Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) efforts and canvassing on behalf of candidates for elected office. Grassroots lobbying campaigns also play a role in shaping the judiciary, although indirectly through campaigns to influence Congressional confirmation or rejection for Supreme Court nominees (Caldeira and Wright, 1998).
[28] Hojnacki et al. (2012: 385).

legislative issues in policy domains such as energy, health, and environ-
mental policy. Firms in the manufacturing sector in particular are quite
active in supporting grassroots activism on federal legislative issues.
Such was the strategy of health insurers, pharmaceutical manufacturers,
medical device manufacturers, and other health industries in the run-up
to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010,[29] just as
health industry grassroots mobilization was prevalent during the failure
of health reform legislation in 1993–1994.[30]

   Public affairs consultants also often take on campaigns for clients that
seek to influence *administrative* policy, such as in the for-profit colleges
case that was described in the introduction. As Daniel Carpenter and
colleagues argue,[31] although "agencies are lobbied with every bit the
intensity that legislators are," there has been a "failure of interest-group
scholars to study patterns of executive and administrative lobbying."[32]
This distinctive understanding of the difference between forms of influ-
ence directed at legislatures and those directed at agencies is also found
in the law, as the definition in the IRS tax code of "grassroots lobbying"
(as it applies to nonprofits) excludes organizations' efforts to pressure
an executive branch agency like the EPA.[33]

   Grassroots consultants are also at times hired by electoral campaigns
to influence *voters* through canvassing and Get-Out-The-Vote work. As
I describe in Chapter 3, campaign consulting is the most common prior
occupation of the consultants in this study. Although none of the
consultants in this study work exclusively with electoral campaigns,
nonetheless some firms do help campaigns to identify and target voters,
manage their "ground game," and craft a compelling message for
generating support. Note that although I describe grassroots consul-
tants' electoral work briefly in Chapters 4 and 7, consultants' role in
candidate campaigns has been very well studied already and such work
is generally beyond the scope of this book.[34]

   Clients with an interest in *ballot measures*, especially in states like
California, Oregon, Colorado, and Arizona, also represent a sizable
portion of the market for public affairs consultants. Particularly in these

[29] Walker (2010).
[30] Goldstein (1999); Skocpol (1997: Ch. 5); Quadagno (2005).
[31] Carpenter, Esterling, and Lazer (1998: 425).
[32] A prominent exception, they note, is Peterson (1992).
[33] Vernick (1999: 1426); see also Berry and Arons (2003: 151–154).
[34] See, for example, Kreiss (2012); Nielsen (2012); Lathrop (2003).

states, a number of public affairs consultants help organizations register voters, gather signatures, gain the endorsements of noteworthy elites, and activate key opinion leaders in local communities in order to help their clients win in the realm of direct democracy. Political marketing firms in California have come to play a central role in the initiative and referendum process, as early progressive reforms in the structure of primary elections weakened the power of the state's political parties and offered greater autonomy to those public affairs consultants working on ballot measures.[35] For example, a firm I interviewed called Valley Signature Gatherers[36] claims to have gathered over one million signatures on a 2004 California ballot measure, adding to its significant history of petitioning efforts in states including Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Florida, and Nevada. The essential role of public affairs specialists on ballot measures has been the subject of critique and debate from a variety of sources, including journalists, political scientists, and practitioners.[37]

Public affairs consultants also often seek to shape *public opinion* through mobilizing participation. One organization interviewed for this study, for example, reported coordinating product release events for a major auto manufacturer. As one senior consultant said to me about these events, "We need [interested consumers of the client's products] to show up to events on a Saturday, to take time out of their schedule to participate … there's certainly participation involved there," even if not *political* participation. Another senior consultant with the same firm jumped in on this point and added, "once we've got them involved, we've *got them*" and can rely on them politically at a later point as part of a long-term strategy.[38]

Lastly, and perhaps least commonly, the consultants in this study occasionally engage in campaigns to influence the *policies of a non-state organization*, such as a corporation, educational institution, religious order, professional association, or other nonprofit organization. While

---

[35] Bowler, Donovan, and Fernandez (1996: 174–175).   [36] A pseudonym.
[37] Broder (2000); Johnson (2002).
[38] Although beyond the scope of this book, I acknowledge that consultants' recruitment efforts may also, in fact, encourage recruited citizens to be more active in other, more independent, forms of grassroots participation in the future. Historical research has pointed out how elite-facilitated mobilizations may ultimately come to challenge those very elites (Markoff, 1997). I thank William Roy for calling my attention to this point.

campaigns targeting non-state organizations are generally outside the scope of this book, it bears mentioning that such strategies are somewhat common in contentious contract negotiations between firms, such as those between cable companies and content providers, as well as between health insurers and hospital systems. Prominent examples include a 2009 dispute between Time Warner Cable and Fox Broadcasting and a battle in 2000 between Blue Cross / Blue Shield of California and Sutter Health.[39] Public affairs consultants in these campaigns generally encourage the public to lobby their opponents through their respective customer service offices.

Supply-side recruitment of activists

Analysts of social movements and other, more institutionalized forms of advocacy have called attention to the usage of "supply-side recruitment" strategies, in which appeals for public participation are targeted at those most likely to say yes to a particular request for participation.[40] Like social movements' need to build "consensus mobilization" (i.e., distributing the cause's messages in the public sphere) prior to "action mobilization" (i.e., mobilizing the cause's supporters to take action), participation consultants need to frame the message in a way that not only resonates with certain segments of the public but also galvanizes supporters into action.[41] As Alan Schussman and Sarah Soule note, activists' pre-existing ties to advocacy organizations highlight their "structural availability" to recruiters.[42]

   While it's undoubtedly true that organized advocates will be strategic and selective in targeting new members or donors and also in how they frame the issue in question, supply-side recruitment allows for the professional micro-targeting of activists that fit highly specific demographic profiles. As Ronald Shaiko points out, such efforts make it possible to target those who are, for example, white female home-owning Democrats who wear glasses, read *Newsweek*, and drive a foreign car.[43] The professional grassroots recruiters in this study represent the formalization and increasing commercialization of supply-side

[39] See, respectively, Collins (2010); Koenig (2009).
[40] Jordan and Maloney (1997); Bosso (2005); Brady, Schlozman, and Verba (1999).
[41] Klandermans (1984).   [42] Schussman and Soule (2005).
[43] Shaiko (1999: 184).

recruitment, building upon but also going beyond advocacy organizations' own professional mobilization strategies. Indeed, even when the consultants in this study seek to activate an existing community organization or group of opinion leaders in a community – through what is known in the field as "grasstops" recruiting – they are highly strategic and instrumental in which potential allies they select.

Once an organizational client has sought out the services of a public affairs firm for assistance in a campaign – a "campaign" being any sustained effort to provide assistance to clients through encouraging public participation – the next step is to decide whose activism would be most advisable to encourage. For example, when a firm needs to gain popular support for a client active in seeking media reform, they might activate representatives of small record labels, musicians, sympathetic academics, and certain small business owners who are worried about the effects of media consolidation. When working on behalf of a major environmental interest, however, they might mobilize ties to state-level environmental organizations, popular liberal blogs, and local opinion leaders. Public affairs consultants like to point out that every campaign faces a set of unique circumstances, and therefore must be tailored rather than standardized in order to have the best chances of success.

Some analysts have described an increasing trend among advocacy organizations in turning to "targeted activation" strategies in place of broad-based member mobilization,[44] and public affairs consultancies are specialists in activating a target constituency. Considering this, however, there still remains the decision as to which constituency to mobilize. A proprietary survey of in-house public affairs representatives, for example, recently found that businesses most often seek to mobilize their employees (among them, management is the most common), and, to a lesser extent, their retirees, customers, local community members, allied interest groups, suppliers, and shareholders in grassroots participatory programs; associations, on the other hand, tend to mobilize their members and allied interest groups.[45] I explore this further in Chapter 7.

Regardless of which particular stakeholder groups are activated in a campaign, public affairs consultancies recognize the value of building a constituency, a strategy that business has increasingly borrowed from

[44] Schier (2000); Crenson and Ginsberg (2004).
[45] Public Affairs Council (2008: 26–27).

civic and political organizations.[46] Of course, as will be described in detail later, there are essential differences between client types in which forms of constituency-building they demand: for instance, member-based civic organizations have less of a need to build a constituency (their members and patrons, in most cases, serve this role well already), while the structure of corporations more often necessitates efforts to build and activate a constituency among their diverse stakeholder groups and, at times, the general public.

Management scholar Michael Lord, for example, argues that there is particular value in constituency-building for corporate actors seeking to influence public policy.[47] In contrast to other ways in which business may seek to gain political influence (e.g., lobbying, litigation), Lord argues that "some of the most effective corporate grassroots efforts are those that cost relatively little; instead, they are creatively and effectively organized to tap into the energy and influence of a diverse universe of sincere and committed corporate stakeholders." In contrast to the notion that corporate public participation programs tend toward inauthenticity, Lord further argues that the quality of communications sent to officials tends to be more influential than their quantity, and that "Astroturf efforts have quite a negative effect [in that] they degrade the credibility and reputation of those who engage in them,"[48] an argument consistent with the findings of Chapter 7 in this book.

A subsidized public or a manufactured one? The question of "astroturf"

Perhaps more pointedly than any other fictional account, director Barry Levinson's 1998 film *Wag the Dog* – adapted from Larry Beinhart's novel *American Hero* – depicts a nightmare scenario of media mani-pulation and the manufacture of populist authenticity. The film tells the story of a Washington public relations and media consultant who, in an effort to deflect public attention away from a series of scandals inside the president's administration, creates a media campaign about a fake war against Albania. In the process, the consultants orchestrate a national campaign to bring home a fictional soldier left behind during the alleged conflict, who gains national sympathy. The fabricated sol-dier, Lieutenant Schurman (nicknamed "old shoe") is valorized in songs

[46] Lord (2000a, 2000b, 2003).   [47] Lord (2001).   [48] Ibid.: 11.

that get regular radio airplay, while also becoming the subject of a national outcry for his safe return, thereby averting the reputational crisis the president would have otherwise faced.

As unrealistic as this example is, it speaks to popular concerns that public affairs campaigns are "astroturf" efforts to subvert democracy by manufacturing grassroots engagement in support of elite interests. The term has been used widely since being coined by former senator and US Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen in 1985 to distinguish between "generated mail" (in his case facilitated by the insurance industry) and communications that represent the authentic and unprompted views of the mass citizenry.[49] Today, the label "astroturf" often becomes a political Rorschach test applied to one's opponents to delegitimate their claims on the basis of inauthenticity, dishonesty, and/or misinformation.[50]

Analysts and commentators often use the term "astroturf" quite broadly to refer to forms of public participation that are considered illegitimate for one or more of the following reasons:

1. *Incentivized:* Participants are offered incentives for their engagement or threatened with negative consequences if they do not take part.
2. *Fraudulent:* Participants either do not believe or do not fully comprehend the claims they are making (or, worse, campaign organizers engage in fraud by attributing claims to individuals that were never actually made). Participants take part despite these limitations because they are either incentivized or threatened (see #1).
3. *Masquerading:* The campaign has covert elite sponsorship and is masquerading as a movement with a broad base of non-elite support.[51]

---

[49] Zellner (2010: 362).   [50] Walker (2010).
[51] Most definitions highlight the third characteristic. Zellner (2010: 361), for example, says that astroturf is an effort by "paid lobbyists to conduct a political or public relations campaign on behalf of a client, typically an interest group, designed in such a way as to mask its origins and create the impression that it is spur-of-the-moment grassroots behavior" (see also McNutt and Boland, 2007). Similarly, Lyon and Maxwell (2004: 561) argue that astroturf is when a business "covertly subsidizes a group with similar views to lobby when it normally would not," thus emphasizing the third characteristic but also implying the first (i.e., incentives). Popular commentators often use the term to refer to fraud (cf. Sager, 2009), and this meaning was highlighted by the consultants I interviewed (see Chapter 4).

The work of grassroots public affairs consultants does, at times, meet one or more of these criteria, but not all of these features clearly differentiate consultant-backed campaigns from the work of most advocacy organizations, particularly regarding the use of incentives. I consider each of these features in turn.

First, on *incentives*, it is of course true that consultants offer incentives to would-be participants to encourage them to become involved, and they also highlight that negative policy consequences may follow if citizens fail to take action. But, with some exceptions (including one I describe below), consultants prefer not to offer financial incentives, which run the risk of delegitimizing their entire campaign.[52] What they offer instead are incentives that are similar to those employed by other kinds of advocacy campaigns, such as informational incentives (educating the public about how and why to participate), incentives based on one's professional or workplace identity, offering networking and socialization opportunities, or giving participants the chance to feel they are a meaningful player in policymaking.[53] Thus, although a primary activity of public affairs consultants is incentivizing participation, most of their campaigns are no more "astroturf" on this count than the work of most advocacy organizations, which also rely upon selective incentives to overcome the collective action dilemmas identified long ago by Mancur Olson.[54] Just like interest groups work to motivate the participation of their members and political parties act to lower the "cost" of voting by providing citizens cues for understanding which candidate is closest to their preference,[55] public affairs

---

[52] For example, the online marketing forum *ReveNews* reported in 2008 that members of MyPoints, a consumer rewards program, were contacted with messages asking that they "Tell Congress to Protect Seniors' Medical Benefits," and offering them five "points" for visiting the website of the AMA Patients' Action Network, or 50 "points" for emailing Congress (Allen, 2008). These points could then be used to secure discounted products and offers from retailers (ibid.).

[53] In the interest of space, this large literature on participatory incentives is not reviewed here. However, the broadest and most influential categorization of incentive systems goes back to Clark and Wilson (1961; see also Zald and Ash, 1966; Knoke, 1988), who distinguished between material incentives (money, goods, services), solidary incentives (intangible rewards that derive from the act of association), and purposive incentives (also intangible, but derive from the goal rather than the means of participation, such as the desire for policy change).

[54] Olson (1965). For a more recent application, see Prakash and Gugerty (2010).

[55] Downs (1957).

consultants have multiple means of making it easier for citizens to take part in the political process (albeit in a narrowly targeted fashion aligned with their clients' interests).

Second, regarding outright *fraud* or misrepresentation by elite recruiters or their agents, these practices do take place but are accompanied by more severe risks. The discovery of communications that are forged or otherwise misrepresent an individual citizen's issue position can be quite costly to both the firm and the client(s) it represents. In 2009, for instance, a Congressional subcommittee opened hearings on the practice of paid public affairs work after it was revealed that an employee of a prominent public affairs firm, working on behalf of a client in the energy industry, sent forged constituent letters to a Virginia representative urging him not to support proposed climate change legislation. These letters brought considerable and unwelcome scrutiny not only to this particular consultant, but also to the entire consultant industry. That it did so at all also calls attention to a second reason why fraud is risky: the ubiquity of the internet and new communications technologies makes it much easier for advocacy groups and the media to locate the source of manufactured communications. New technologies have made it possible, for example, to reveal evidence of how many fake computer-generated Twitter followers a political leader or advocacy organization has, through the "truthy" project at Indiana University.[56] Watchdog groups like the Center for Media and Democracy have also made it a priority to call attention to covert public affairs strategies.

Setting aside concerns of fraud, consider the more commonplace worry that public affairs campaigns stimulate the participation of those who either do not believe or do not fully understand the issue. A recent report, for instance, described how Gotham Public Affairs recruited paid protestors on behalf of the television network Ovation against Time Warner Cable's decision to cut the network from its channel lineup, all under the guise of a group called "Citizens for Access to the Arts."[57] As an online ad recruiting participants described,

... this is a very easy and quick job. This client pays $20 an hour for a little less than an hour. All you really have to do is show up and support our rally. We ask that you DO NOT under any circumstances talk to the press or media on

---

[56] Ratkiewicz et al. (2011).   [57] Gittlitz (2013).

our behalf or discuss anything about your attendance or compensation with them.[58]

Strategies like these are indeed deployed by public affairs consultants with some regularity. Nonetheless, given that their disclosure makes such events (or broader campaigns) relatively easy to discredit, consultants have a strong interest in avoiding their usage, especially on high-stakes policy debates.

The subsidized public may be one in which elites have become more dominant players, but this need not entail the assumption that incentivized activists are disingenuous. Even if the outcome of their activism is to support the preferences of consultants' elite clients, this does not necessarily mean that activists are dishonest about their own preferences. Consultants' goals, instead, are often (although not always) to identify and make alliance with those who have an authentic interest in the cause.

But we must also acknowledge that political recruiters tend to exercise a more subtle form of power over those they request to become engaged. It is not uncommon, for instance, for consultants to help employers recruit their employees to participate in political activism on behalf of the firm, although a number of states explicitly prohibit employer coercion in this process.[59] Similarly, trade associations have organized protest events that recruit employees from member firms to speak out on behalf of industry, such as in the American Petroleum Institute's "Energy Citizens" rallies against climate legislation in the summer of 2009.[60] Or in other cases where public affairs consultants engage in forms of "bloc recruitment"[61] – what consultants call "grasstops" – rank-and-file members may feel pressured to join the campaign because their leadership is already on board. In all of these instances, activists may fear that remaining inactive could indirectly result in either personal harm or unwanted policy consequences.

Third, on the issue of undisclosed elite support (*masquerading*), consultants' record is more equivocal. Consultants do, at times, create

---

[58] Ibid.
[59] On employers pressuring employees to lobby on behalf of their firm, see Keim (2005); Heath, Douglas, and Russell (1995). Regarding state restrictions against such practices, see Volokh (2012: 315–318). California law, for example, states that employers may not engage in "controlling or directing, or tending to control or direct, the political activities or affiliations of employees" (ibid.: 315).
[60] Snyder and Brush (2009).   [61] Oberschall (1973).

front groups through which elite interests masquerade as citizen groups, such as how gambling interests created Citizens for Riverboat Gambling in Iowa in the early 1990s, or how consultants fabricated the pro-Gulf War campaign called Citizens for a Free Kuwait.[62] Many of the consultants I interviewed contend that if the participants they sponsor have a genuine belief in the cause, that fact alone is sufficient to defend the campaign's legitimacy. They also regularly pointed out, correctly, that advocacy organizations are not required by federal law to disclose their donors, and thus can be charged with engaging in "astroturf" just as easily as campaigns organized by consultants. Nonetheless, it remains true that consultants often fail to disclose information about the identity of the client, the role of the consultant, and/or which other funding sources are being applied to the campaign.

For example, campaigns may misrepresent the breadth of their funding sources when they are heavily dependent on a single patron. This was the case for Working Families for Wal-Mart, which I describe in greater depth in Chapter 7; the campaign initially claimed that Wal-Mart was *only one* of the (presumably numerous) funders of the campaign, although it was later revealed that Wal-Mart was its *sole* funder. Similarly, in a groundbreaking series about covert lobbying by the manufacturers of flame-retardant chemicals done by the *Chicago Tribune*, journalists revealed that these firms worked through a front group called Citizens for Fire Safety to create the appearance of broad community support in favor of flame-retardant chemicals being used in furniture, claiming to include fire marshals, scientists, and representatives of low-income and minority communities.[63] Record labels at times organize "phoner" campaigns to request spins of sponsored songs and make it appear that these songs are more broadly popular.[64] A lack of disclosure about the funding of these campaigns makes it difficult for citizens to interpret consultants' mobilization requests.

Taking these considerations as a whole, then, consultants' record is somewhat mixed. Their use of incentives is generally not very different from what most advocacy organizations do in their own mobilization of resources. Some consultants do engage in fraud and/or misrepresentation, although this is a risky strategy (and, as I show in Chapter 7, one that is likely to be ineffective). And there is a general lack of

---

[62] Bodensteiner (1997); Fitzpatrick and Palenchar (2006: 208).
[63] *Chicago Tribune* (2012).   [64] Rossman (2012: 34).

transparency in the field, both regarding the role of the consultant and the client.

Nonetheless, consultants still are not in a position to truly "manu-facture" real civic and political participation out of whole cloth. Consultants help to locate and target would-be activists, offer them (usually non-monetary) incentives for participation, and provide infor-mation about venues in which to become active. They also work heavily with existing civic and political organizations, thus transplanting, if you will, already grown grassroots to new issue environments. And, in these efforts, they hope that their campaign will independently take root in its new locale, even if only for a short time.

For these reasons, perhaps a better metaphor for most consultant-backed organizing work would be the planting of sod rather than laying astroturf. That is, consultants seek to borrow grassroots that were grown for other purposes and put them to use for those of their clients. In so doing, they generally hope that roots will grow in this new environment. I return to this point in Chapter 8.

Communications technologies and the means of participatory production

Finally, public affairs consultancies are defined by their employment of communications technologies in facilitating popular activism. Since the early 1970s, participation consultants have capitalized on the availabil-ity of a low-cost long-distance phone service, faxing technologies, direct mail, and demographic mapping and targeting services in order to stir up the grassroots and help their clients win issues. Today, this repertoire has expanded considerably, as micro-targeted email campaigns are increasingly supplemented by web technologies, robocalls, texting, and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. This has caused the volume of communications citizens send to Congress to increase in exponential terms,[65] and there is also evidence that administrative agencies are coping with an excess of standardized form letters sent their way.[66] On the other hand, at the same time that these new technologies have engendered an age of mechanical reproduction of political messages, public affairs consultants seek to make their

---

[65] Fitch and Goldschmidt (2005).   [66] Shulman (2006).

campaigns stand out by incentivizing citizens to offer their unique perspectives.

Using these technologies, public affairs consultants request a wide range of participatory activities of those they target for engagement, although they face a consistent trade-off between encouraging high-cost, low-tech forms of participation that only the most committed of participants will take up (for example, flying to Washington to meet with their representative about an issue) versus low-cost forms of participation that policymakers can more easily ignore (such as signing one's name at the bottom of a mass-emailed form letter). In fact, it may be the case that the more standardized the letter, the less likely policymakers are to take the communication seriously.[67]

Public affairs consultants attempt to find the best match between the client's goals, the stakeholder groups targeted, and the type of participation to request. Sometimes a broad-based strategy using multiple tactics is called for that mobilizes diverse stakeholder groups alongside receptive members of the broader public; on high-stakes issues that can be cast in more ideological terms, firms may go beyond their natural constituency and mobilize the mass public through web, television, or newspaper ads (this has been a common strategy adopted by health insurance and banking firms during periods of proposed regulatory reform). At other times more narrowly focused or even one-on-one strategies are more appropriate: for instance, modern campaigns often employ an "intercept" strategy, which involves the staging of a seemingly unplanned encounter between a prominent constituent and a policymaker in order to attain a deeper level of person-to-person influence.[68]

Implications of professional public affairs

Having considered what it is that defines this organizational field, what are the implications of the activities of participation consultants for how best to understand participation in contemporary democracy, the political role of elites, and how social movements interact with organizations?

---

[67] Silverstein (1998); Browne (1995); Fitch and Goldschmidt (2005).
[68] Jalonick (2003).

Commercialized democracy

Scholars of American political development have called attention to how, since the 1960s, a more activist state encouraged the growth of both service-providing and advocacy-oriented nonprofit organizations.[69] To the extent that these organizations were oriented toward patronage by external grant-makers, their operations tended to be more professionalized.[70] Many of these organizations began to contract with government agencies in order to provide services, in line with the devolution of federal authority to the states and outsourcing of services to the nonprofit sector.[71]

But professionalization is only one part of the picture, as advocacy has been not only professionalized but also *commercialized*. A perhaps even more significant part of the story, then, has been overlooked: how the growth of formal organizations active in public advocacy, along with the expansion of business political mobilization, created a new demand for mobilizing grassroots constituents in the political marketplace. While grassroots lobbying tactics by well-heeled organizations are hardly new to the American political scene,[72] the extent to which services for galvanizing public support or opposition on a particular issue have been packaged and sold to paying clients is a rather novel development.

Consider, for example, how Grassroots Enterprise (a Washington, DC consulting shop owned by PR conglomerate Edelman, with a predominantly trade association clientele) describes its services in promotional materials, and how it merges techniques from advertising, political organizing, and electoral campaign strategies to help its clients win. This firm claims to:

- Help the client to create and delineate specific end goals, and develop a plan to get there that includes analysis of the key decision-makers, strategies for messaging, design of promotional materials, and background research on the issue
- Help create and carry out web-based programs that encourage targeted participants to join the campaign (through paid ad spots, efforts to build "buzz," and viral marketing)

---

[69] Skocpol (2007); see also Minkoff (1995).   [70] Minkoff and Powell (2006).
[71] Marwell (2004).   [72] Kollman (1998); Goldstein (1999).

- Provide clients access to their pre-existing national network of influential opinion leaders, who can be activated to leverage support for the client
- Offer services to develop a database of in-depth profiles of the behaviors of each stakeholder, as well as to identify which of these stakeholders are mavens or opinion leaders on whom others rely for key decision-making information[73]
- Measure the participation of stakeholders in real time, thereby allowing clients to make crucial adjustments during the course of the campaign

Thus, the participation of citizens is not only organized on behalf of paying clients, but micro-targeted and monitored by the public affairs firm charged with facilitating it. "Citizens" have been turned into "stakeholders," and efforts to mobilize participation have been restructured into advertised appeals. This would, to say the least, seem to augur poorly for the possibility of a public sphere which is relatively free of the communicative distortions introduced by media technologies, corporate influence over civil society, and the power of experts relative to the lay public.[74]

Despite these substantial concerns, this particular form of commercialized advocacy is not, strictly speaking, replacing the activism of grassroots citizens' groups. Often, in fact, many citizen advocates turn to public affairs consultants in order to improve their own operations. For example, consultants like Crossroads Campaign Solutions, the Richard Norman Company, and Shirley & Banister Public Affairs, which I discuss in Chapter 6, all focus on improving the efforts of pre-existing advocacy organizations by helping them both to conduct more effective outreach into the broader public and also to make more effective use of their existing members and resources. *Thus, on its own, it's unclear whether the participatory commercialization that public affairs consultants represent is harming public engagement writ large; on the other hand, the selective targeting of activists by well-resourced interests can, as we will see, exacerbate participatory inequalities.*

---

[73] On opinion leaders, see the classic work by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) and contemporary critiques by Watts and Dodds (2007) and Rossman (2012). For a popular application, see Gladwell (2000: 19).

[74] See Habermas (1989); Calhoun (1992).

A renewed understanding of the political role of elites

Grassroots public affairs consultants are political elites who, in their work through professional service firms, mobilize mass participation for a living. They possess expertise in facilitating public engagement, which they draw from diverse sources such as electoral campaigning, grassroots organizing, lobbying, public relations, and advertising. As Steven Brint has argued, the post-1960s era in the US brought with it massive growth in the ranks of expert professionals, who can be characterized as those who convert professional knowledge into marketable resources.[75]

The role of elites in society is a topic that is returning to the center of sociological investigation due to a variety of factors, including vastly widening income inequality in the US since the 1970s, new technologies in network analysis for modeling relations among elites, and the increased popularity of the work of Pierre Bourdieu (especially in how his work illuminates elite cultural capital and how it may be converted into other forms of capital).[76] In addition, organizational theorists are finding that a renewed interest in elites and power dynamics in organizational fields helps to correct some of the well-recognized limitations of institutional theory in its understanding of interests, agency, and strategic action.[77]

Mayer Zald and Michael Lounsbury, for instance, argue in a seminal article that the transition from the "old institutionalism" of scholars like Philip Selznick and toward the "new" institutionalism replaced a focus on actors within organizations with an emphasis on more generalized culture and cognition, thus shifting the focus away from strategic decision-making and the political power of elites.[78] Returning to insights from C. Wright Mills, they argue that it is important for organizational analysts to understand how contemporary elites occupy "command posts" which are "centers of societal power . . . that regulate, oversee, and aim to maintain social order in society and economy, both at regional, nation-state and inter-state levels."[79] Importantly, command posts are not only those positions within political parties, bureaucracies, or elected offices that offer access to the levers of political power, but they argue that positions of power in other societal

[75] Brint (1994: 204).   [76] Khan (2012).
[77] Walker (2012b: 584–587); Roscigno (2011).
[78] Zald and Lounsbury (2010).   [79] Ibid.: 964; Mills (1956).

institutions and broader organizational fields are also worthy of the label. Thus, they maintain, command posts also include what Stephen Barley has called the "asteroid belt" of actors surrounding the state, including "varied elites and experts often connected to large corporations, sundry lobbyist organizations, law firms, social movement organizations, NGOs, etc."[80]

Professional service firms like the consultants in this book are an important yet under-investigated command post for the contemporary elite, serving as a mediator between corporations, organized interests, and the state.[81] What this study contributes is evidence of how such elites play a part in the framing of political issues (often in a quite populist fashion), targeting of political messages to particular audiences, and in the management of the political environment for paying organizational clients. Especially in offering citizens ready-made templates for participation – a more dramatic version of what Paul Lichterman refers to as "plug-in" volunteering, which takes place "under the direction of a professional who defines the tasks" for participants[82] – elite consultants help to shape both the form and the content of much mass participation today.

The practices of public affairs consultants also bear on broader questions of the influence of elites in society, hearkening back both to the classic Dewey-Lippmann debate over the potential for an informed and meaningful democracy given the problems of a mass public, as well as the more general debate between elitists and pluralists in political sociology and political science.[83] Fundamentally a question of the extent to which equality in representation and policymaking is possible in advanced democracies, elite theorists generally expect that a privileged minority have outsized political influence, whereas pluralists contend that competition among opposing interests helps to (imperfectly)

---

[80] Zald and Lounsbury (2010: 965); see Greenwood (2008), as well as Barley (2007, 2010). Think tanks should also be added to this list, given their position within elite policy networks; for an investigation into whether think tanks fit the expectations of elite theorists, see Medvetz (2012).

[81] Greenwood (2008: 155).   [82] Lichterman (2006: 540).

[83] Lippmann (1922); Dewey (1922); Whipple (2005). The sociology and political science literatures on the elitism–pluralism debate are vast and reviewing them lies beyond the scope of this book. However, for reviews, see Kahn (2012) and McFarland (2007). For a systematic recent application of these ideas to questions of public participation and political inequality, see Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (2012).

level the playing field between the desires of the privileged against those
who lack access to power and resources.

On the one hand, the practices of public affairs consultants would
seem to offer strong evidence in support of an elitist view of politics,
and some popular commentators see this as a particularly worrisome
role in which elite interests masquerade through seemingly broad-
based, popular mobilization.[84] After all, as I show in Chapter 5, nearly
40 percent of the massive corporations in the *Fortune* 500 appear as
the clients of these consultants, and in Chapter 6 I show that the
advocacy organizations that hire consultants tend to have budgets
that are around fourteen times larger than those groups that do not.
As E. E. Schattschneider once argued, "the flaw in the pluralist heaven
is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper class accent," and
it might be said that public affairs consultants offer those upper class
voices a bullhorn. Indeed, a case could be made that consultant-
backed campaigns are primarily efforts by elites to engage in a sort
of pluralist window-dressing in which elite interests are falsely made to
appear representative of the broader public interest. Especially when
they fail to disclose their (or their client's) role through such actions as
creating "third party" or "front" groups, they work against the plural-
ist goal of a more transparent, open society in which political battles
are won on the basis of the honest competition among interest groups
for support. This is undoubtedly true for some of the campaigns
described in this book.

However, an elitist approach seems to go too far in the suggestion
that popular influence can simply be "bought" by hiring a consultant.
While I acknowledge, in agreement with a number of contemporary
analysts,[85] that the US system of advocacy organizations is systemati-
cally biased toward representing the interests of the affluent and edu-
cated, it is equally important to recognize that consultants' campaigns
for their clients must contend with competing interests and existing
preferences in public opinion. In addition, like other kinds of political
organizers, they must study the opposition, craft a message that reso-
nates with the public, and seek out policy targets that offer them an
opening for generating real change. And they must do so, as I show in
Chapter 7, in a way that connects with constituencies that have an

---

[84] Stauber and Rampton (1995); Beder (1998).
[85] For example, Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (2012); Skocpol (2003).

authentic interest in the cause, one that is *independent* of the interests of the paying sponsor. Try as they might to manufacture a base of support for a paying client, campaigns that fail to connect with an authentic base of supporters are likely to fail. Thus, the efforts of these elite consultants are, to some extent, limited by the independent force of existing preferences and organized interests, thus providing some pluralist counterbalance to elite influence.

Social movements and organizational theory

Scholars have shown that organizations outside the state – such as corporations, educational institutions, trade or professional associations – are regularly targets of popular contention, and that the character of challenges to these organizations is often fundamentally different from protests against government agencies or officials.[86] Organizations can be seen as polities in their own right, having their own internal politics, covert power struggles, and ways of managing uprisings within their ranks.[87] Social movement actors, for their part, seek out vulnerabilities and opportunities for change which are based on activists' understanding of the unique configuration of organizational decision-making found in an organization or in a broader field.[88]

Consistent with the expectations of neo-institutionalism – which emphasizes how organizations respond to the coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures they face in their environments – a variety of studies emphasize how public contention against non-state organizations leads targeted organizations to take steps to signal their alignment with the demands of secondary stakeholders like protest groups. This has led, for example, to new forms of self-regulation such as those in forestry and apparel manufacturing, certification systems for dolphin-free tuna, and various fair trade standards.[89] Others have shown that after facing protests, individual companies make efforts to signal their social responsibility through philanthropy and other practices.[90]

This study contributes to the broader discussion of how social movements shape organizational practices on a number of levels. First and

---

[86] Walker, Martin, and McCarthy (2008); Armstrong and Bernstein (2008); Soule (2009).
[87] Zald and Berger (1978).   [88] Weber, Rao, and Thomas (2009).
[89] E.g., Bartley (2007).   [90] Ingram, Yue, and Rao (2010).

foremost, I show that the mobilization of grassroots campaigns is an important yet under-investigated response to public contention that corporations often take. As I show in Chapter 5, corporations seek to mobilize their own grassroots activism when faced with protest or controversy, and this is especially prevalent among low-reputation firms. Responses such as these help to illustrate the importance of strategic action in response to external pressures and also to better understand the political character of contemporary corporations.[91] Second, this study illuminates how consultants serve as an important mediator in managing contention. Like other professional service firms, public affairs consultants play a needed boundary-spanning function between an organization and its environment. I return to this point in Chapter 4. Lastly, I make clear in Chapter 3 that the founding of new advocacy organizations helped to support the early development of grassroots public affairs consultants, thus showing how advocacy may support the development of new industries.[92]

In responding to contention, organizations work with consultants to mobilize support that appears to be authentic and genuine. Organizational theorists have shown the particular value of authenticity in organizational fields, in applications ranging from microbrews to handicrafts.[93] Authenticity is essential to the reception of grassroots participation, as audiences are likely to discredit participation that appears to be incentivized or staged on behalf of an outside interest. As Robert Fishkin once argued, echoing Habermas, political engagement must be unmanipulated to be taken as legitimate.[94] This is why, as I describe in Chapter 7, it is particularly crucial for consultant-driven campaigns to connect with those who have an independent interest in the issue that is an arm's length removed from the sponsor.

Implications for social capital

The observation that America is in a state of civic decline is, ironically, a near constant in the nation's history. As Michael Schudson points out in his highly regarded history of American citizenship,[95] the theme of civic privatism and individualism run amok has been found throughout our intellectual discourse in works going back to Tocqueville and

---

[91] See Oliver (1991).   [92] Rao (2008).   [93] E.g., Carroll and Wheaton (2009).
[94] Fishkin (1992: 159).   [95] Schudson (1998: Ch. 7).

continuing into the thought of Lippmann, Riesman, Bellah, and, today, Putnam.[96] In more recent years, the "civic decline" discourse has continued apace, with considerable debate over whether we are seeing a civic "decline" or instead simply a shift into new, more flexible forms of association.[97]

The practice of professional public affairs consulting fits into this story in that paid, professional mobilization of public participation both reflects and reinforces the changing structure of association in our society. It reflects civic change in that advocacy organizations have shifted toward more professionalized activities that rely on policy research, litigation, polling, and fundraising rather than general member mobilization.[98] The grassroots lobbying services that consultants provide complement and reinforce this organizational shift, in that they provide their organizational clients – who are, not coincidentally, often more professionalized advocacy groups, as I show in Chapter 6 – with the best available means of targeting the right segments of the public for participatory incentives.

On the other hand, there is reason to believe that the work of these consultants is not so much leading to a decline in Americans' stock of social capital, but is instead encouraging the further development of a new and different form of it. Indeed, I will argue that the targeted activation of specific citizens, or what I refer to as the growth of the narrowly *subsidized public*, need not displace citizens from taking action in other sorts of community engagement. The concern, then, is not that those who are targeted decide no longer to remain involved in other aspects of civic and political life; instead, it is those who are already involved that are among the most likely to be targeted. Thus, a larger degree of political inequality may be between those who are associational "joiners" and those who are unengaged; political recruiters, as discussed earlier, often engage in supply-side recruitment

---

[96] Lippmann (1922); Riesman, Glazer, and Denney (1950); Bellah et al. (1985); Putnam (1995, 2000). For a more sweeping historical perspective, see Sennett (1977).

[97] Wuthnow (2002).

[98] This need not, however, entail the *replacement* of member-based organizations with staff-driven non-membership groups, as membership organizations and non-membership groups tend to rely on one another for mutual support (Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner 2011).

with a disproportionate emphasis on turning known activists onto their cause. To the extent that participants tend to be more privileged than the general populace, targeting joiners may be a source of increasing political inequalities.

Adapting repertoires: decoupling the toolkit from the toolmaker

Scholars of social movements and organized advocacy often argue that despite the myriad ways in which those seeking change might make claims in the public sphere, only a limited number of strategies are "thinkable" to actors in a given moment.[99] Organized advocates, like other types of social actors, possess a toolkit for taking action that both enables and constrains effective action.[100] The sum total of tactics that are culturally available to actors at a given moment can be thought of as a "tactical repertoire,"[101] from which actors select on the basis of shared cultural assumptions and bounded rational calculation. Importantly, repertoires are flexible and may be readily adapted to new circumstances, or, importantly, diffused to new actors other than those who created them; this can be thought of, in Tarrow's terms, as a modular repertoire.[102]

The latter concept is relevant here, as public affairs consultants adapted the repertoire of organized advocacy to the changed political and civic environment of US political life starting in the 1970s. This environment was characterized by a massive expansion of citizen advocacy organizations (and their increasing professionalization), the decentralization of power in Congress, declining trust in government, intensification of political partisanship, and the availability of new communications technologies that allowed for weak-tie mobilization of low-cost participation. Under these circumstances, participation consulting emerged to offer professionalized civic groups and politicized business groups a way to mobilize public participation in novel ways. In the fashion of the bricoleur – one who creatively assembles a new organizational practice out of diverse existing cultural contents[103] – public affairs consultants adapted certain parts of the repertoire of

---

[99] Perrin (2006).   [100] Swidler (1986); Clemens (1993, 1997).
[101] Tilly (1995).   [102] Tarrow (1993).   [103] Douglas (1986).

citizen participation to the commercial purveyance of participatory services. In this interaction, certain groups competing for power gain strategic advantages by developing new tactics, while other contenders respond and adapt to those innovations.[104]

In adapting the tactics of citizen advocacy for commercial purposes, part of this repertoire was kept intact, but other parts were cast aside or only partially adapted. Like the Naderite and Public Interest Movement advocates of the late 1960s and early 1970s,[105] public affairs consultants found new ways to exploit the media and communications technologies to get people involved in the political process. On the other hand, consultants can only do so much to build organizational infrastructure on their own, and so they instead learned to rely on the existing capacities of other organizations, developing a productive division of labor between consultants' professionalism and grassroots organizations' thick network ties; this can be seen today in how public affairs consultants build coalitions and mobilize opinion leaders through "grasstops" lobbying. As I show in Chapter 7, consultants' top priority when targeting organizational stakeholders is to mobilize pre-existing opinion leaders, thus utilizing the existing infrastructure of civil society to meet their clients' ends.

What we learn from this account is that repertoires of action often diffuse across institutional boundaries, including between their civic origins and ultimate commercial uses. Marketers, for example, increasingly employ viral techniques that build upon individuals' social networks in order to sell products and services. Political activists, in turn, have used many of the same techniques to "market" their issue or cause.[106] In this case, the growth of citizen advocacy organizations and increasingly activist orientation of business made it possible for activist tactics to be employed by paid professional consultants. The blurring of boundaries between states, markets, and civil societies has made the spread of repertoires across societal sectors much easier to facilitate.

---

[104] McAdam (1983). Also, numerous manuals and how-to books offer suggestions for how corporations and interest groups can win in public relations battles against activists seeking regulation, accountability, or Not-In-My-Back-Yard legislation (e.g., Deegan, 2001; Harrison, 1993; Grefe and Linsky, 1995; Wittenberg and Wittenberg, 1989).

[105] Lazarus (1974).   [106] Bosso (2005).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the field of public affairs consulting, high-lighting its qualified professionalism, use of incentives, employment of supply-side recruitment strategies, set of organizational clients, and ultimate policy targets for their campaigns. I also noted that the development of this organizational population represents not only the next step in the professionalization of advocacy, but its commercialization as a service sold in the political marketplace. Although consultants have borrowed from the repertoire of citizen participation in crafting their methods, professional public affairs consulting does not appear to be *replacing* traditional forms of grassroots advocacy. Yet, on the other hand, the selective targeting of activists may be exacerbating political inequalities.

Having defined the field of public affairs consulting and considered its implications for our understanding of modern civic and political life, we now take one step backward in order to consider how the growth of this organizational population was shaped by the changing structure of civic life starting in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In so doing, we see that public affairs consultants are both shaping and shaped by the changing structure of American civil society.

3 | *The formation of a grassroots industry*

Introduction

Public affairs consultants have risen to prominence in recent years, but their very existence is a relatively new development, as this population of organizations developed largely in the 1970s and 1980s and has become institutionalized as a regular element of the political system in the years since. This chapter examines how it was that "grassroots" went from being predominantly a characteristic of advocacy organizations and local citizens' groups to a tactic also employed by elite actors when seeking popular support.

It does so by calling attention to the major restructuring of American civic life following after the protest movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, in which the increased activism of American government in new regulatory and social domains led to both an expansion of citizen engagement and, later, a heightened degree of political activism by businesses and industry groups. Those new organizations, many of which were groups with a professional staff and direct-mail fundraising operations, and which were often reliant on the backing of powerful external patrons (both in foundation grants and in direct corporate support), illustrated the power of harnessing new communications technologies to mobilize citizens as lobbyists. Making use of the increased availability of new communications technologies, consultants – many of whom had personally cut their teeth in the fields of citizen advocacy, corporate lobbying, and especially electoral strategy before opening up their own shops – were more than happy to apply those technologies and skills on behalf of the new population of would-be clients.

The chapter begins by offering a prehistory of public affairs consulting, describing work by earlier political and PR consultants that paved the way for the industry. Next, I trace the career paths of consultants into the profession, finding that electoral consulting was consultants'

most common prior occupation. I then describe how the transformation of organized advocacy starting in the late 1960s, as well as the expansion of corporate trade associations starting in the following decade, offered fertile territory for participation consulting. Following this, I describe the emergence of the field itself and then provide the results of a statistical analysis of the founding of consulting firms between 1972 and 2002. The results of these analyses make clear that the most powerful influences on the founding of consulting firms were the growth of new civic organizations and trade associations, even after accounting for the influence of changes in Americans' political attitudes, levels of political participation, partisanship, and economic conditions.

A brief prehistory of public affairs consulting

Although it wouldn't be until the 1970s that the grassroots consulting field would truly get off the ground, the idea to generate grassroots support on behalf of elite interests was hardly new at that point. Indeed, there is a long prehistory to the rise of grassroots consulting that reaches back into antiquity; even in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Cassius played a consultant-like intermediary role in Brutus's murder of Caesar by writing fake letters "in several hands ... as if they came from several citizens."[1] In the late nineteenth century, employers developed their own public relations messages to counter the threat of the "union menace."[2] And in the twentieth century, the field had precursors in the related domains of advertising and public relations, public opinion polling, campaign consulting, and professional lobbying. In many ways, the development of grassroots consulting represents the next step in the evolution of a mass public that has come to know itself through the lens of social science research, put to work on behalf of organized advocacy.[3]

The early public relations practitioner and consultant Edward Bernays, a nephew of Sigmund Freud, can be seen as a forerunner of the contemporary consulting field in its various guises.[4] Called the "Father of Public Relations" in his *New York Times* obituary after living to the age of 103, Bernays was known for his efforts to expand the idea of public relations well beyond mere communications and into

---

[1] Sager (2009).   [2] Haydu (1999).   [3] See Igo (2007).
[4] See, e.g., Ewen (1996); Friedenberg (1997: 16).

the territory of molding popular preferences and actions.[5] Building upon social science techniques including polling and experiments, his work sought both to understand public opinion and also to find ways of reshaping it to suit his clients' preferences. One such technique, for instance, was to gain the endorsement of elite experts or others seen as influential in a peer community – thus building on the public's trust in independent experts and civic leaders – which continues today in the practice of "grasstops" mobilization strategies used by grassroots public affairs consultants. Bernays was perhaps best known for his campaign to encourage smoking among women on behalf of the American Tobacco Company's Lucky Strike brand, in which a number of young suffragettes were persuaded to march down New York's Fifth Avenue smoking cigarettes prominently; the campaign framed cigarettes as "Torches of Freedom" with the goal that smoking would become a "gesture of freedom and demand for equality among young women."[6] Bernays would lay out these principles in works including *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (1923), *Propaganda* (1928), and his (in)famous essay on the "Engineering of Consent" (1947).

Although first put into practice by Bernays and his contemporary Ivy Lee, it wasn't until 1933 that the first professional political consulting firm in the US would be founded. The firm, Campaigns, Inc., was established by Clem Whitaker and Leone Smith Baxter in California.[7] Whitaker was previously the owner of a political news service that provided reports from the state capital to eighty small-town and weekly newspapers throughout California, while also serving from time to time as a lobbyist in Sacramento. In fact, Whitaker's earlier lobbying emphasized the grassroots approach of "lobbying influential people in legislators' districts rather than the legislators themselves."[8] Baxter was formerly a corporate publicist and manager of the Redding, California Chamber of Commerce.[9] Notably, Baxter's key role in the firm illustrated the important role of women in the field of PR consultants.[10] The pair would become not only consulting partners, but life partners in that they eventually married five years after starting the

---

[5] Ewen (1996). [6] Evans (2010).
[7] Campaigns, Inc. is widely recognized as the first political consulting firm in the US (e.g., Friedenberg, 1997; Lathrop, 2003; Magleby and Patterson, 1998; Kelley, 1956).
[8] Pitchell (1958: 279–280). [9] Pitchell (1958: 287). [10] Donato (1990: 143).

firm.[11] Thus, in the first political consulting firm, the lead consultants brought together hybrid knowledge about the media, the politics of industry, and indirect lobbying through opinion leaders.

California has long contended with Washington, DC as a center of professional lobbying, and the state continues to be a dominant locale for the grassroots consultants who would emerge in the 1970s and thereafter.[12] Given the state's long-standing tradition of direct democracy through the initiative and referendum process, consultants have played an important role in the state's unique policy environment around issues such as property taxes, insurance regulation, same-sex marriage, and the environmental impacts of land development.[13] California was also marked by a rather weak party system and widely dispersed population growth, which encouraged the use of mass media for statewide communications.[14] Perhaps, then, it should not be surprising that a form of consulting that brought together electoral strategies, advertising, polling, and organizing was first found in California's distinct political ecology.

Beyond this regional effect, the context of the 1930s also proved to be fecund for Whitaker and Baxter and their followers thereafter, as it was at this point that opinion polling emerged as a political tool, and one marked with the imprimatur of science.[15] Worries about how practices of political polling distort democracy and limit the development of a more deliberative and open public sphere worried such analysts as Jürgen Habermas (and, for different reasons, Pierre Bourdieu),[16] but these techniques generated usable social knowledge and offered a political opportunity for those called to consulting. The previously undifferentiated mass public could be sliced and diced into segmented audiences, and communications could begin to be targeted at those narrower audiences in order to gain influence and generate political support. Elites, then, could use firms like Campaigns, Inc. to deploy new media technologies of radio and distributed film shorts to make their case in broader public policy battles.

And that is precisely what followed in a variety of efforts organized by Campaigns, Inc., including some seventy-five campaigns they

---

[11] Lepore (2012).   [12] See Table A1 in Walker (2009: 102).
[13] E.g., Magleby and Patterson (1998); Eckholm (2012).
[14] Lathrop (2003: 16).   [15] Igo (2007); Lathrop (2003: 15).
[16] Habermas (1989); see also Bourdieu (1979).

organized between 1933 and 1955.[17] During those years, the firm morphed from a scrappy start-up working on a shoestring budget to a trusted and wildly lucrative business servicing such dominant firms as Pacific Telegraph, Standard Oil, Pacific Gas & Electric, and Southern Pacific, and a variety of prominent Republican candidates for office in the Golden State.[18] Famed novelist and California gubernatorial candidate Upton Sinclair complained in 1934 that he lost that year's election in part because of the "lie factory" of PR efforts that falsely attributed statements by the fictional characters in his novels to Sinclair himself; evidence suggests that Whitaker and Baxter were the ones feeding these false claims to the media.[19]

Their victories included campaigns such as an initiative backed by railroad firms, a salary negotiation campaign for the California Teachers Association, and, famously, work on behalf of the American Medical Association against President Truman's proposal for national health insurance.[20] As health policy expert James Morone describes the latter,

Clem Whitaker and Leone Baxter's organization, Campaigns, Inc., did a legendary job. Thirty-seven PR agents found all kinds of creative ways to shout "socialism!" at the start of the Red Scare. Their propaganda campaign has become legendary. In an inspired move, Whitaker and Baxter lined up hundreds of groups (1,829 by one count) and scripted their indignation over socialized medicine. The Truman administration archives bulge with letters, memorials, and petitions from local chapters of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Chambers of Commerce expressing outrage, all worded suspiciously alike.[21]

By 1958, Campaigns, Inc. was such a powerful force that one political scientist would proclaim that Whitaker and Baxter "have become the giants of the industry, the most successful practitioners of the art of campaign management and the model by which all other firms may be measured."[22]

And their work helped to inspire – and, indeed train – the next generation of political consultants.[23] In fact, Pat Samuels,[24] one of the most prominent public affairs consultants in the field since the 1970s,

---

[17] Pitchell (1958: 282).   [18] Ibid.: 287.   [19] Lepore (2012).
[20] Ibid.; Morone (2011: 375–376).
[21] Morone (2011: 376); see also Starr (1982: 282–285).
[22] Pitchell (1958: 286).   [23] Harvey (1970: 41).   [24] A pseudonym.

told me in an interview that he studied the campaigns of Whitaker and
Baxter as he was founding one of the first grassroots consulting firms.

Still, the work they helped to inspire was mostly in the realm of
campaign consulting. By the early 1960s, political consulting started
to move beyond the services of particular firms and became a budding
industry,[25] but the majority of outfits were primarily those involved in
consulting for electoral campaigns.[26] As Robert Friedenberg has
argued, the development of campaign consulting required a number
of preconditions: relatively closely contested elections, a candidate seek-
ing office in an active (rather than passive) fashion, a large constituency,
and a combination of funds, campaign organizers, and communications
technologies.[27] These consultants tended to focus more on the "air
game" of messaging through the media instead of the "ground game"
of grassroots organizing. The *Campaigns & Elections* "Political Pages"
directory today shows that traditional campaign consultants continue
to make up a far greater share of the political consulting field than
grassroots public affairs consultants do.[28]

Thus, it would not be until the early 1970s that the industry of
grassroots public affairs consulting – differentiated by these consul-
tants' efforts to mobilize groundswells of public participation on behalf
of their paying clients – would really get off the ground.[29] It wasn't until
that later point that a vastly expanded interest group field (following the
1960s-era social movements), the political mobilization of business, and
the widening partisan gap would all come together to support this
burgeoning field.

Paths into the industry

The consultants who heeded the call to start new consulting firms hailed
from a variety of backgrounds, although my interviews with a number

---

[25] Medvic (2003: 33).   [26] Dulio (2003: 19).   [27] Friedenberg (1997: 5).
[28] See Appendix 1 on using *Campaigns & Elections* as a data source.
[29] However, note that there were precursors to grassroots public affairs consulting
firms in the work of certain "full service" electoral consultants that offered not
only more established services like media training, speech preparation,
fundraising solicitations, and the like, but also grassroots services such as
canvassing, facilitating town hall meetings and other public dialogues, etc.
Republican strategist Stuart Spencer's firm Spencer-Roberts was an early
practitioner of this model, identified both in research (Ginsberg, 1984: 169) and
in some of my interviews with contemporary firms.

of long-standing consultants revealed a few consistent pathways from previous careers into the field of grassroots public affairs consulting. These previous lines of work include positions as electoral candidates or their staffers, electoral consultants, in-house corporate public affairs officers, public opinion researchers, or work in grassroots organizing on behalf of social movement organizations and other advocacy groups. The field is generally characterized by a heterogeneous set of career backgrounds. Many consultants, like Whitaker and Baxter long before them, bring together hybrid careers themselves, often finding that grassroots consulting allows them to bricolage diverse skills accrued across varied occupations. One prominent consultant, for example, worked previously as both a campaign staffer for electoral campaigns and as a technical specialist for a telecom firm; he discusses his grassroots consulting work as the application of his technical skills to issue campaigns. Similarly, many other consultants found that the expertise they developed in electoral campaign organizing could easily transfer to work on behalf of corporate clients.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the career backgrounds of consulting firm founders, and does so using data from consultants' websites (see Appendix 3). Biographical statements for the firm's founding partners are a staple of consultants' websites, and these typically provide useful information on consultants' previous occupations prior to starting their public affairs shop. These founding consultants are almost entirely male, as only 11.2 percent of founders are women; despite women's important role in public relations more broadly,[30] women were only rarely the entrepreneurs behind these grassroots consulting firms.

What Figure 3.1 shows most clearly is that when taken as a whole, a plurality of the founders of grassroots consulting firms come from some other kind of consulting work (a combined 44.3 percent), whether it be consulting for electoral campaigns (26 percent), working for a PR or advertising shop (9.9 percent), traditional inside lobbying firm (2.3 percent), or another grassroots public affairs consultancy (6.1 percent).[31] The second cluster of career backgrounds includes those who cut their teeth in electoral politics in some way

---

[30] Donato (1990).
[31] Those founders who claimed to have worked for another grassroots public affairs consulting firm were concentrated within firms established more recently.
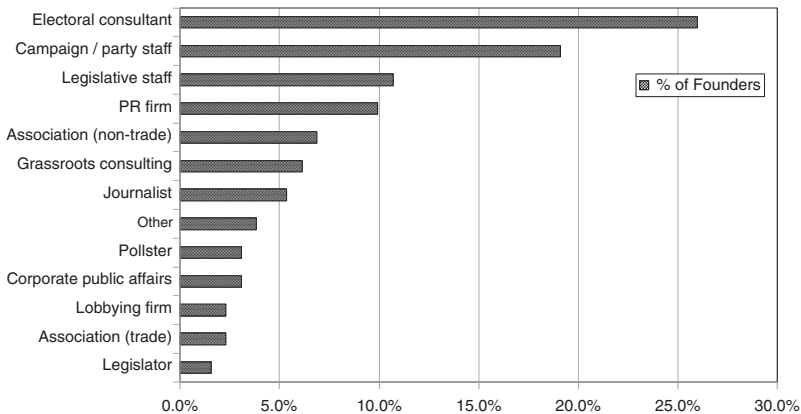
Figure 3.1 Career backgrounds of grassroots consulting firm founders

other than consulting (a combined 31.3 percent), either as campaign
or party staff (19.1 percent), staff for an elected legislator (10.7 per-
cent), or as a legislator themselves (1.5 percent).[32] Work as a leader of
an advocacy organization (6.9 percent) or trade association (2.3 per-
cent) represents a smaller third cluster. Lastly, it was much less com-
mon for firm founders to have backgrounds doing in-house corporate
public affairs work (3.1 percent), journalism (5.3 percent), taking
polls (3.1 percent), or other occupations such as law, government
agency staffing, research, or corporate management (combined 3.8
percent). These findings square with the arguments of David Farrell
and colleagues, who argue that while "early [political] consultants
tended to originate in the commercial world," today "the routes of
entry appear quite different, with many consultants being trained by
the political parties and increasingly in specialist courses at universities
across the United States."[33]

In my interviews with consultants, I heard accounts that provided
further depth on how those who founded these consulting operations
built upon these heterogeneous careers and also how they were
responding to broader forces in the political environment.

---

[32] This low proportion of founders who were previous legislators contradicts the
expectation of a "revolving door" between lobbyists and legislators (see, e.g.,
Salisbury et al., 1989). Grassroots public affairs consulting, by contrast, builds
upon skill sets developed through electoral campaign work.

[33] Farrell, Kolodny, and Medvic (2001: 13).

Perhaps the most common story of all was that those who founded these firms were working in the burgeoning sector of electoral campaign consulting firms established in the wake of Whitaker and Baxter, and who found themselves needing more stable sources of revenue between election years. They found in the 1970s and 1980s that although electoral revenue is full of sharp peaks and valleys, corporations were increasingly finding themselves on the receiving end of both unwelcome regulation and popular controversies, and the ballooning interest group sector also needed to mobilize untapped sources of support among the mass public. And as the public became increasingly partisan, consultants found that audiences were becoming more receptive to polarizing messages about issues like the environment, taxation, and government regulation of business.

The story of how Toledo Alvarez founded his firm Toledo Alvarez Associates is, in many ways, prototypical.[34] He explained to me that the firm started out doing electoral consulting, and that he also had personal experience working as a campaign staffer, primarily on the Democratic side. He elaborated:

I come out of doing [electoral] campaigns on the East Coast, to the West Coast, to forming an organization, doing it professionally, and so on and so forth. At some point we transitioned and took the tools, which are very similar in terms of who you're communicating with. We took those tools and we applied them to [helping] individual companies who needed to navigate the political waters, if you will [. . .] Our business started in the 80s. We shifted it more in the 90s away from the electoral side, and I probably haven't run [an electoral] campaign in 8–10 years.

I heard a very similar account from Roger Dylan Hess, founder of the prominent West Coast public affairs consulting firm Roger Hess Advocacy:[35]

We were doing [electoral] campaigns when I started . . . But mostly [in this state] we have state primaries in June and we have November elections for the most part [. . .] So that's about five months a year no matter what you charge. And I didn't ever believe you could charge enough in those five months to have a vacation paid for the other seven, so I tried to diversify immediately. That was the strategy and a purpose, and [we wanted] to have people [think that] if

---

[34] These are pseudonyms.   [35] Pseudonyms.

they worked for us, they'd have a job. You know, it didn't go away because election day passed. That's what we tried to follow.

Lastly, as Bill Hoover of Field Engagement, Inc.[36] described to me about his more recently founded firm, he and his co-founder had previously

worked on political campaigns; we looked around and we said, OK, you can hire just about every type of consultant imaginable. You can hire a pollster, you can hire a media consultant, you can hire a direct mail consultant, you can hire a general consultant, a finance consultant, on and on and on and on. But when it actually came to getting more people involved in [an issue] campaign, there is no outside expertise . . .

My business partner and I, when we were both doing jobs in the legislative world and I was working for [a legislator in my home state] and he was working for a member of Congress in DC. We made a similar observation that if you were an advocacy organization trying to affect change you could hire lobbyists or communications professionals, but there was no outside expertise on building a broader stakeholder base. Those were our two ideas around which we founded the company.

Perhaps most straightforward of all was what I heard from one of the most prominent firms on the West Coast, regarding why they diversified beyond candidate campaigns. When I asked why his firm shifted from working for candidates to working for corporate clients, he responded curtly that they did it simply to "make money and have year-round business."

Working as a legislative staffer was a learning experience for some consultants, showing in clear terms how constituent messages are received by policymakers. For example, Phil Frederick (whom I profile in greater detail in the next chapter)[37] noted that his work as a legislative assistant to a former senator from a large mid-Atlantic state showed him that grassroots constituent communication is effective. Similar to how one of Ken Kollman's informants in his study of grassroots lobbying said that "politicians use grass-roots contacts as a sort of hyper-concentrated version of what people are thinking back home,"[38] Phil told me that

the key is when the door is cold and it's [the senator and me] sitting in there and he's letting his hair down and talking about how he's going to determine his vote on a particular thing. Two things become blazingly true. One is that

---

[36] These are pseudonyms.   [37] A pseudonym.   [38] Kollman (1998: 155).

democracy works; [elected officials are] generally responsive. But, two: there is nothing more effective than a face-to-face meeting for an elected official.

In sum, then, the pre-existing base of political professionals active in communicating about politics to mass audiences, who learned their organizing skills in electoral campaigns and legislative work, seems to have been crucial for opening these new grassroots public affairs consultancies. But the supply of these skills is only one factor, as this also required demand from corporations and advocacy organizations. And it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that those two trends came together to produce a wave of demand for professional advocacy services.

As Pat Samuels, one of the first grassroots public affairs consultants in the US, described to me in an interview, the field took off because both corporations and consultants were independently reaching out to one another. He continued,

You know, as things change and as the politics change, more people are exposed. You know … there were two major issues early on that were probably driving this movement [among consultants] more than any. And one was tobacco,[39] and the other was electricity: the nuke plants in the 1970s. It was major. It was major. So, they were the two industries [that] were the major drivers of the development of [corporate-backed] grassroots or public participation [...] And, you know, after the 60s, corporate interests saw the effectiveness of group participation. And they said, "Well, if they can do it …" [...] And so, corporate and business interests said, "Well, why not. Let's go out and buy it."[40]

From streets to suites

It was in the 1970s and 1980s that these entrepreneurs found that the territory was fertile for professionals in grassroots politics. A major part of

---

[39] For a useful case study of grassroots mobilization by tobacco firms, see Givel (2007).

[40] Further highlighting the role of elite interests in sponsoring industry-backed campaigns in defense of tobacco and nuclear industries, David Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg (1996: 1643) have pointed out that "both the nuclear power and tobacco industries in the United States determined that there were advantages to the social movement form and initiated countermovement organizations" in response to contentious challenges.
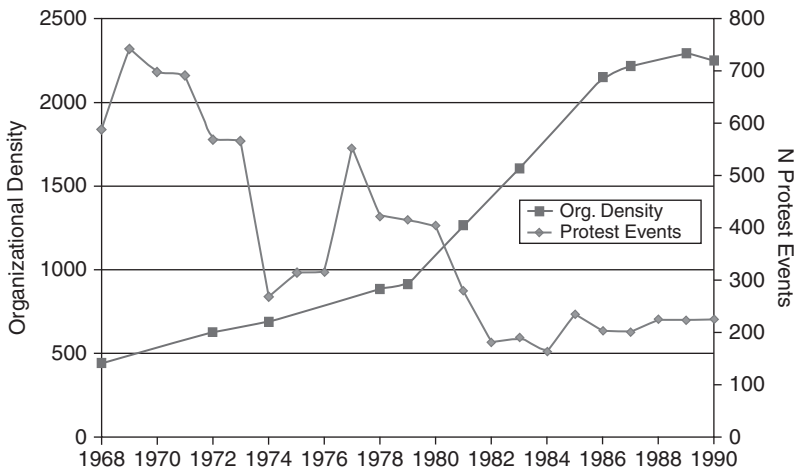
Figure 3.2 From movements to interest groups, 1968–1990

that story can be linked back to the growth in government activity in the
1960s and early 1970s, which inspired the Public Interest Movement and
myriad citizen groups to be founded in the following decade.[41] Further, the
wave of popular activism of the "long sixties" eventually made its way into
the interest group sector, with new groups becoming professional advo-
cates for their causes.[42] As illustrated in Figure 3.2, which compares the
number of public protest events reported in the *New York Times* with
the total number of generalist advocacy organizations listed in the
Encyclopedia of Associations from 1968 to 1990, the overall volume of
public protest declined significantly, while the number of advocacy organ-
izations active in public affairs ballooned in dramatic fashion thereafter.[43]
As a growing consensus of scholars in sociology and political science argue,
the end of the "long sixties" protest wave brought with it a significant
change in the character of advocacy: from operating outside institutions to
making change on the inside, or, in Bayard Rustin's knowing phrase,
from protest to politics.[44] A key element of this "institutionalization" of

---

[41] Vogel (1989); Berry (1997); Walker (1991); Skocpol (2007).
[42] Minkoff (1997).
[43] These data on protest events reported in the *New York Times* come from
      McAdam et al. (2009).
[44] Meyer and Tarrow (1998).

protest is the professionalization of social movement organizations, such that the boundary between the latter and formal "interest groups" becomes increasingly blurred.[45]

The organizations that sprouted up in the wake of this major cycle of contention were largely middle class, relied upon external patrons, and lobbied most often on single issues ranging from gender discrimination to the influence of business in politics. They were influential well beyond reforming policy; as political scientist Jeffrey Berry notes,[46] lobbying groups in the 1970s changed the *very context* of policymaking, in that a variety of new constituencies became aware of their ability to generate bad publicity, file lawsuits, and reshape public opinion.

Perhaps the most significant consequence of the group "explosion" was that associations blazed new trails in the strategic, targeted mobilization of citizens through media technologies.[47] It is also not coincidental that their expansion in this period followed the passage of the "Sunshine Laws" that decentralized power within Congress,[48] which were designed to make the policy process more transparent to citizens.

It therefore appears that the rise in citizen advocacy helped to support the development of the organizational field of public affairs consulting. Practitioners of public affairs consulting have, in fact, noted an association between the founding of new civic organizations with the development of their own field. For example, corporate grassroots gurus Edward Grefe and Marty Linsky argue that public affairs consulting represents the marriage of "communication and information technology with the [*sic*] 1960s grassroots organizing techniques," and they even claim heritage in the community organizing of Saul Alinsky.[49] Further, as a leading public affairs consultant argued in a statement to the *New York Times*, public affairs consultants took their cues from professionalized advocacy groups. When asked if consultants are having ill effects on American democracy, he responded: "Give me a break . . . most communications to the White House or the Hill are prompted. Whether by the Sierra Club, the National Rifle Association, or the American Association of Retired People is not the point."[50]

---

[45] Burstein (1998); Andrews and Edwards (2004).   [46] Berry (1977: 289).
[47] Schier (2000); Crenson and Ginsberg (2004).
[48] Heitshusen (2000); Oppenheimer (1980).   [49] Grefe and Linsky (1995: xi).
[50] Engelberg (1993: A17).

Business gets organized

But, despite the mass mobilization of citizens' groups in response to the more activist state, business did not simply stand idly by. Far from it, as the late-1970s era brought with it a considerable borrowing of interest group methods by business lobbies, as the formalization of grassroots mobilization tactics became a service that lobbying firms and political consultants began to offer to paying clients. Indeed, as one journalist reported in the *New York Times* in 1978, new grassroots mobilization tactics appeared

... to reflect and contribute to fundamental changes in how government now works, to shifts in power relationships, and to a decline in the authority of the Presidency and Congressional leadership ... It also appears to reflect an aggressive and determined effort by industry and business to increase its direct political action, as well as a growing ability of business leaders to submerge their differences and agree on cooperative action under common tactics and strategy.[51]

Although, as David Vogel notes, the unity of business interests that characterized the late 1970s would not last,[52] public mobilization tactics came to be an institutionalized element of the tactical repertoire of industry thereafter.

The mid 1970s marked the start of a period in which business began once again to assert its power in Washington.[53] Perhaps ironically, the rise of citizen activism appears to have encouraged the adoption of civic tactics by businesses. In fact, industry was not getting results because it failed to recognize that

public policy was no longer being made in private negotiations between Washington insiders and a handful of strategically placed representatives and senators. Power within Congress had become more decentralized, the number of interest groups represented in Washington had increased, the role of the media in defining the political agenda and the terms of political debate had expanded, the importance of political parties had declined, and the courts had begun to play a much more active role in making regulatory policy.[54]

Similarly, journalist and popular commentator William Greider argues that there existed a direct relationship between the transformed

[51] Mohr (1978: D7).   [52] Vogel (1989).
[53] Vogel (1989); Peschek (1987); Plotke (1992).   [54] Vogel (1989: 10).

regulatory environment, the growth of associations, and private incentives for public participation:

The origins of information-driven politics are, ironically, traceable to progressive reform as much as to large corporations or wealth. Middle-class and liberal-minded reformers, trying to free government decisions from the crude embrace of the powerful, emphasized a politics based on facts and analysis as their goal. They assumed that forcing "substance" into the political debate, supported by disinterested policy analysis, would help overcome the natural advantages of wealth and entrenched power. But information is never neutral and, in time, every interest recognized the usefulness of buying or producing its own facts.[55]

Accordingly, businesses felt relatively weak vis-à-vis the largely liberal set of new advocacy organizations and realized that they should imitate the strategies of those who were working against them. It took about a half-dozen years for industry to respond.[56]

Public affairs consulting came about in part as a result of business mobilization in politics, beginning in the mid 1970s and accelerating immediately thereafter.[57] Because of the threat posed by regulation and citizen organizing, corporations became more sophisticated in politics. While business feared the consequences of throwing around its political weight in the 1960s, the period after the 1974 elections saw the rise of industry activism against perceived over-regulation.[58] This led to a form of class consciousness among businesses that, although fleeting, supported the development of a long-term corporate presence in paid lobbying, public relations, and policy-planning organizations.[59] In addition, in this new regulatory environment, corporations also began to place heavier emphasis on public transparency and accountability, stakeholder opinion, and philanthropic programs; many corporations also instituted in-house public affairs departments.[60] These developments were indirectly tied to the protest wave of the long 1960s, argue French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, in that protests encouraged corporations to adopt a "new spirit of capitalism" in which flexible and often participatory organizational practices were adopted, in part, in order to defuse outside criticism.[61]

---

[55] Greider (1992: 46).   [56] Vogel (1989).
[57] Faucheux (1995); Stone (1994); Vogel (1989).   [58] Pertschuk (1982).
[59] Peschek (1987).   [60] Schlozman and Tierney (1986).
[61] Boltanski and Chiapello (2005).

Thus, corporate groups developed their own forms of grassroots organization in order to shape both public opinion and to mobilize the public as a force in molding legislative decisions. The population of industry groups grew in line with increased business mobilization in politics in the late 1970s,[62] following the oil embargo, stagflation, and other economic instabilities of the middle of that decade. Business's political power was growing not just because it could hire lobbyists in Washington and contribute large sums to political campaigns, but because it was often able to show its support among the public. Whereas in earlier years grassroots campaigns were a last-ditch effort or "last line of defense, called in when other lobbying, advertising, and public relations efforts had been exhausted,"[63] today professional grassroots consultants represent an integral part of a corporation's public and political existence.

New communications technologies

New communications technologies gave participation consultants a broad new arsenal of methods for mobilizing participation. While this is not entirely new, the lowering of the costs of collective action – due in large part to the increased availability of communications technologies – opened up a variety of new possibilities. By as early as 1948, political commentators were arguing that "the system of deluging Congress with thousands of communications obtained by 'pressing a button' and giving the signal to the 'faithful' back home to write or telegraph (without their knowing necessarily what the facts and issues are) is a comparatively recent development ... yet, in the opinion of many, this technique is *already outdated* and has lost much of its effectiveness."[64] As the advocacy field was increasingly professionalized and dominated by the voices of business interests, new technologies were put to use in their service. These included low-cost long-distance phone calling, direct mail using computerized lists of likely activists (often provided by specialized vendors), and, today, web, email, and social networking technologies.

The availability of these technologies made it possible for consultants to adopt the techniques that citizens' and business groups were using to

---

[62] Akard (1992).   [63] Stone (1994: 754).
[64] LaFollette (1948: 54), emphasis added.

mobilize political action. Consider, for example, the following journalistic account of a typical patch-through calling campaign coordinated by a public affairs consulting firm in the early 1990s:

Say, for example, the National Organization for Women opposes a nomination to the Supreme Court because the candidate has an equivocal record on abortion rights. [A consultant] will take the membership rolls of the group, and match names to the phone numbers. It might also use its computer to cross-reference magazine subscriptions, data on personal purchasing habits, and precincts with particular voting and income profiles to come up with a bigger list of sympathetic people. At the company's phone bank [office], a computer dials the numbers. When someone answers, an operator comes on the line and explains NOW's position, offering to transfer the caller, at no charge, to the White House switchboard or local member of Congress.[65]

Gathering steam in the 1970s with the use of direct mail (especially by conservative entrepreneurs like Richard Viguerie), public affairs consulting operations began to offer to their clients technological services for mobilizing participation.[66] And, although during that period many corporations started their own in-house public affairs operations, many in the field came to recognize the importance of relying on stand-alone organizations specialized in activating the grassroots. As Kevin B. Fitzgerald of Legislative Demographic Services argued,

More associations, corporations, and unions are building grassroots lobbying operations in-house. A stark reality for many of these new departments is the complexity and multiple disciplines required for an effective grassroots operation. Expertise in ... strategy development, communications, technology, event planning and public relations ... often overwhelms staff. Most organizations do outsource some or all of their technical and data needs to consultants.[67]

Similarly, consultant Wayne Blanchard argued,

Why not rely on experts that perform these services every day, where communications technology has been developed and is currently in place, and where sufficient resources are available and trained to build the support teams and mechanisms needed in a grassroots campaign? [...] There are well-organized firms that specialize in services ... such as "Direct Connect," a

---

[65] Engelberg (1993: A17).
[66] On the rise of political consulting more broadly, see Sabato (1981).
[67] Jalonick (2003: 48).

seamless transfer of constituent calls to their state or federal legislator's office and at no cost to the constituent; combined data collection or information dissemination through Web site interfaces with associated software tools and toll-free inbound lines; automated celebrity outbound communications; creative message design with targeted direct mail; and the "Blended Call" to maximize file penetration and constituent contact rates.[68]

A market for mobilization services develops

Professional lobbying of the public began with a number of boutique outlets as side projects of major PR firms, but successes by certain early boutiques made this practice appealing to those who would start independent firms.[69] Some began as direct mail outlets in the 1970s, as noted by Republican strategists like Richard Viguerie.[70] As groups began to "contract out the direct-mail and phone bank components of their grassroots operations," so "an ancillary industry has arisen to meet the demand for the new technology."[71] As early as 1978, commentators were noticing that, "especially in the business and industrial community, there has been a major increase in the use – and apparent effectiveness – of so-called indirect lobbying," activating key community leaders, mass telephone calls, and computerized lists (often matched to Congressional districts of targeted representatives).[72]

   In 1993 and 1994, *Campaigns & Elections* magazine estimated, grassroots public affairs services represented an $800 million industry, not counting additional advertisement purchases from other vendors.[73] By 1998, the industry was in full bloom: "Creating citizens' movements, or the semblance of citizens' movements on demand . . . has become big business. Public relations firms and boutique shops advertise such arcane-sounding specialties as 'development of third-party allies,' or 'grassroots recruitment and mobilization,' or 'grass-tops lobbying.' The goal of these campaigns is to persuade ordinary voters to serve as the front-line advocates for the paying clients."[74] By 2009, public affairs firms had learned to leverage social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, both of which are well suited to incentivizing low-cost participation on behalf of a paying client. As one of the public affairs

---

[68] Ibid.: 48–49.   [69] Stone (1994: 755).   [70] Viguerie (1981).
[71] Cigler and Loomis (1995: 396).   [72] Mohr (1978).   [73] Ibid.
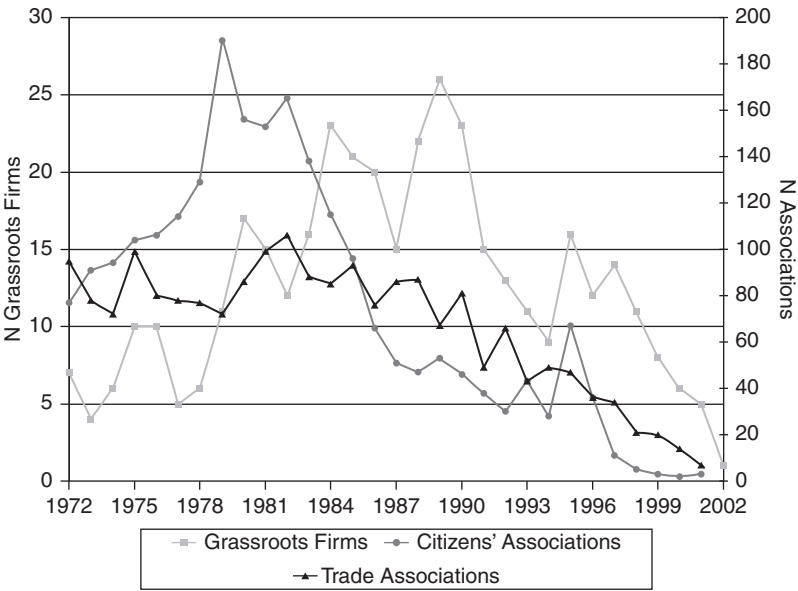[74] Mitchell (1998: A14).

Figure 3.3 Founding patterns of organizational populations

consultants I interviewed argued, "everyone is thinking about what the next Facebook is going to be. We're a sound-bite nation, but I think this goes in pendulum swings [from mass media sources to trusted, local sources]. We're going back to the traditional sources right now, like family, friends, neighbors, etc. We grow bored with sources quickly."

Figure 3.3 illustrates the founding patterns of consulting firms, advocacy organizations, and trade associations, showing a clear pattern by which consulting firms followed after the development of citizen and, later, industry groups. Figure 3.3 maps the aggregate founding patterns of consulting firms (from the baseline data) against membership organizations listed in the *Encyclopedia of Associations* and the trade association data. This figure illustrates that the peak founding periods for both public interest groups and trade associations occurred prior to most founding events of consulting shops. However, it appears that business mobilization in industry associations had two peak years: 1975 (during which industry started to become more politically active), and 1982, following the election of Ronald Reagan. While both fields underwent substantial growth throughout the 1970s, grassroots

consulting did not expand dramatically as a field until the mid-to-late 1980s, at the same time that the founding of new citizen associations went into decline. This figure presents initial evidence that business actors learned the power of the citizen organizing, which, in turn, spurred the development of participation-subsidizing organizations to adopt the tactics of public interest groups.

Assisted by the growth of communications technologies that allowed for the mass contacting of political officials with relatively low costs on the part of the participant (little effort needed to make the contact, and a ready-made message), grassroots consulting grew at a dramatic rate beginning in the late 1970s and increased steadily throughout the 1980s. Business groups found in these firms a means of expanding their lobbying operations to relevant publics as a political force. Indeed, a number of the large political consulting and public relations firms active on behalf of business expanded their operations into outside lobbying around the same time.[75] Industry groups made similar use of these firms. Public interest groups also began to employ these firms for mobilizing distant members, supporters, and donors.

A statistical model of firm formation

Given the above factors that appear to have had an effect on the formation of participation consulting firms, to which explanation should we give the most weight? The statistical models that follow allow one to determine which of these explanations hold the greatest merit, while also accounting for the confounding explanations that changes in public attitudes or engagement in civic and political life might have been more influential.

As Figure 3.3 illustrated, the field of professional public affairs consulting expanded dramatically between the early 1970s and the opening years of the new century. To understand this in greater depth, I examine patterns of consulting firm founding between 1972 and 2002, broken down across eleven regions of the country. These include the nine regions determined by the US Census Bureau, plus additional regions

---

[75] Faucheux (1995).

separated out for Washington, DC and Virginia (where, of course, a quite disproportionate share of political consultants are located) and California (where many consultants are located that specialize in petition drives and ballot measures). Then, I estimate how the number of civic organizations, industry associations, and a variety of other social and political variables – within each region in the prior year – influenced the founding of public affairs consulting firms. A full description of the measures and statistical methodology employed in these analyses is found in the article from which these findings are adapted.[76]

Table 3.1 presents the findings of the statistical model. The primary conclusion to be derived from Table 3.1 is that the expansion of advocacy organizations and the increase of business trade groups both had a significant influence on the founding of new public affairs consulting firms, even after holding a variety of other factors constant. Substantively, both of these measures also have positive and highly significant marginal effects on firm founding, as associational founding increases the mean count of consulting firms founded by, on average, 2.4 percent; the comparable increase for each additional business group is 4.9 percent. Therefore, these analyses suggest that civic and business organization founding events were highly consequential in shaping the patterns of consulting firm founding, although it is worth noting that the coefficients for business mobilization are consistently greater in magnitude. I therefore find strong support for the primary argument that heightened formal organization and business presence in civil society has encouraged the development of this new organizational population.

Importantly, the statistical models provide little support for the expectation that public affairs firms have arisen in response to the declining political participation of Americans. Similarly, Americans' level of trust in government, feelings of political efficacy, or changing levels of interest in public affairs had no significant effect on the founding of new organizations.

However, certain political factors did have strong and significant effects on the formation of firms; in particular, the increased partisanship of the American populace and the expansion of Republican Party

---

[76] Walker (2009: 91–95; 101–102).

Table 3.1 *Random effects Poisson GEE regression analyses of the founding of public affairs consulting firms, 1972–2002*

Independent variables	Coef.	Robust S.E.
Public affairs associations		
Membership organizations founded (count)	0.02***	(0.01)
Business associations		
Trade associations founded (count)	0.05***	(0.01)
Participation		
Attended a political meeting (%)	–0.02	(0.03)
Cognitive measures		
Trust in government (%)	–0.01	(0.01)
Interest in public affairs (%)	–0.02	(0.01)
Political efficacy (%)	0.00	(0.01)
Party decline		
Party workers (%)	0.08+	(0.04)
Republican control		
Mean governorships held by Republicans (proportion)	0.37*	(0.16)
Political partisanship		
Strong party identification (%)	0.05**	(0.02)
Economic conditions		
State corporate taxes (thousands of 2002 dollars per estab.)	0.04	(0.08)
Total non-farm employment (per thousand capita)	0.00	(0.00)
Year[1]		
Year is 1972–1974	–0.66	(0.51)
Year is 1975–1979	–0.52	(0.41)
Year is 1980–1984	–0.31	(0.30)
Year is 1990–1994	–0.10	(0.26)
Year is 1995–2002	–0.46	(0.32)
Exposure measures		
Regional population (millions)	–0.01	(0.01)
Constant	–2.96+	(170)
N	341	
Wald Chi-square	275.86***	
Estimated R^2	.471	

[1] The reference category for year includes 1985–1989.

Semi-robust standard errors appear in parentheses. All analyses specify an autoregressive (AR[1]) error structure.

Significance levels: $^+ p \leq .10$; $^* p \leq .05$; $^{**} p \leq .01$; $^{***} p \leq .001$

control of state governments both had noteworthy positive effects on firm founding. More specifically, each additional percentage point increase in the strong partisanship of the US citizenry was associated with a 5.2 percent increase in the mean number of firms founded, and that region-years in which Republicans control all regional governorships relate to a 44 percent increase in consulting firm founding.[77] These findings indicate that a more partisan populace, governed by the Republican Party, played a positive role in supporting consulting firm founding.

Finally, the statistical models show that economic conditions and corporate taxation had little effect on public affairs consulting firm founding,[78] and there is not much support for the notion that firms arose in order to compensate political party decline. In fact, the models show modest support for the *opposite* argument: that the presence of party workers makes it *more* likely that a firm will be founded. This finding, consistent with the evidence from consultants' career backgrounds in Figure 3.1, supports the notion that firms were often founded by former party activists, and in those locations populated by such individuals. Thus, even though aggregate national patterns of party activism were mainly in decline during the years of this analysis, pockets of greater party activism supported the development of consulting shops. Each additional percentage point increase in party activists is associated with an increase of 8 percent in the mean number of firms founded.

Making sense of the statistical findings

How might we understand the increasing prevalence of public affairs consulting firms in the US in recent decades? The findings of the above analyses suggest, interestingly, that expanding civic and business associational populations facilitated their rise. These elite consultants who mobilize public action grew in number and power as US civil society saw a

---

[77] However, these results should be interpreted with some caution, as additional analyses (not shown) indicate that Republican House seats had no significant influence on founding events, and Republican Senate seats had a slightly significant ($p < .10$) negative influence. When all three measures are included, the effect of Republican governorships remains positive and significant.

[78] This runs counter to Akard's (1992) suggestion that corporate taxation spurred business activism.

number of broad transformations. The legitimation of this new organizational field was driven by civic *organizational change* rather than the decline of individual participation. Without such changes having taken place, then, it would have been unlikely that organizations engaged in targeted mobilization of the public would have emerged.

The above analyses indicate that the central factor shaping the organizational dynamics of these private firms was the rise of business trade associations. The founding of trade associations, as organizations that are coalitions of firms or businesspersons which serve as "focal points for diverse interests,"[79] may be taken as an indicator of business recognizing its shared and collective interests. As business became more aware of its political interests – especially in response to the crisis of corporate legitimacy starting in the late 1960s[80] – industry groups utilized the services of grassroots firms in order to connect with the broader public and activate their stakeholders. Business engagement in politics, overlooked in scholarship on civic engagement, appears to be a primary support for firms that incentivize public participation.

Second, advocacy groups were only slightly less consequential in facilitating the founding of public affairs consulting firms. The "interest group explosion" assisted in the expansion of a separate, ancillary field of organizations that stir up the grassroots. It is interesting, therefore, that grassroots firms and citizen groups appear to support rather than compete with one another. It seems, then, that these consultants have not *replaced* the activism of public advocacy groups, but instead complement them. I return to this point in Chapter 6.

A noteworthy additional finding of the present analyses is that lower rates of political participation appear to have little association with the founding of participation consulting shops. Thus, although one might expect that in contexts of declining participation it might behoove businesses and interest groups to hire professional firms, there is little evidence to support this notion. On the other hand, it remains possible that specific grassroots *campaigns* occur in response to citizen participation targeted against the particular client of a consulting firm, a possibility that I explore in some detail in Chapters 5 and 7.

The disconnection and alienation of citizens from government does not show any clear effect on the likelihood of grassroots lobbying firm

---

[79] Staber and Aldrich (1982: 163).   [80] Vogel (1975).

founding. Additionally, rather than competing with political parties for resources and constituent mobilization, public affairs firms may see party members as a base for staff and executive recruitment. Indeed, as illustrated earlier, many principal lobbyists started out as electoral campaign consultants. Finally, the model suggests an important secondary conclusion: that a more partisan public, alongside a more Republican government, appears to have supported the rise of public affairs consulting as a regular part of civic and political life in the US.

Conclusion

By analyzing the founding patterns of consulting firms, this chapter provides leverage in understanding the broader civic transformations that, since the 1970s, helped paid mobilization of public participation to become a regular part of the American public sphere. Although research on civic engagement and political participation has made much ado about whether changing patterns of participation are shaped more by a generational decline in democratic norms, social networks, and generalized trust,[81] or, alternatively, by the vitiated supply side of opportunities for participation,[82] extant research has downplayed the mobilization of citizens by paid consulting operations. In addition, by analyzing two prominent organizational changes in civic life – the growth of business trade associations and the dramatic increase in advocacy groups – this chapter considered in further detail the under-examined *consequences* of these civic changes. While the effects of business mobilization on government have been well studied,[83] comparatively little work has been done on how industry activism shapes civil society.[84]

Before moving on to the next chapter, it is worth asking a key question: How can we explain the scholarly neglect of business influence on civic life and public participation? It appears that, as in classical political economy models, scholars continue to assume that a permeable but nonetheless enduring boundary tends to be maintained between the public and private spheres. Similarly, it is common to neglect the

---

[81] Putnam (1995, 2000).   [82] Skocpol (2003).
[83] See, for example, Hillman, Keim, and Schuler (2004); Plotke (1992).
[84] But see Vogel (1989).

porousness of the tripartite scheme of markets, states, and civil societies; as scholars of the nonprofit sector, for example, illustrate, it is often quite misleading to conceptualize civil society as fully independent of the state and market.[85] Although much recent work in social and political theory has emphasized the increasing encroachment on the public sphere by private interests – especially since the English-language publication of Habermas's *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*[86] – the influence of business on the dynamics of civil society has remained a somewhat shadowy realm for researchers of civic engagement. This chapter, in particular, suggests that a greater integration of insights from the literature on the "privatization of the public sphere" would benefit future empirical research on participation. Those studies that call attention to the increasing "sidelining" of the public represent a worthwhile first step in this direction.[87]

Additional insights from this chapter are applicable to the dynamics of legitimation in new organizational fields. Although the development of new organizational forms often jeopardizes existing interests,[88] these outfits were successful in showing how public-oriented campaigns can promote civic engagement on behalf of their organizational clients; this was mainly because these growing organizational fields presented a demand for new, low-cost communications technologies to influence an increasingly decentralized government.

Having reviewed the *sources* of participation consulting as a field, the discussion now turns to understanding the *structure* and *consequences* of these firms' practices.

---

[85] Frumkin (2002: 12); see also Friedland and Alford (1991).
[86] Habermas (1989).
[87] See, for example, Crenson and Ginsberg (2004); Schier (2000).   [88] Rao (1998).

4 | *Methods for mobilizing the public*

Introduction

We saw in the previous chapter how the field of public affairs firms was established, and how the development of these firms was in part a response to the expanded market demand for public mobilization services following the expansion of civic and business trade groups in the 1970s and 1980s. The present chapter examines how these consulting firms develop strategy in order to help their organizational clients manage their sociopolitical environments.

This chapter therefore examines organization–environment relationships on two levels.

On one level, public affairs consultants *play a mediating role* in helping their clients to manage public policy issues and respond to challenges that arise in their sociopolitical environments. They serve what organizational theorists refer to as a "boundary-spanning" function, connecting the organization to authorities and other core audiences on which the organization depends in order to sustain itself.[1] They are therefore similar in many ways to other types of professional service firms (e.g., law firms, advertising companies, accountants, management consultants) in this general sense. However, they differ from most other professional service firms which do more to help their clients to comply with the demands of their legal, market, and/or institutional environments.[2] It is in this respect that sociologists often find that legal compliance regimes are endogenous to organizational practices.[3] While part of what public affairs consultants do is to help their clients conform

---

[1] Aldrich and Herker (1977).
[2] To be sure, as the case of Crosstown Strategists below makes clear, part of what grassroots consultants do for their clients also at times involves compliance matters.
[3] E.g., Edelman, Uggen, and Erlanger (1999); Dobbin and Kelly (2007).

to institutional pressures, they also help clients make strategic efforts to reshape those environments and resist such pressures.

On another level, consulting firms *themselves are organizations* that face inter-organizational pressures, requirements to uphold their standing and legitimacy among core audiences, and need to maintain resources in order to survive. Sociopolitical legitimacy pressures are particularly acute because consultants' role in organizing grassroots support for their clients is, at times, less than fully transparent. Although consultants regularly note that their campaigns are not illegitimate because recruited participants are voicing their honest and authentic views to policymakers, consultant-driven campaigns nonetheless often downplay or conceal their own role in facilitating such participation. A well-executed campaign should, of course, keep the consultant back stage and draw more attention to salient public opinion on an issue rather than the role of a consulting firm in amplifying it. More specifically, consultants must contend with popular mistrust of commercial efforts to incentivize public participation, which, as I described in Chapter 2, is often discredited as "fake" grassroots or "astroturf." As this chapter makes clear, the public acceptability of commercially mobilized public participation is a topic very much on the minds of consulting firms.

The chapter begins by describing two firms in detail: Frederick Partners and Williamson Strategists.[4] Both firms have a predominantly corporate and trade association client base, but both also do business on behalf of a variety of nonprofit organizations. Like many consulting firms, both got their start in political campaign consulting before shifting their attention toward organizing paid grassroots campaigns. Both play a mediating role between their client firms and clients' sociopolitical environments, often helping to buffer their clients from the considerable demands of organizing a broad-based advocacy campaign. The firms differ in that Frederick Partners focuses on brokering face-to-face contacts between leaders of pre-existing civic organizations and policymakers, whereas Williamson Strategists offers a broader menu of services including the creation of third-party organizations, organizing protests/rallies, and spreading their client's message through blogs. Williamson is also significantly more active in providing high-tech data management services and making use of social media technologies

---

[4] These are pseudonyms.

in their campaigns; they are also, as many of the consulting firms in this study are, more closely tied into the shift toward "big data," analytics, and the statistically driven targeting strategies that are currently revolutionizing electoral campaign strategy.[5] This difference in focus reflects both the varying skill sets of each organization's founding teams and their understanding of which services will be most effective in meeting the demands of the political marketplace.

After describing the organizational processes and institutional contexts of these two consulting firms, the remainder of the chapter uses data from my survey of consulting firms in order to discuss how firms like Frederick Partners and Williamson Strategists fit into the bigger picture of commercialized public participation through "grassroots for hire."

Mobilizing opinion leaders: Frederick Partners

Frederick Partners was founded in the 1980s and is headquartered in Washington, DC. The firm's charismatic founder, Phil Frederick, was a pioneer in this field and made Frederick Partners one of the most successful firms in the grassroots mobilization industry.[6] I interviewed Phil and his assistant in his office in the summer of 2010.

Frederick himself got his start doing public relations work for a local government office, followed by positions with the Republican Party and working as a staffer for a US senator. Despite his partisan personal background, Phil promotes the firm as a nonpartisan consultancy. He explains further that the firm doesn't do any electoral campaign work. As he sees it, for those other firms who are partisan, this allegiance naturally engenders a certain amount of trust and access with allied policymakers ("the upside is that they have these *personal* relationships . . . [partisan consultants] can get through to those people where others might not"), but the risk is that being partisan limits a firm's ability to negotiate with political opponents. Further, partisan consultants have fewer options when a client needs the consultant to broker a constituency with a member of the opposite party. Such suggestions are consistent with research in political science on relations of trust between clients and political consultants.[7] As I describe later in this chapter,

---

[5] Kreiss (2012); Issenberg (2012).
[6] The consultant's name is also a pseudonym.   [7] E.g., Kolodny (2000: 116–117).

firms with a predominantly corporate client base are most likely to be nonpartisan in affiliation.

Frederick Partners has worked on behalf of a large number of *Fortune 500* firms, trade associations, and, to a lesser extent, large national interest groups outside the corporate realm. Major campaigns for the firm include work on behalf of a large healthcare provider firm seeking to increase doctors' reimbursement rates through Medicare, a large-scale campaign to raise awareness about the Medicare prescription drug benefit on behalf of a leading global pharmaceutical firm, and efforts to help a massive defense contractor lobby against cuts to the Pentagon budget by Congress. The firm has also carried out full-scale campaigns on behalf of utility companies, trade groups for energy interests, and telecom firms.

The consultancy's dominant strategy for mobilizing stakeholders was, during the early portion of the organization's lifespan, the use of paid phone banks. But the firm now employs a much broader range of services, de-emphasizing phones. Phil suggests that this was done, in part, out of necessity as a survival strategy, implying that firms need to diversify their strategies if they are to continue to exist despite changing technologies and fluctuating issue agendas for firms and policymakers. Phil explains that during the time since the firm's founding nearly thirty years ago, "we've changed more, refined, reinvented, [and] done all the stuff you need to do to survive ... and we moved years ago away from phones." Part of this change in strategy reflects the firm's calculations about the trade-off between high-cost forms of issue mobilization (e.g., fly-ins, face-to-face meetings) and low-cost but high-volume forms (see Figure 7.4). When asked about this trade-off, Frederick suggests that although mass mobilization remains effective in some cases, the firm has adopted a sort of "back to basics" strategy, emphasizing quality over quantity.

Going back to basics has meant that the firm has shifted its efforts into two stakeholder mobilization strategies beyond phones. First and foremost, Phil suggests that the firm has moved "solidly ... to dealing with third-party groups, heads of organizations, [and] those sorts of people." The firm has become known for its abilities to mobilize leaders at the "grasstops," a term of art for those who are opinion leaders through their position in civic groups, political organizations, religious groups, workplaces, and in other types of organizations.[8] As is common

---

[8] On opinion leadership, see Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955).

in commercialized grassroots mobilization practices, they build upon and co-opt the existing structures of organized civil society.[9]

Phil indicated that the firm does, in fact, maintain a list of community organizations and interest groups and their leaders, to which the firm can turn when a client indicates that they need community support on a particular issue or in a specific congressional district. These relationships need to be cultivated over a long period in which trust is established and maintained. He suggests, "what has always been the case is [that] you have to be able to go back to them when it's something that's credible [and] that they would have an interest in." But in so doing, Phil suggests that it's in the consultant's interest to be extremely selective in targeting the right audience for mobilization. Doing otherwise could, in fact, damage relationships with those stakeholders and make future appeals less effective. But some of the best targets for mobilization, he argues, are those who are civically active but have previously had little contact with their member of Congress; the opportunity for such individuals to have a say, especially in an in-person meeting with a member of Congress, is likely to generate a lot of excitement. In other words, these individuals are especially receptive to lobbying incentives.[10] Such outreach can be beneficial to the consultant in the future, to the extent that

they had a good experience on the last issue and saw that their voice was heard. And quite frankly, the good experience . . . comes back to the face-to-face meeting and all that. If they get to sit with their member of Congress or the chief of staff to the member or somebody that matters, and they really feel they've been listened to, that's good [. . .] Even if it doesn't ultimately work out perfectly, they feel that it was worth their time.

Second, Frederick now places more emphasis on general public affairs work, or "changing perceptions of different clients and issues . . . reputational work." A key service in this portfolio is crisis management. Importantly, and connected with the discussion that will follow in Chapter 5, Phil Frederick sees the work that he does as closely connected to how firms manage public controversies and other uncertainties in their relationships with public audiences. Mentioning the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill and the crisis this entailed for BP (formerly British Petroleum), he suggested that the work of consultants needs to

---

[9] Walker (2010).   [10] On lobbying incentives, see Knoke (1988: 323–325).

go beyond mere public relations efforts that are only cosmetic, as these may do little to protect a firm during a crisis period. He suggests that consultants often help companies to prepare for such circumstances, to the extent possible, by charting out a plan for a crisis and building support in a community of stakeholders. Importantly, he sees a corporate client's efforts to be a good citizen as integral to its ability to manage crises and protect its reputation. To that end, Frederick argues that his client firms should engage in a proactive process of

game playing different scenarios, so at least you have your internal stuff ready to move. And you have to move real time in [the] news cycle. The next thing is [that if] you have built up credibility ... versus a "surface" or advertising credibility, then you may be able to control it more. If you've worked with community organizations, for example. And [the public should] really understand what you do, the added value to the community; it's not only just the jobs and you're a good corporate citizen, but are you [supporting] scholarship? Are you somebody that cares about the community? You know, you're doing good deeds.

One of the central issues that public affairs consultants face about their own participation in politics regards the legitimacy of mobilizing participation on behalf of paying clients. This issue is often framed through the distinction between traditional forms of citizen organizing and social movement activities coded as "grassroots," in contrast to organizing that is not rooted in a genuine community and involves small, elite interest masquerading as a broad-based movement. As described in Chapter 2, the latter is often referred to as "astroturf," or fake grassroots, with troubling implications for democracy. Thus, consultants regularly face concerns that they are harming the democratic process by creating a semblance of mass support for issues that only have a narrow, often elite constituency that would stand to benefit from such engagement. How do consulting firms justify their role in such campaigns?

Phil of Frederick Partners, voicing a consistent theme in my interviews with firms like his, suggests that it's not so much the distinction between "grassroots" and "astroturf" that matters in determining the legitimacy of participation, but instead the distinction between campaigns that resonate with mediating publics versus those that do not. In his view, consultants cannot truly "manufacture" displays of public support or opposition to a public policy any more than other types of

interest groups can. The support in society either exists or it doesn't, and it is the job of the organizer to do as much as possible to amplify supportive voices. In addition, the costs of engaging in a fraudulent campaign can be high for the consulting firms that misrepresent or fabricate citizen communications. Echoing the ideas of famed community organizer Saul Alinsky – similar to what others have said about the "new corporate activism"[11] – Frederick suggested that self-interest is crucial to all campaigns, and that campaigns that misrepresent popular opinion are likely to fail. When I ask him about the distinction that some make between "astroturf" and "grassroots" public participation, he responds,

I think it's bullshit. And the reason why I think it's bullshit is what matters is [whether] the person who comes forward [has] a legitimate, credible interest of why, say, farmers would care about this issue … And if they can articulate that in a credible way, then it's a credible issue. Whether they found out about that issue from the back of a box of Rice Krispies or an article in the newspaper or somebody like me contacting them, I really … I don't know that it matters so much as whether it's their legitimate opinion.

But there are other points to consider that suggest focusing on self-interest and the honesty of a recruited citizen's opinion may not be the whole story in evaluating the legitimacy of elite-driven public participation. Although such practices are not a specialty of Frederick Partners, other consultants in my study reported providing the entire organizational backbone – the writing of bylaws, renting of office space, hiring of staff, crafting of websites and press releases, and recruitment of members – on behalf of a paying client. They not only lower the costs of engaging in collective action (as described in Chapter 2), but they often go further by building up organizational infrastructure for what may become an autonomous organization.[12] This sponsoring role may *or may not* be disclosed to the public. Although all of those who participate in such an organization or cause may, in fact, genuinely support the goals of the campaign, not disclosing that a campaign may be funded by a major corporation, industry group, or other interest group suggests that public trust may be exploited by organizations purporting to support a general public interest. Similar to questions

---

[11] Grefe and Linsky (1995).
[12] Such was the goal of Students for Academic Choice, described in Chapter 1.

that have been raised about how patient advocacy organizations in the health sector often fail to disclose the major funding they receive from the pharmaceutical industry, consulting firms at times exploit public trust in apparently disinterested citizen advocacy groups.[13]

Integrated political services: Williamson Strategists

Williamson Strategists was founded in the 1980s as an organization specializing in voter demographic data, which were used predominantly by electoral campaigns and also by fundraising and grassroots mobilization efforts by companies, unions, nonprofits, and other civic and political organizations. In the years since, the firm expanded into new service areas including websites for Political Action Committee (PAC) fundraising, and, importantly, services for facilitating grassroots mobilization. Today, the firm represents a variety of clients using its grassroots services, including energy firms, food manufacturers, hospitals, financial services firms, and pharmaceutical companies. The firm is nonpartisan in both its grassroots issue campaigns and also in that it provides data services to both Republican and Democratic candidates. Williamson Strategists has also been heavily involved in a variety of international electoral campaigns. I interviewed Janice Kennedy, the firm's senior VP for public affairs, and her assistant Graham McNary, in Washington in October 2010.[14]

In contrast to Frederick Partners' more traditional strategy of mobilizing pre-existing civic groups, Williamson takes more of an "all of the above" strategy for mobilizing stakeholder support on key issues of interest to their clients. The firm provides a full range of services from website development and online recruitment to mobilizing participants to attend rallies and demonstrations targeted at the district offices of key Congressional leaders. The imprint of the firm's founding as a keeper of extensive data files on the political behaviors of Americans is present in its contemporary grassroots strategies. Janice suggested that these strengths are part of the initial conversation the firm has with a typical client:

For any client, [we ask] what are your goals? [We start by] developing a plan on how to achieve those goals, and it could be anything from writing the

---

[13] Rothman et al. (2011).   [14] All names are pseudonyms.

content for a website, writing the action alerts, writing blogs, ghostwriting blogs [...] op-eds, letters to the editor.

[We] keep contacts programmed where we identify people through the voter file on who votes, how often do they vote, [and] do they give? Those would be the top people you'd think would be engaged. We have that because, remember, going back to the '80s they developed this. They had that technology. We can, for a client, extrapolate that and know who our targets are, then go out and ask them to be involved, and then we train them ... we write training packets for them. [We also train them in] public speaking and [do] role-playing to teach them how to talk to a member of Congress. What are the legislative issues, how you do this ... everything.

When I asked Janice and Graham about how they draw the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate campaigns, they expressed the concern that regardless of the legitimacy of *consultants* being involved in campaigns, the rise of email and web-based *communications* has led to a greater level of popular mistrust among policymakers. This sentiment echoes broader findings in political research.[15] It also challenges the suggestion from one particularly well-known article by political scientist Bruce Bimber, which argues that even if the rise of networked communications technologies neither facilitates community-building nor simply empowers elites and interest groups, it leads to a more "fluid" and fragmented style of politics.[16] While the latter may be true for the online campaigns organized by citizen associations, mass communications facilitated by consultants have led to a degree of political standardization and also a worry among policymakers that apparent constituent communications might, at times, be fraudulent. As the costs of sending a message to a policymaker approach zero, many who participate may not even remember taking such an action. Referring to a widely circulated report by the Congressional Management Foundation,[17] Graham elaborated this thought further:

The problem wasn't that people were behaving badly. The problem was that people on the Hill who had to read the emails had ... gone from email not existing to being inundated with hundreds of thousands of emails. And the attitude on the Hill was basically "if it's an email, it's astroturfing ... dump it."

---

[15] Zavestoski, Shulman, and Schlosberg (2006).   [16] Bimber (1998).
[17] Goldschmidt and Ochreiter (2008).

    And so there was this feeling that it was a legitimate form of communication for citizens to use, but . . . it [was] *form* email in most cases. And the people on the Hill were sort of ignoring it as illegitimate. And then . . . this technology allowed people to read a blurb, click a button, and send an email with their name on it to the Hill. Six weeks later . . . somebody at the [Congressional] office would call or send them an email [to confirm], and they'd be like "I didn't do that."

    [This] created the impression of fraud [. . .] The dichotomy that was created: the industry saying "it's now easier for people to express their opinion on a wide variety of issues than it ever has been before." And people on the Hill saying, "Yeah, but those opinions aren't real, and we're not gonna accept those."

As Graham describes it, web-based communications technologies generated vast new volumes of standardized messages and engendered increasing mistrust of the public among policymakers. The implication of this is that although consultants are encouraging such communications, their actions coincide with a substantial increase in communications driven by other interest groups, trade associations, unions, and the like.

    When I pressed Janice and Graham further on the proper role of a consultant in mobilizing displays of popular support or opposition to a policy, Graham acknowledged the ambiguity inherent in the consultant's role. Considering the boundary between amplifying pre-existing popular support and creating the appearance of broad support for an unpopular issue, Graham suggested that firms' campaigns "touch that line a little bit . . . it doesn't mean that every public affairs firm hasn't [at some point]." Still, Graham and Janice both suggested that the campaigns that are more likely to run the risk of fraud are those that a company or trade association runs internally without the help of a consultant:

Graham: In a lot of these [trade] associations, there's a 23-year-old kid who's responsible for writing these things up, and that's where a lot of the trouble starts. It's relatively young people in an association who have a junior position in the government relations department who are pushing emails out to the members . . . A lot of times they don't necessarily know that you need to include the name of the organization, that you need to be factual . . .

Janice: But it's our job to teach them that.
Graham: It is, but we don't always get the chance . . . [There are] all
            kinds of associations out there that have the technology but
            don't have the experience, knowledge, or consulting to teach
            them that.

Janice also made clear that the field of public affairs is not profession-
alized in the sense of requiring formal training in order to practice (see
Appendix 8). As she sees it, the skills that might make someone a
successful traditional lobbyist may not be all that helpful when seeking
to mobilize popular participation:

People in government affairs are hired to lobby, and so you have your
lobbyists who have come [from] the Hill and are well versed in this policy
issue or the other as well . . .
  But can they write in a way that's on a 6th-grade level so that their
constituents, so to speak, can understand it? Usually not. Can they recruit?
Do they have that marketing ability to then recruit? I mean, you're talking
about so many different skill sets that someone off the Hill oftentimes doesn't
have. Very few and far between [do they] have the skill sets to understand the
policy, yet can market, yet can do the advertising, and come up with a
campaign and can implement it, and can fundraise . . . And can build in
compliance . . .

Public affairs consultants require a huge amount of trust between con-
sultant and client, and contracts are typically written in a very open-
ended fashion. A consultant cannot guarantee a particular policy result
for their client, only that they will do their best to obtain a desirable (or
at least less undesirable) result. When asked about what a contract with
a client typically looks like, Graham explains,

Graham: In those type of contracts our goal . . . is to build public
            support, build membership for your organization, generate
            communications to Capitol Hill – all those kinds of things.
            [If] we get too specific with that, [then] we're suddenly just
            checking boxes, and we don't usually get hired to check
            boxes. Usually, we're hired to actually see results. And . . . we
            always have opposition. We're never working in a vacuum
            where it's just us out there, so we have to be able to be
            flexible enough to respond to those results, those
            reactions . . .

> If we're getting letters to the Hill and that's our tactic, but the legislation changes in a way that makes all of those letters we've already gotten irrelevant, but we've only got a couple of weeks before the bill's out of committee, letters don't make sense anymore. So if it's in the contract that we're gonna get letters, we're now . . .

Edward: In a corner?

Graham: Yeah. And most of the people – corporations, trade associations, nonprofits who work in this field – get that. They understand that you've got to be able to pivot very, very rapidly. So . . . the scope of work is usually much more broad . . . [that] we'll hit certain milestones, you know.

This strategy may also promote transparency and reduce incentives for corruption. For example, one report by the Public Affairs Council on corporate lobbying in Brazil notes that firms there may be paid on the basis of "success fees," thus encouraging firms to win campaigns for their clients through whatever means necessary. Billing by the hour rather than by the outcome would seem to reduce these pressures.[18]

In sum, my interview with Janice and Graham and broader investigation into the clients and strategies of Williamson Strategists suggests that public affairs consultants help their organizational clients to manage their external environment through facilitating public participation, and they do so in a fashion that maintains a degree of flexibility both for the consultant and for the client. These elite consultants seek to be responsive to changes in the environment while maintaining compliance with lobbying regulations and contract specifications.

Interestingly, however, firms like Williamson Strategists both reduce the risk of "astroturfing" public participation by their clients while engaging directly in such strategies in other ways. The risk is reduced in that the consultant tends to be careful not to engage in fraudulent communications, yet the consultant also helps to create third-party or "front" organizations and also engages in controversial strategies like ghostwriting blog posts to support their client's issue positions. Thus, like many other firms in the field, Williamson walks a careful boundary between mobilizing authentic participation and creating a false front

---

[18]   Public Affairs Council (2012: 17).

through which narrow elite interests masquerade as broad public constituencies.

Public affairs consultants in broader context

How do firms like Frederick Partners and Williamson Strategists compare to the broader field of public affairs consultants across the US? Using data from the survey of public affairs consulting firms across the US and also data from their websites (see Appendices 2 and 3), I now describe the consultants' client bases, partisanship, services provided, strategies, targets, staffing, and revenues. These findings highlight how such firms help their clients to engage in the strategic management of public issues on behalf of their corporate, advocacy, and other organizational clients. I describe how the specific services of these consulting firms relate to the needs of their varying organizational clients in Chapters 5 and 6. However, an important first step is to describe the overall client bases of public affairs consultants. I turn to that task now.

Organizational clients

Using the website data, I determined that the median public affairs consulting firm has thirty-six clients. Given that the survey data reveal that the median firm has seven staff, this translates to a ratio of approximately five clients per full-time staff member. Largely consistent with my earlier research – with certain caveats[19] – and also consistent with the case descriptions of Frederick Partners and Williamson Strategists, Figure 4.1 shows that a plurality of the average firm's clients come from the private sector (38.2 percent), as 28.6 percent of clients are individual corporations and an additional 9.6 percent of clients are trade

---

[19] See Walker (2009: 91). These differences exist because the earlier study built upon client lists culled from the full baseline data. Those data include many vendor firms that only provide a single technical service (e.g., voter mapping) and also include firms that were active *at any point* between 1990 and 2004 (many of which became defunct). In addition, however, there are differences due to the somewhat more refined set of organizational categories used in Figure 4.1; parties, campaigns, and ballot measure coalitions are disaggregated in this figure, as are types of advocacy organizations. As noted in Chapter 1 and further detailed in Appendix 3, the website data include only the subset of those organizations who provide broad-based grassroots mobilization services and continued to be active as of 2009.
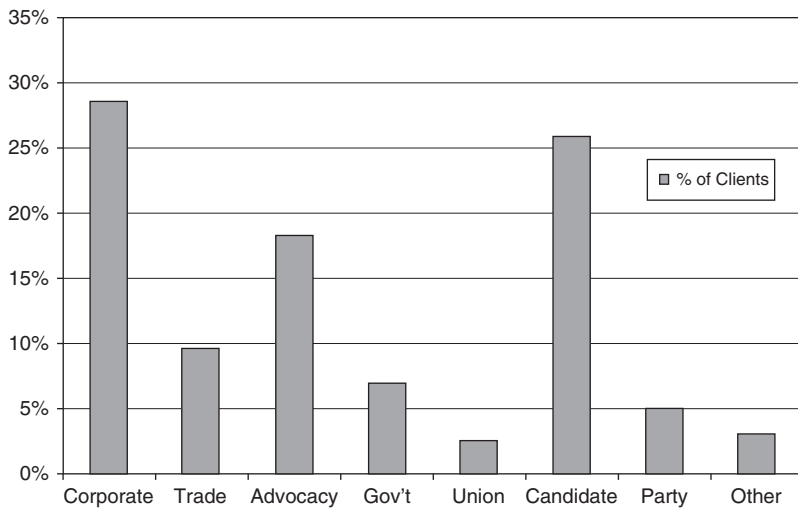
Figure 4.1　Clients of public affairs consultants (website data)

associations. This finding also squares well with other studies of American politics which have shown a predominant presence of business over other types of actors in political lobbying, and also that firms tend to lobby individually more than they do collectively.[20] The data also illustrate that advocacy groups of various types are well represented, including general advocacy organizations (18.2 percent) and, to a much lesser extent, labor unions (2.5 percent). Electoral campaigns and political party organizations comprise the bulk of other clients, such that individual candidates' campaigns represent 25.9 percent of clients and party organizations make up 5.1 percent.[21] Although public affairs consultants emphasize grassroots mobilization (rather than just the "air game" and technical services for which electoral consultants are often known[22]), recall that Chapter 3 showed that most grassroots consulting firms were founded by individuals with a background in electoral consulting. Even if these consultants have diversified in the years since, the legacy of their previous occupations,

---

[20]　E.g., Hart (2004); Baumgartner and Leech (2001: 1195–1196).
[21]　Among party organizations, there is an approximately even split between party groups on the Democratic side (47.9%), and those on the Republican side (47.4%). The remaining 4.7% are minor political parties.
[22]　Farrell, Kolodny, and Medvic (2001: 15).

it would appear, translates to a continuing presence of electoral campaign clients on their rosters.

Lastly, government agencies appear less often but still have a notable presence (7.1 percent). The government clients of grassroots consultants tend to be local water districts, transportation or port authorities, and school districts (often lobbying for bond issues in states such as California, Illinois, and Kansas, which require voter approval of such bonds). There are particular state regulations on issue advocacy by governments, so consultants are at times limited in precisely how they can engage in grassroots on behalf of such agencies. One consultant in a large Midwestern state described to me how school districts, for example, will set up ad hoc PACs which, in turn, hire consultants to lobby on property tax levies to fund schools; school districts themselves are prohibited by that state from engaging in such activity directly. Another prominent consultant in a large Western state told me that he will often work on behalf of state government agencies to "educate" the public on particular issues of concern to those agencies, but this typically needs to stop short of "advocacy" due to concerns about the propriety and legality of so-called "taxpayer-funded lobbying."

Partisanship

Firms such as Frederick Partners and Williamson Strategists both expressed concerns about partisanship and the limits it may impose upon the business of public affairs consulting. Being too closely allied with one side or the other may limit political options for firms, although being nonpartisan may constrain trust between consultants and ideologically motivated clients. Using the website data (see Appendix 3), I determined that the field breaks down such that 27.5 percent of firms are affiliated with the Democratic Party, 25.7 percent are closer to the Republicans, and 46.8 percent of firms are either non- or bi-partisan. Thus, although Democratic firms are slightly better represented, firms are affiliated with both parties rather evenly (and a large plurality of firms do not favor one party over another).

Table 4.1 makes further use of the website data to break down the proportional representation of firms within party affiliation by primary client type. Note that because the measure relies upon the *primary* (i.e., modal) client type for each organization, these figures do not perfectly

Table 4.1 *Partisanship by primary client type (website data)*

Primary client	Democratic (%)	Republican (%)	Non- or bipartisan (%)	Total (%)
Corporate / Trade	29.8	29.5	71.6	47.5
Associations	25.5	11.4	11.9	15.8
Campaigns	44.7	59.1	10.4	34.2
Government	0.0	0.0	6.0	2.5
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

match the distribution presented in the earlier breakdown of client types.

Table 4.1 makes clear, first and foremost, that corporate clients are most likely to be represented by non- or bipartisan firms. This finding suggests that businesses tend to be ideological in some respects but mostly avoid strong partisan affiliations in their ties to consulting firms.[23] I find that nearly 72 percent of non- or bipartisan firms, like the two described at the start of this chapter, have a predominantly corporate client base. I also find relatively little difference between Democratic- and Republican-affiliated firms in terms of their likelihood of representing a primarily corporate client base; 29.8 percent of Democratic firms have mainly corporate clients, whereas 29.5 percent of Republican-affiliated firms do.

Table 4.1 also shows that Democratic-affiliated firms are among the most likely to represent advocacy organizations (nearly 26 percent of Democratic consultants' client base), whereas only around 11 percent of Republican firms have primarily associations as clients. The Republican firms in the website data are predominantly those linked to electoral politics, such that 59 percent of such firms have a predominantly electoral client base. This finding suggests that grassroots mobilization firms are more closely tied to Republican paid Get-Out-The-Vote efforts, despite suggestions in previous research that Republicans –

[23] This need not rule out that certain business sectors are quite ideological in their selection of issues on which to organize grassroots campaigns, as well as in their PAC contributions and other forms of political engagement (e.g., Clawson and Neustadtl, 1989).

being more rooted in faith communities – should be less likely than Democrats to outsource their grassroots voter mobilization efforts to paid consultants.[24] Lastly, those few consulting firms with a predominantly government agency client base are, as one might expect, nonpartisan.

Services

Which services do public affairs consultants provide to their clients in order to help them to manage their environment? The cases of Frederick Partners and Williamson Strategists both suggest that consultants tailor their strategies to the organizational client in question and their client's policy target, and that firms vary in their degree of specialization in a subset of services they offer to clients.

Table 4.2 uses the data from the SPAPCO survey to present a list of the twenty-eight possible services that public affairs consultants could provide to their clients. Respondents were asked, to "identify the services that your firm has provided in <u>at least one campaign in the past year</u> (check all that apply)." Respondents were also given detailed instructions on how a "campaign" should be defined (see Appendix 2.3).

What Table 4.2 shows quite clearly is that even when involved in campaigns to mobilize public participation, consultants most often provide general consulting services (68 percent) or public relations services (55 percent). They also quite often provide services for placing electronic media ads (45 percent), maintaining databases or lists of potential activists (42 percent), or focusing their mobilization efforts on pre-existing opinion leaders (42 percent). Importantly, only 26 percent of consultants also reported engaging in traditional or "inside" lobbying activity in the past year. Although most other services were used a moderate amount (such as field operations, or canvassing, as well as managing public events or lobbying days), a number of the more technologically oriented services that were used in the 1980s and 1990s have fallen out of favor – in what is territory ceded to more specialized firms or no longer used – such as fax broadcasting (6 percent), satellite broadcasting (3 percent), and developing software or technological applications for participation

---

[24] Fisher (2006).

Table 4.2 *Services provided by consultants (survey data)*

Service	%
General consulting	68
Public relations	55
Electronic media ads	45
Database / list management	42
Internet, email, or electronic comm. services	42
Grasstops / mobilize opinion leaders	42
Community coalition-building	39
News or print media advertising	39
Voter mobilization / GOTV	39
Demographic targeting	35
Direct mail	35
Ballot / initiative / referendum	35
Field operations	32
Television advertising	32
Media training / speech support	32
Polling / focus groups	32
General electoral campaign support	32
Event mgmt. / scheduling lobby days	32
Phone banking	29
Petition mgmt. / signature gathering	26
General media advertising (multiple media)	26
Inside lobbying / gov't affairs	26
Fundraising	26
Fax broadcasting	6
Other	6
Litigation / legal support	3
Satellite broadcasting	3
Software and tech. for participation	0

(0 percent). Only 3 percent of public affairs consultants reported engaging in litigation or legal support.

Considering the breadth of a firm's service offerings, the median firm provides eight such services in a given year. The survey also asked which services each firm tends to think of as its area of greatest expertise; Table 4.3 displays the distribution of these top service areas. Consistent

Table 4.3 *Primary service provided by consultants (survey data)*

Service	%
General consulting	19
Public relations	15
Polling / focus groups	15
Petition mgmt. / signature gathering	7
Direct mail	7
Inside lobbying / gov't affairs	7
Field operations	4
Phone banking	4
Television advertising	4
General media advertising (multiple media)	4
Internet, email, or electronic comm. services	4
Grasstops / mobilize opinion leaders	4
Fundraising	4
Ballot / initiative / referendum	4

with the top areas of service for the field as a whole, the leading areas of expertise are also general public affairs consulting (19 percent) and public relations (15 percent). However, a substantial proportion of consultants specialize in polling/focus groups (15 percent), petition management (7 percent), direct mail (7 percent), and inside/traditional lobbying (7 percent). Other firms specialize in particular advertising media, particular grassroots strategies, or particular technologies.

Strategies and ultimate targets

How do consultants go about getting members of the public involved in their campaigns to generate policy change? Consulting firms, like other kinds of political organizations, face a trade-off between mobilizing high-cost but potentially more effective forms of activity versus stimulating low-cost but high-volume actions. My interviews with Frederick Partners and with Williamson Strategists both suggested that this trade-off is a regular part of the decision-making of both consultants and their clients. Further, this trade-off varies depending on the ultimate target of a campaign; for example, motivating activists to help shoot down an unfavorable executive agency decision is likely to look considerably
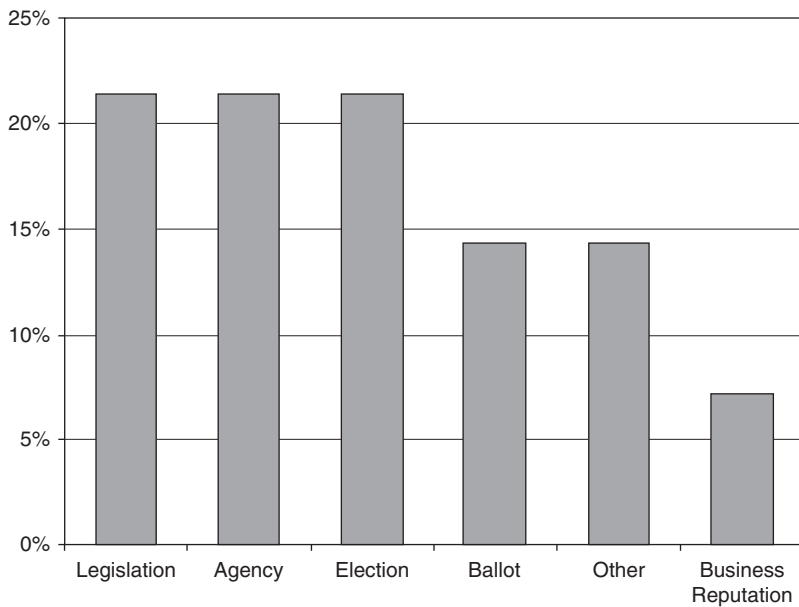
Figure 4.2 Policy target of a consultant's primary campaign (survey data)

different than if the target is a piece of legislation before Congress. Although I develop a more detailed analysis of campaigns' effectiveness in mobilizing citizen participation in Chapter 7, some initial discussion of consultants' strategies for mobilizing participation is fitting here.

Considering this, the survey asked consultants, for each of their three most prominent campaigns over the past six years, which activities they were most active in encouraging among recruited activists. I also asked what the client's ultimate policy target was for this campaign. Figure 4.2 displays the distribution of ultimate policy targets for the *most prominent campaign* of each consulting firm. Respondents were allowed to select more than one outcome, although they were also asked to identify which one was their "top priority" for the campaign.

What Figure 4.2 shows most clearly is that there are four dominant targets for policy change by public affairs consultants: legislation, agency decisions, electoral outcomes, and ballot measures. In fact, these four types combine to comprise the primary targets in the leading campaigns of almost 80 percent of the surveyed firms. The remaining approximately 20 percent of firms focused their efforts on improving

the reputation of a business client[25] or meeting some other goal (e.g., the election of multiple candidates rather than one individual candidate). Thus, the grassroots mobilization services provided by these consultants serve to meet a diverse range of policy needs in an organization's institutional environment. I return to the question of the effectiveness of various strategies in Chapter 7.

One consistent finding in my interviews is that strategies for mobilizing the public must be tailored to meeting the policy goal of the client; consultants often make remarks similar to how social movement organizers describe the development of strategy.[26] Accordingly, the results from the survey show that:

1. Campaigns focused on shaping *legislation* emphasize especially in-person visits with public officials, as well as hard-copy letters, phone calls, emails, and faxes sent to their offices. In addition, consultants do their part to facilitate the writing of op-eds to newspapers, the spread of information via social networking websites like Facebook and Twitter, and often encourage electoral campaign contributions or petition signatures. Consulting firms only infrequently encourage the use of public protest tactics (regardless of their ultimate target).
2. Campaigns that seek change in the decision of an executive *agency* are somewhat less likely to encourage in-person visits with public officials, although such visits are still often encouraged by consultants. They do, however, often facilitate attendance at public forums (during public comment periods on agency decisions). Letter-writing and other mediated communications with policymakers are also a common focus, although slightly less so than in legislative campaigns that involve elections rather than appointments to hold office. They also, like campaigns directed at legislators, create opportunities for social networking activism and the writing of op-eds to shape popular opinion on the issue.

---

[25] One might expect that managing business reputations would be a more central focus for these consultants. My interviews with these consultants suggested that a division of labor exists in which more of that work goes to generalist PR firms, and not grassroots public affairs / grassroots lobbying firms, especially since such work is more likely to involve advertising and not necessarily the mobilization of activism.

[26] See, e.g., Jasper (2006).

3. Efforts by consultants to shape *electoral* outcomes are, naturally, inclined to emphasize voting as a key strategy. The primary service that public affairs consultants offer in electoral politics is to supplement the ground strategy and Get-Out-The-Vote efforts of candidates and their parties.[27] However, driving up attendance at public forums, communicating about the candidate through social networks, and generating favorable editorials are also common strategies. They also engage in substantial fundraising efforts for their candidate or party.

4. Lastly, campaigns that seek the passage or defeat of a *ballot measure* are, of course, most heavily involved in signature gathering; some grassroots consulting firms are signature-gathering outfits that also help their clients develop strategy.[28] But more broadly, the mobilizing strategies of consultants on ballot campaigns merge features of their legislative and electoral siblings. They encourage monetary contributions to support the campaign, efforts to gain popular support through media and social networking sites, and, of course, they require both a large-scale signature-gathering effort and, if the measure is eventually qualified, a substantial Get-Out-The-Vote and voter education operation.

Revenues and staffing

The survey results show that public affairs consulting firms tend to be boutique operations that operate as small businesses with relatively tiny staffs (mean staff = 12.5, median staff = 7), but with median annual revenues of approximately $375,000 (mean $2.31 million). Thus, these firms have notably higher average revenues than other firms in the same industry (NAICS #541820, Lobbying services and PR agencies), which have mean revenue per establishment of $1.2 million.[29]

The survey also asked how much revenue firms tend to generate from each campaign, for the top three campaigns to which the firm devoted the greatest effort over the past six years (see Appendix 2.3). The

---

[27] On campaigns' ground game strategies, with some discussion of consultants' role therein, see Nielsen (2012).

[28] Magleby and Patterson (1998).   [29] Census Bureau (2007).

median firm generated approximately $175,000 in revenue from its top campaign over the past six years (mean = $327,431), and generated median revenues of $100,000 for its second and third most prominent campaigns. The highest campaign revenue figure reported by any of the firms was $1.5 million, for a major corporate coalition mobilizing in support of the 2009 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. In that case, the corporate coalition hired one of the consultants in this study to build community coalitions around the issue, communicate by phone with concerned stakeholders, target specific demographic groups, send direct mail, place print advertisements, and provide general support in the campaign.

Unsurprisingly, the consultants I spoke with were often not comfortable talking about their salaries or, if they bill hourly, what those hourly rates are. But a few of the consultants helped to contextualize their firm's revenue situation. For example, Michael Craigs of the long-standing West Coast firm Hearts & Minds Strategists told me that how much they charge a client is determined entirely on a project-specific basis.[30] Two other consultants I talked with said the same. As Michael elaborated,

Michael: There's no one formula. Depends on the size of the project, the duration, how much manpower, how difficult the project is, what's the regulatory [situation] or the pathway to get [legislation] approved, or not approved, or whatever. And it depends on what level of government you're dealing with. Everything. We have prices all over the [place] but we do have an hourly rate. If some people hire us for an hourly basis they pay the straight hourly rate.

Edward: Do you mind telling me what that is? Or if you'd prefer not to, that's OK.

Michael: Yeah, I mean, I get $400 an hour, and then it goes down to like $125 and $100 to some of our younger people . . . it's not one rate.

Or, if a client signs a monthly retainer with Hearts & Minds,

That'll vary from $5,000 a month to $20,000, $25,000, $30,000 a month depending, again, on how big the problem is, what geographical footprint it's

---

[30] These are pseudonyms.

involved in, how [much] complexity, [and] how long it's gonna take to do whatever it is we have to do.

Other consultants I spoke with typically mentioned hourly rates in the range of $150–$400 per hour for senior consultants, often with a series of hourly tranches for less senior consultants, and monthly retainer fees toward the lower end of the distribution mentioned by Hearts & Minds. A report, for example, was released in 2011 that showed that the prominent firm Davies Public Affairs was requesting a contract with the Marina Coast Water Agency in Monterey County, California – apparently to help manage a public dispute over a water desalination plant – which would charge $375 per hour against a $5,000 weekly retainer (capped at $100,000 total).[31]

Similarly, Toledo Alvarez put his firm's revenue in the following context:

I have competitors that probably won't touch things for under $25,000 a month. Now, if you're doing $25,000 a month you're probably representing a *Fortune* 500 type company, but that's sort of the range. We are by no means the cheapest. I have a competitor who I've hired to help me on a project. I think we're paying him $5,000 a month. So he's less than we are [at $8,000 per month]. So it fluctuates. We ... have clients [that are each on retainer for] between $5,000 and $20,000 a month, depending on the service.

However, not all firms I talked with did hourly billing; some rely more on a fee-for-service structure or take very little hourly revenue but instead depend on a win bonus (or a bonus of a long-term retainer after a success which, it is agreed informally, will require very little work from the consultant). One consultant I interviewed mentioned that a competitor firm had recently commanded a win bonus (a "success" or "contingency fee") payment of $100,000; such payments are allowed for federal lobbying under certain conditions but are prohibited by law when lobbying at the state level (at least in forty-three of the states).[32]

Others reject hourly billing in favor of only working with clients on medium- to long-term retainer. As Owen Taylor, founder and CEO of Taylor Advocacy,[33] put it, for his firm

---

[31] *Monterey County Herald* (2011).   [32] NCSL (2013).
[33] These are pseudonyms.

everything is a retainer. I track hours internally here ... and just make sure we're charging the right amount of money [in retainer fees]. But I can't charge per hour for what I do. So, I mean, I have seventeen people who work for me, but I can do something in five minutes that it might take somebody else a week to do. So, you know, how do you [do that]? So you don't bill hourly [...] And people say to us, "Well, can't you do it hourly?" I tell them, that's why I'm not a lawyer anymore. I didn't want to bill hours.

Revenues by client type

To dig a bit deeper into firms' sources of revenue, Figure 4.3 displays the proportion of each type of client represented by the consulting firms in the survey (from the website data, as illustrated in Figure 4.1 earlier), and compares these figures to the proportion of their revenue generated by each type of client (from the survey data). In general, Figure 4.3 makes clear that the top sources of revenue for consultants are generally very closely proportional to their client share, as corporations, trade groups, advocacy organizations, and electoral campaigns serve also as dominant revenue sources. Political party organizations and other organizations (e.g., universities) appear as clients infrequently, and provide only a small amount of revenue. In general, Figure 4.3 shows
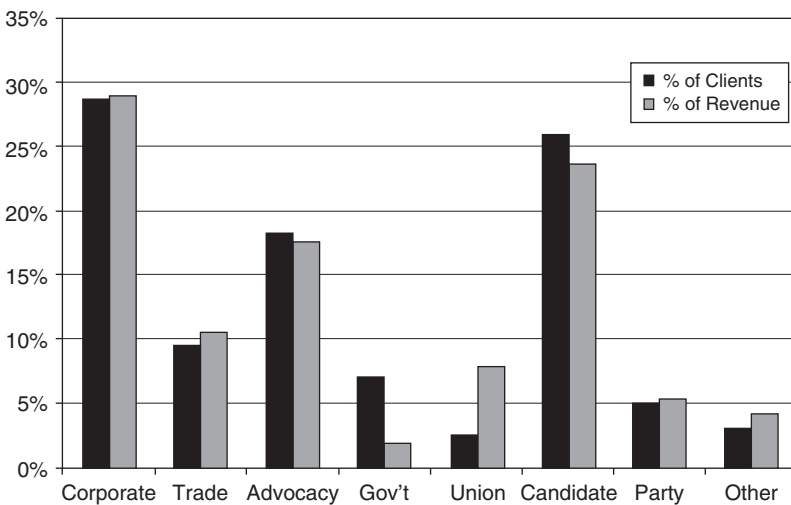
Figure 4.3 Clients of consultants (website data) and mean share of revenue provided by each client type (survey data)

that corporations, trade associations, labor unions, and political party organizations tend to pay firms somewhat more on average, while government, candidate campaigns, and advocacy organizations are less lucrative.

Importantly, these data show two exceptions to this rough proportionality: government agencies and labor unions. Government agencies comprise about 7 percent of the mean consulting firm's clients, yet provide less than 2 percent of the mean firm's revenue. By contrast, labor unions make up 2.5 percent of clients but provide almost 8 percent of revenue. How should we understand the disproportional revenues associated with these client types?

Data from my interviews with consultants, as well as additional data collected about firms' clients – described in greater detail in the next two chapters – help to illuminate these findings. I interviewed a number of consultants who either currently or previously worked with government clients, and their most common gripe was the difficulty associated with responding to government Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and the competitive bidding process necessary to win a contract. As Owen Taylor told me,

The only time we really work for government is when we're asked to do it. It's not something that I really like to do because you can't really make enough money doing it, and if you work for government you're always gonna get your name in the paper and [people will find out] how much you're making, even though you're working way under market. People are always going to think it's too much money . . . plus, I don't like to – I really don't like to – compete for RFPs.

By comparison, Roger Hess Advocacy, which works regularly with government agency clients, was naturally somewhat more sanguine about the firm's work on behalf of such clients, but nonetheless acknowledged that the more stringent accounting required by such contracts generally forces the firm to hold down their number of billed hours. And John Crate of Emmitt Strategies[34] – a small firm that today works exclusively on behalf of advocacy groups and unions – said that he no longer takes on government clients in part because of a negative experience with a government client. He elaborated that Emmitt's government work required not only an extensive RFP process to get approved, but afterward the firm wasn't even paid until about a year

---

[34] These are pseudonyms.

later. Considering all of this evidence, it is not surprising that the average firm's government contracts are much less lucrative on a per-client basis.

Why, then, are unions a relatively more well-paying client type? Unions, other studies have found, tend to be even more active in using their own mechanisms of grassroots mobilization than other kinds of public interest groups.[35] Unions regularly mobilize mass participation, although their ability to do so has been weakened along with dwindling union density and broader political challenges to the union movement.[36]

Some evidence for why unions tend to be more lucrative clients, then, is that their campaigns tend to be much more large scale than the consultant-backed mobilization efforts carried out on behalf of other types of clients. For example, using data from the *Encyclopedia of Associations* (see Appendix 6), I find that the general advocacy organizations who hire public affairs consultants tend to be exceptionally large (with a median membership of 23,000), but the unions who hire these consultants tend to be larger still, and by an order of magnitude (with a median 250,000 members). Thus, although unions hire consultants much less frequently than other kinds of advocacy organizations do, the services they require tend to be much more large scale. Further, although the advocacy organizations and labor unions that do not hire consultants have approximately similar median budgets (respectively, $350,000 and $358,000), the labor unions who hire consultants tend to have vastly higher median budgets than their general advocacy counterparts ($30 million compared to $5 million).

It would appear, then, that despite how very active labor unions tend to be in mobilizing grassroots participation, they generally only turn to public affairs consultants when they require the development of broad support beyond their own in-house capacities for generating participation. As one consultant put it in an interview, unions often have a more extensive "volunteer apparatus" than many advocacy groups, and so they typically come to consultants for services that cross the high bar that exceeds their volunteer capacity. For a consultant, this means that a relatively small share of union clients may offer outsized returns, but the consultant will likely be working quite hard on large-scale campaigns to earn that revenue.

---

[35] Kollman (1998: 18, 94–95).   [36] E.g., Clawson and Clawson (1999).

Conclusions

The cases of Frederick Partners and Williamson Strategists both revealed how firms who provide "grassroots for hire" manage institutional pressures for their organizational clients and also how they themselves face (and respond to) pressures in their environment. Most significantly, consulting firms need to maintain revenues and provide effective policy representation to their clients. They do so by tailoring their strategies to the client in question and providing boundary-spanning services for galvanizing popular activism.

The chapter further showed that firms vary considerably depending on their political partisanship and the diversity of services they offer. Firms with predominantly corporate clients, such as Frederick Partners and Williamson Strategists, tend to avoid partisan affiliations for fear of foreclosing certain key business opportunities. Corporate clients, for their part, may prefer not to be publicly linked to actors who help to stimulate popular activism on polarizing issues. An important additional finding is that Democratic- and Republican-affiliated firms have an approximately equal representation of corporate clients, despite Republicans' reputation as the party that favors the interests of industry (and the findings of Chapter 3). The major difference between the two sets of partisan firms is that Republican firms do significantly more work on electoral campaigns, whereas Democratic firms are more likely to run grassroots campaigns for public advocacy groups.

Further, Chapter 4 made clear that consulting firms, as organizations themselves, face their own set of pressures. The median firm has a relatively small staff of seven professionals and annual revenues that are slightly higher than their organizational peers in other sectors of the lobbying and public relations industries; still, many firms command substantial resources through high hourly rates and considerable retainer fees. The median firm offers eight specific services in support of mobilizing public activism, and the major sub-specialties are providing general counsel to clients, engaging in public relations, research, signature gathering, direct mail, and linking grassroots efforts with traditional "inside" lobbying. In addition, as the cases of Frederick Partners and Williamson Strategists both indicate, the consultant industry faces substantial popular mistrust about their role in stimulating public participation. Consultants tend to respond to this concern with the counter that those who participate in such campaigns

have done so voluntarily and with a genuine interest in communicating with policymakers. However, the role that consultants are playing in facilitating popular activism is often less than fully transparent.

In the next chapter, I describe in detail the particular strategies that consultants provide in supporting corporations in their grassroots campaigns, as well as the factors that lead some firms to engage in such grassroots strategies (while others choose not to).

5 | *Corporate grassroots*

Introduction

Individual corporations are the leading source of business for public affairs consultants, both in terms of their overall revenue and also as a share of their aggregate client base. The expansion of business political mobilization starting in the 1970s made possible the development of the field of grassroots public affairs consulting, and corporations have, in turn, remained a lucrative source of revenue for consultants. While corporate political activism has become a more common topic of popular discussion since the Supreme Court's 2010 ruling in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (described in greater detail in Chapter 8), corporations have been engaged in political activity far beyond insider lobbying and funding Political Action Committees (PACs) for many years prior to this decision.

But unlike advocacy organizations, which are generally structured for mobilizing the participation of their members – whether through face-to-face organizing or through mediated forms like mass email or other types of "clicktivism" – corporations do not typically possess in-house structures and routines for generating mass political activism on their behalf. Although it's undoubtedly true that the in-house public affairs function at many firms has become much more encompassing in recent decades and firms do at times use these offices to facilitate activism by employees, shareholders, suppliers, distributors, and/or executives,[1] the services of one or more consulting firms are often necessary when a company seeks to mount a large-scale grassroots effort.

Organizing a pro-corporate grassroots campaign is not usually – to consultants' great chagrin – a company's first line of defense when facing a threat. Companies generally need to be pressured into action by external forces, such as corporate controversies, to do so. Oftentimes

---

[1] Meznar and Nigh (1995).

these circumstances represent threats to a company's reputation, bottom line, and/or ability to operate in certain markets. The initiators of such challenges tend to include protest groups, community activists, policymakers threatening regulation or legislation, or difficult negotiations with other organizations. Indeed, if companies could resolve a controversy or becalm an anti-corporate protest group by increasing their philanthropy or co-opting opponents, this would make for a much more desirable alternative. And many companies today are doing precisely that.[2] But certain circumstances call for a more extensive and full-throated response.

This chapter, then, examines precisely which factors lead companies to mount grassroots campaigns by enlisting the support of public affairs consultants. Using public records of consultant–client relationships published on public affairs consultants' websites, this chapter examines which *Fortune* 500 firms appeared on their client lists and which did not. Studying this relationship further, the chapter examines how hiring a consultant is related to the controversies and protest faced by a firm, and its reputation, financial characteristics, and other types of political engagement.

Above all else, this chapter shows that controversies and protest are key influences on consultant-backed engagement in grassroots campaigns by the largest corporations in the United States. Although these firms undoubtedly wield considerable power and influence, facing contentious claims-makers or the negative publicity associated with a controversy can lead even these powerful firms to adopt the posture of an outsider in need of mass support.

However, a secondary finding of this investigation is that these influences are moderated by corporate reputations. Reputations are understood to be those "central, enduring, and distinctive attributes that distinguish a focal organization from other members of a shared social category," which are reflected in judgments about a firm's standing relative to its peers.[3] On a practical level, I find that although both high-reputation and low-reputation companies hire public affairs consultants, only low-reputation firms tend to do so in response to controversies or protest. High-reputation firms, by contrast, appear to be less threatened by such public challenges, yet are still likely to hire such a

---

[2] Galaskiewicz and Colman (2006).
[3] See, respectively, King and Whetten (2008: 199); Love and Kraatz (2009: 314).

consultant, especially if they operate in certain highly regulated industries. Although recent research has shown that firms with stronger reputations tend to attract more protest[4] – in part because a firm's high standing both makes protests against such firms more noticeable and also because negative claims are incongruent with audience perceptions of those firms – high-status actors tend to be more aware that their responses are being observed closely. Thus, even though the data assembled here also confirm that high-reputation firms are more likely to face contentious challenges, their responses to protest should be less likely to involve grassroots mobilization on behalf of the firm.

I begin by comparing accounts of two corporations that have faced major controversies: Kimberly-Clark and Wal-Mart. While Kimberly-Clark responded to negative claims made by protest groups and policy-makers mainly by increasing its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitments, Wal-Mart responded to its challenges by hiring a public affairs consultant and organizing a grassroots campaign in addition to making CSR efforts. How can we understand these divergent trajectories?

This chapter helps to draw attention to the diversity of outcomes that follow from contention directed against corporations. Scholars working in the tradition of the "new institutionalism" in organizational theory applied their insights to understanding pressures on corporations to change their practices, highlighting how activists are often effective in generating changes in corporate practices which ultimately lead other companies to adopt similar practices. These pressures may lead companies to imitate one another by incorporating similar pro-social practices to other influential companies.[5] However, although we know that anti-corporate protest and controversy may make companies more socially responsible, we know much less about the full range of strategic options available to firms when faced with contentious claims-makers. These less-explored corporate tactics include lawsuits filed against activists,[6] soft repression of activism through counter-information or PR campaigns against corporate challengers,[7] or efforts to co-opt or partner with protest groups.[8] What

---

[4] King and McDonnell (2012).   [5] E.g., Briscoe and Safford (2008).
[6] Pring and Canan (1996).   [7] E.g., Aldrich (2010: 179).
[8] Galaskiewicz and Colman (2006); Yaziji and Doh (2009).

this chapter shows is that pro-corporate grassroots campaigning is one very important yet often overlooked consequence of contentious challenges directed against firms.

Kimberly-Clark and Greenpeace

As one of the largest paper companies in the US (second only to International Paper)[9] and the largest manufacturer of tissue products, the practices of Kimberly-Clark are highly significant and have a considerable environmental impact. It is also the largest toilet paper manufacturer in the world. Importantly, Kimberly-Clark is also seen as a relatively high-reputation firm, as *Fortune* magazine in 2009 scored the company similarly to field-leaders International Paper and Weyerhaeuser. Combined, these factors make the company a highly appealing protest target: as a large firm, bringing about changes to its practices would stand to have a powerful impact on improving environmental quality; as a high-reputation firm to which other firms look for signals of best practices, the ability to change the company's practices could lead to mimetic changes in other companies. Social movement groups often conceptualize institutional change in a fashion similar to neo-institutional theorists of social organization, hoping that changes to the field-leading firms will lead to imitation by lower-status firms.

In November 2004, Kimberly-Clark was faced with a Greenpeace-sponsored campaign called "Kleercut." The name of the campaign was a play on Kimberly-Clark's signature brand name Kleenex, implying that these tissues come from timber harvested using the controversial practice of "clear cutting" swaths of forest and leaving no remaining canopy cover. The goal of Greenpeace's campaign, in its own words, was to

help protect ancient forests in Canada and globally [apply] pressure on the company via the marketplace and its large [base of] customers and consumers. In order to highlight the issue, hundreds of protests took place globally, resulting in more than 50 activists arrested in acts of peaceful civil disobedience. Scientific and exposé reports, media mobilization and shareholder engagement were also an important part of the campaign.[10]

---

[9] See PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2009).   [10] Greenpeace (2011).

The campaign began with the announcement in November 2004 that Greenpeace, partnering with the Natural Resources Defense Council, would be pressing for the use of more recycled paper and for the company to reduce its reliance on virgin timber from the North American Boreal forest. The campaign against Kimberly-Clark followed after a year of unproductive discussions between activists and the company.[11] Although the company had a strong pre-existing commitment to harvesting wood in the most sustainable fashion and also claimed to have a policy that "prohibits the use of any wood from virgin rain forests or significant old-growth forests," a spokesman from the company acknowledged that the company did use some virgin pulp from the Boreal forest in Canada.[12] Greenpeace claimed that less than 19 percent of the company's pulp came from recycled sources, and that "the rest comes directly from clear-cutting ancient forests like Canada's Boreal, where trees range in age from 70 to 160 years old."[13]

Greenpeace's strategy was to call for consumers to boycott all Kimberly-Clark products until the company ceased, in their words, destroying ancient forests. These products included not only Kleenex, but also Scott, Viva, Cottonelle, and other brands owned by the company; because the company's products were so well known, Greenpeace sought to turn this into a vulnerability. As Greenpeace put it,

the fact that Kimberly-Clark products are sold so widely makes the company an easy target for grassroots campaigning. Because Kimberly-Clark products are sold at most grocery stores across North America and Europe, there is always an opportunity to target Kimberly-Clark products in your local community, whether you live in a small town or a big city.[14]

Greenpeace adopted a broad-based strategy to encourage the boycott to have an impact, but its focus was more on institutional buyers (retail stores) than individual consumers. Given that the campaign was mainly about the Canadian Boreal forest, the campaign placed greater emphasis on Montreal, Vancouver, and Toronto, but also had an active presence in the US. The campaign encouraged activists to visit their website (kleercut.net) and to connect with other activists who would also be willing to "adopt a grocery store" to target. Accordingly,

---

[11] Hopey (2004).   [12] Brown (2004).   [13] Greenpeace (2008).   [14] Ibid.

activists would identify a grocery store that sold Kimberly-Clark prod-
ucts, hold events consistently at the store including demonstrations,
rallies, street theater, or picketing, and pressure the store to discontinue
selling the company's products. Activists were prodded to develop
relationships with store managers, distribute information packets, or
even to "get the code to the store's intercom" to make announcements
that Kleenex are made from ancient-growth forests.[15] Greenpeace also
held events that declared the Kimberly-Clark corporate headquarters a
forest "crime scene," converted a Greenpeace truck into an oversized
Kleenex box marked "Kleercut," and provided activists with templates
for conversations with media and retail store representatives.

The company reiterated throughout the campaign that most of its
pulp comes from sawdust and chips from lumber production; they also
issued statements reminding the media that they were chosen as the
2006 "sustainable leader" in the personal products sector of the Dow
Jones Sustainability World Indexes.[16] Later in the campaign, the com-
pany claimed that it had reduced its use of Boreal fiber by 30 percent,[17]
and the company's spokesman also said that Kimberly-Clark "has one
of the most progressive fiber policies in the tissue industry."

As a high-reputation firm, Kimberly-Clark not only attracted
social movement attention, but also found itself in a situation
where it needed to protect its position among peer organizations as
protests intensified. Although the Kleercut campaign attracted
national and international attention, certain strategic options
appeared to be less appealing (or perhaps even unthinkable): repres-
sing the activists in the campaign, seeking to routinize the move-
ment, or, importantly, the seemingly outlandish option of facilitating
a counter-movement of loggers and other stakeholders who favored
clear-cutting the Boreal (an activity that the company itself was
against; it did so only out of an apparent lack of alternatives and
a perceived consumer preference for the softer tissue of virgin
pulp).[18]

The company's response, then, was to highlight its commitment to
CSR and sustainability, and it brought about a series of corporate policy

---

[15] Ibid.   [16] Ferrar (2006).   [17] Giasone (2008).
[18] It is worth noting, however, that corporate-backed campaigns have mobilized
loggers against environmentalists in the past. See Sanchez (2001).

changes that led Greenpeace to end its campaign in 2009. The company said that it would, by 2011, increase its use of recycled or Forest Stewardship Council-certified sources to 40 percent in its North American Division.[19] The new agreement also ensured that the company would no longer purchase pulp from the Kenogami and Ogoki Forests in northern Ontario unless "strict ecological criteria are met." The company also set a goal that it would move toward more sustainable sourcing of 100 percent of its fiber. Greenpeace described the campaign as a major victory and hailed Kimberly-Clark as a worthy partner after the campaign concluded in 2009.

Wal-Mart and local community groups

In contrast to Kimberly-Clark's response to Greenpeace, Wal-Mart has taken quite a different approach in its response to community activists and local political leaders who have been resisting the chain's expansion into certain major metropolitan areas where no Wal-Mart stores currently exist (such as New York City and Washington, DC), and other metro areas where proposals for new retail operations have met organized local resistance (such as Chicago, Salt Lake City, Houston, and Apple Valley, CA). Instead of focusing primarily on CSR efforts – although philanthropic giving and partnerships are clearly part of their concurrent efforts – Wal-Mart has organized a national grassroots mobilization program called the Wal-Mart Community Action Network (CAN), with branch operations in a variety of localities where the chain has met resistance to expansion. Consistent with the expectation that companies facing serious controversies while also having major reputational concerns are most likely to take an "activist" approach to handling public issues, Wal-Mart's facilitation of pro-corporate social movement activity has offered the company new strategic options that go beyond their CSR engagement.

The campaign began in late 2008 with the registration of the walmartcommunity.com domain, and by April 2009 the company was encouraging receptive members of the public to join local networks in three California communities (Chico, Merced, and Van Nuys), a regional Wal-Mart New England network, and three local networks in the Mid-Atlantic (New York City, Long Island, and one for six

---

[19] *New York Times* (2009).

locations in Pennsylvania where new stores were being proposed). A few months later (June 2009), the High Desert (Apple Valley) and Poway, California networks were established, as well as a blanket network for California.[20] As of this writing, there are fifteen local, state, and regional Wal-Mart CAN networks across the US, in addition to the overall national network. As early as 2009, the company could claim that the national networks had over 60,000 members in total.[21]

The focus of Wal-Mart's Network is mainly on the mobilization of consumers and local opinion leaders (on the use of these groups as corporate stakeholders, see Figure 7.2). As Aaron Bernstein, the firm's senior manager for advocacy and outreach puts it, "We wanted to tap into the loyalty that customers have for their (local) store . . . We needed to deliver clear and powerful voices from our customers. We wanted to provide them with a platform where they could go to learn about the issues, and then to take action."[22] The site included not only information about the firm's positions on such issues as the Employee Free Choice Act, health reform, and organized retail crime, but also offered numerous ways to take action. With the support of consulting firms including Alexandria, Virginia-based DDC Advocacy (which hosts portions of the site), the page also offers ways to join the Network for updates, places to "share your story" about the effect Wal-Mart has had on one's community, and more. As the Network advises readers of its website, "By joining CAN, you're adding your voice to the voices of other advocates across the nation who want to help build better, stronger communities. Your participation in CAN, combined with the actions of people like you, can help make a difference at home and across America."[23]

The CAN campaign followed on the heels of Working Families for Wal-Mart, a campaign I describe in depth in Chapter 7. While this earlier campaign emphasized pressuring suppliers, signing up consumers who visited Wal-Mart stores, and offering incentives for those who joined, CAN is primarily focused on web-based organizing. The CAN campaign helps the company as it seeks to expand into urban areas where they face not only community and labor opposition, but where they also often face political pushback on store openings unless

---

[20] Internet Archive (2011).   [21] Painter (2009).
[22] Public Affairs Council (2010b).   [23] Wal-Mart (2011a).

the company promises to pay a wage well beyond the federally mandated minimum.[24]

In order to understand this broader campaign in greater depth, consider the following case of contentious Wal-Mart store proposals in New York City.

Wal-Mart's grassroots campaign to enter the New York City market

Wal-Mart has faced consistent problems and setbacks in its efforts to open a new retail store in one of the five boroughs of New York City, and, although it has campaigned earnestly to open a store there since at least 2004, no such store has been approved or opened as of this writing.[25] Wal-Mart's first major attempt was to seek approval for a store in Queens, but neighborhood, labor, environmental, and local small business groups organized to express strong opposition to the proposed 132,000-square-foot store as part of a larger development by Vornado Realty Trust.[26] The company then floated a proposal to open a store in Staten Island,[27] only to find that despite the support of the borough president, the company would have to scrap the plan due not only to community opposition but also to the necessity of a costly environmental cleanup at the proposed retail site.[28]

Importantly, the company had sought to gain community support during these earlier campaigns, as the Queens campaign involved the hiring of public affairs firm The Marino Organization.[29] Marino is a firm known for its campaigns in support of real estate and land development clients, and its website provides illustrative case studies of their work on behalf of clients ranging from Home Depot to the Real Estate Board of New York. Marino helped this campaign with a major advertising push in newspapers and on the radio, as well as by commissioning a poll to show that 62 percent of New Yorkers supported Wal-Mart's efforts to enter the city.[30] The company also sought to gain the support of community and civic leaders.[31]

In 2010, Wal-Mart began to move ahead on its third attempt at a New York site, this time in the East New York section of Brooklyn. By

---

[24] Heller (2010).   [25] Lefkowitz (2011).   [26] Greenhouse (2005a).
[27] Greenhouse (2005b).   [28] Greenhouse (2006c).   [29] Woodberry (2005).
[30] Heilemann (2005).   [31] Frank (2005).

this time, the company had established its national Community Action Network to enlist the support of consumers and local leaders as allies and coalition partners. Although the Community Action Network had listed a state-level branch in 2009, it only registered www.walmartnyc .com in the summer of 2010, at the same time that the company was gearing up to campaign for the East New York site. In late 2010, the company hired New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg's former campaign manager to help the company's grassroots operation, while also announcing that it would consider moving into sites much smaller than a typical 150,000-square-foot supercenter. Wal-Mart sought locations where real estate prices were relatively low and that were currently underserved by local supermarkets, making the argument that stores were planned for areas that were "supermarket deserts." In East New York in particular, the company sought to reach out to leaders of the local African-American and Latino communities to help support their argument that the company has a focus on underserved populations.[32]

The company's grassroots strategy involved a combination of recruiting petition signers, partnering with local community organizations, and issuing publications, flyers, and leaflets in order to enlist members of the public to contact local officials. As one commentator put it, "their ground campaign is going into neighborhoods and trying to basically win endorsements of noted leaders."[33] And they won certain key endorsements. For instance, Wal-Mart's New York City network claims the support of representatives of the New York City Housing Authority Tenants Association, the Real Estate Board of New York, and local racial/ethnic organizations. The president of the New York State NAACP conference says, "We need jobs in our communities. We need affordable places to shop close to home. We need partners to support our neighborhood charities. And we want our voices to be heard by decision makers who claim to represent us. We welcome Walmart in New York City because they are willing to be part of the solution. It is time we support solutions and stop turning businesses away."[34] The CAN also mailed glossy brochures to thousands of New York residents, stating, "You don't ask the special interests or the political insiders for permission to watch TV. So why should they decide where you're allowed to shop?"[35] The CAN campaign in New York

---

[32] Otis and Cahalan (2010).   [33] Harris (2011a).   [34] Wal-Mart (2011b).
[35] Harris (2011).

was sophisticated enough that one city council member compared it to a major candidate campaign leading up to election day.[36]

Wal-Mart's grassroots efforts went beyond enlisting community support, and also promoted local protest events, such as a pro-Wal-Mart rally held at City Hall on December 14, 2010. Clad in blue shirts with yellow print reading "New Yorkers Want Walmart!" on the front, and "Jobs! Affordable Groceries! In Our Neighborhood!" on the back, a small rally of predominantly African-American residents promoted the company on the grounds that it would provide economic stimulus and create new jobs. For example, Divine Pryor of Medgar Evers College, City University of New York, argued that "Jobs equal public safety. Jobs equal public health. Jobs equal economic stimulus. I think we owe them a chance to sit down and come up with some reasonable negotiations and dialogue about how that can be possible."[37]

The campaign also took a multi-pronged strategy, seeking to illustrate local support for a new Wal-Mart store on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. On the campaign's YouTube page, the company has been issuing regular "Wal-Mart Reports," which involve man-on-the-street interviews with local residents who support the company's expansion efforts, "news" segments that define a "food desert" and explain how a new store would offer a remedy, and telling success stories of employees who were able to rise up the ranks of the company.

Importantly, this grassroots effort was not seen as a replacement for the company's CSR strategy (or a contradiction to it); instead, its CSR efforts were built directly into the campaign. For instance, Wal-Mart recently made a $4 million donation to a New York City youth empowerment program aimed at providing summer jobs to young people.[38] New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg, in a press conference after the donation was announced, called Wal-Mart "one of the great corporate citizens in this country."[39] Although the company made efforts to argue that the donation was part of its national effort to empower youth and not linked to its market interest in expanding into the New York area, in other places the company has explicitly connected its political campaign for a store opening with its philanthropy. For example, on the New York City CAN's Facebook page, Wal-Mart PR staff highlighted the following response to the donation as a "Comment of the Week" from a CAN member:

---

[36] Ibid.   [37] Wal-Mart (2011c).   [38] Hernandez (2011).   [39] Ibid.

This is great news! But, if Walmart [is] being so generous with it's [*sic*] money, how can we deny them the right to open stores here? If they open stores in New York – this will equal more summer and permanent jobs for New Yorkers.

The opposition the company faced included not only their traditional opponents in community organizations, labor, and small business, but also involved professionalized organizations and new coalitions created for the purpose of opposing the company's expansion. For example, PR firms were also active on behalf of the opposition, as Gotham Government Relations was enlisted to help form an anti-Wal-Mart coalition organization known as the New York Neighborhood Alliance.[40] A partner in the firm argued that "Wal-Mart will destroy how we live our lives and disrupt our daily routines [. . .] Residents will undoubtedly completely change their shopping habits, and in turn would force the closure of countless neighborhood shops – some of which have been around for decades and were passed down through generations." There also recently emerged another network of anti-Wal-Mart groups for the city, known as Wal-Mart-Free NYC.[41]

As of this writing, the campaign has not made major progress in opening a store in the NYC area, but the company did earlier reach an "agreement in principle" that local construction unions would build any new locations,[42] and an independent poll by Quinnipiac University showed that 57 percent of New Yorkers believed that politicians should not block the opening of a Wal-Mart (and 74 percent said that their low prices would benefit local residents).[43] However, the broader context remains hostile to the company's efforts, as NYC city council hearings in early 2011 were boycotted by the company, which thought it was being unfairly singled out among other big-box retailers.

Why go grassroots?

Why is it the case that when certain companies are faced with protest, they promote or augment their commitment to CSR, whereas other companies will *additionally* attempt to mobilize grassroots support in opposition? The comparison between Kimberly-Clark and Wal-Mart is

---

[40] PR Newswire (2011). [41] Lefkowitz (2011). [42] Naziri (2011).
[43] See Boyle (2011).

instructive for what it reveals about how a firm's reputation moderates the relationship between challenges to the firm and the decision to organize grassroots support using consultants.[44]

First and foremost, Wal-Mart is a company that has had considerable reputational challenges in the past through concerns about its union practices, environmental sustainability, and strained relationships with local community members.[45] As a company with major reputational concerns and a history of contentious protest targeted against it, the company had a much freer hand in mobilizing grassroots support in its favor. Indeed, the Community Action Networks the company created across the country were not the first time the company had engaged in political organizing, as it had earlier created the Working Families for Wal-Mart coalition with the help of a public affairs consulting firm (see Chapter 7). If the company were in a stronger reputational position, it would have been able to exercise the symbolic capital of a strong reputation and would not have been as likely to take such a full-throated strategy in response to controversy.

The case of Kimberly-Clark and Greenpeace shows what a high-reputation firm is likely to do when faced with protest. Instead of

---

[44] This is not to deny that other factors inherent in a corporation's culture may also play a role in its decision to mobilize grassroots support in response to contentious challenges. Wal-Mart's executives, for instance, have long argued that their company's success in business is directly linked to improving the quality of life for working Americans through providing access to jobs and low-cost goods (e.g., Fishman, 2006a). Kimberly-Clark's executives may indeed have a more environmentalist ethos, which, independent of reputation, may have predisposed them against organizing a grassroots campaign to counter Greenpeace. Nonetheless, there is reason to conclude that the effects of reputation continue to play a significant role even after accounting for such factors associated with corporate culture. Avery Dennison, for instance, is a paper products firm without the strong reputation of Kimberly-Clark, but which also has a notable commitment to sustainability, as evidenced in a variety of company characteristics (including an internal sustainability steering committee, a corporate leadership team for sustainability, and diverse partnerships with environmental NGOs and participation in environmental certification regimes; see Avery Dennison, 2010). While high-reputation Kimberly-Clark does not appear as the client of any public affairs consultant in my data (described below and in Appendix 5), Avery Dennison appears as the client of three consulting firms.

[45] See, for example, Ingram, Yue, and Rao (2010).

organizing a coalition in favor of the company's environmental practices, the firm wanted to appear accountable and receptive to the claims of secondary stakeholder groups. Further, it was in no position to defend a practice that it had already recanted. As the world's leading tissue manufacturer and one of the most respected firms in the forestry and paper industry, the company was a magnet for protest but also had few options for how to respond to negative claims. In the end, given the high pressure and widespread media coverage of the Greenpeace campaign, the company was pressured to concede to many of the demands of the protestors. Doing so helped Kimberly-Clark to reaffirm its position as a leader on environmental practices, as well as to gain the added legitimacy of having Greenpeace's endorsement for its sustainability.

The link between corporate responses to protest and a company's CSR practices warrants further comment. Importantly, the outcomes of both of these campaigns represented somewhat natural extensions of each firm's existing CSR. In the case of Wal-Mart, the talking points used by the Community Action Networks highlighted how new urban stores would promote the creation of new jobs (although many dispute this), and the company's philanthropic donations to support youth summer jobs were largely consistent with the campaign's argument. Further, Wal-Mart has recently focused its CSR efforts on issues of access to food, and a key argument for why the company should be permitted to open a New York store is that the proposed sites are in areas that would otherwise be "supermarket deserts." The pro-Wal-Mart rallies that the firm orchestrated also highlighted the company's support in low-income African-American communities using a jobs and economic recovery frame. Importantly, Kimberly-Clark's response was also consistent with its previous commitments, although these commitments also served as a restraint upon the firm's options for response; for example, the company could not appear to be allied with the logging companies and others who would stand to benefit from the continuation of unsustainable practices.

Importantly, both of these campaigns were not simply "private politics" in which firms were targeted *instead* of the state. In each case, activists targeted both the firm directly as well as the state, pressing for new regulations that would affect the firm and force corporate change through legal rather than voluntary mechanisms. Another similarity is that it was within each firm's power to stop the protests through its own actions: for Wal-Mart, they could shelve their plans to open in NYC; for

Kimberly-Clark, they could agree to stop using pulp from endangered forests. However, in the Wal-Mart case, the regulatory threat was more significant than the concern that consumers would respond negatively to their actions; in fact, Wal-Mart knew and highlighted the fact that a majority of New Yorkers said, in independent surveys, that they were in favor of allowing the company to open a store in one of the boroughs. The larger problem would be that city council and local regulators would block the company's expansion plans. This ongoing legislative and regulatory opposition also, it appears, facilitated a particularly *political* strategy in the company's response to protest. The relatively remote regulatory threat that Kimberly-Clark faced may have also made a heavy-handed stakeholder mobilization response less desirable, while at the same time facilitating more engagement in private regulation.[46]

These two campaigns, while insightful and illustrative, tell only a portion of the story about what leads a company to mobilize stakeholder support through working with a public affairs consultant. I now turn to a broader statistical analysis of why companies generate such displays of public support.

A statistical model of corporate grassroots activity

Background

In order to understand corporate grassroots campaigns more broadly, I estimate a statistical model of the factors that lead firms in the *Fortune* 500 to hire a grassroots public affairs consultant. Given that very few companies possess the in-house capacities needed to launch a full-scale campaign, companies generally outsource such efforts to consulting firms when they seek to employ this strategy. Using data from a variety of sources, I estimate how protest, controversies, political contexts, and other factors shape a company's likelihood to hire a consultant to organize a campaign, as well as how reputations buffer companies against controversies and protest.

Details about the data collection and measurement of variables are available in Appendix 5.

[46] See Bartley (2007).

Analysis

Which factors lead companies to hire public affairs consultants to mobilize their stakeholders in corporate grassroots campaigns? I conduct a series of negative binomial regression models of *Fortune* 500 firms' count of public affairs consultants hired as of 2010; a negative binomial model is appropriate to a count-based dependent variable that is over-dispersed (mean of .93 with a variance of 3.28).[47]

Results are displayed in Table 5.1. The first model, labeled "All firms," shows the effects of reputation, consumer and labor protest, stakeholder relations, political context, other types of corporate political activity, industry, revenue, and structural characteristics on the count of consultants retained for all included *Fortune* 500 firms. The second model examines the same relationships among firms at or below the median reputational score provided from *Fortune*'s "Most Admired Companies" list. The third model does the same for firms above the median in reputation. The comparison of the second and third models with the first allows one to evaluate the extent to which reputation moderates the relationship between firms' stakeholder relations and their grassroots activities.

First, it should be noted that nearly 40 percent of the *Fortune* 500 appear as the client of a public affairs consultant, and this includes over 67 percent of *Fortune* 100 members. Thus, regardless of the corporate–community relations and protest faced by these prominent firms, grassroots practices have become, by the early years of the twenty-first century, rather well institutionalized. Corporate constituency-building efforts are now a rather mainstream practice.[48]

Looking at the first (leftmost) model, the results suggest that high-reputation firms are very slightly less likely to hire public affairs consultants. At the bivariate level (not shown), in fact, I found that 56.8 percent of firms in the top reputation quartile appear as the client of at least one grassroots lobbyist (whereas only 22.5 percent of firms in the lowest reputation quartile appear as a client), but it is also clear that the highest-reputation firms tend to be those that have the highest revenues,

---

[47] In additional models (not shown), I also specified a binary dependent variable and entered the same independent variables into logit estimations. The core finding holds that community controversies are only a significant predictor of hiring a consultant for low-reputation firms, and not for high-reputation firms.

[48] See also Lord (2000, 2003).

Table 5.1 *Negative binomial regression of the count of consultants hired by* **Fortune** *500 firms on corporate characteristics*

Variable	All firms		Low-reputation firms		High-reputation firms	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Reputation						
Fortune score, 2007	−0.038	(0.034)	–	–	–	–
Protest						
Consumer protest	0.199	(0.185)	0.578*	(0.288)	0.043	(0.225)
Labor protest	0.167	(0.231)	0.376	(0.333)	0.042	(0.293)
External controversies						
Community controversies	0.279*	(0.137)	0.709**	(0.221)	0.149	(0.162)
Environmental controversies	0.132[+]	(0.077)	0.304**	(0.106)	0.024	(0.104)
Internal controversies						
Diversity controversies	0.163	(0.160)	0.059	(0.237)	0.183	(0.209)
Employee controversies	−0.179[+]	(0.095)	−0.277[+]	(0.156)	−0.081	(0.114)
Stakeholder strengths						
Community strengths	0.006	(0.106)	0.058	(0.155)	−0.086	(0.130)
Environmental strengths	−0.007	(0.091)	0.055	(0.131)	0.026	(0.108)
Diversity strengths	0.228***	(0.062)	0.224*	(0.100)	0.225**	(0.074)
Employee strengths	0.033	(0.085)	0.094	(0.134)	0.011	(0.099)
Political context						
House DW-Nominate mean	0.260	(0.402)	0.252	(0.647)	0.343	(0.503)
Political activism						
Lobbying ($ millions)	0.309*	(0.150)	0.455[+]	(0.254)	0.265	(0.173)

Industry						
Information	0.775*	(0.329)	0.729	(0.505)	0.863*	(0.412)
Manufacturing	−0.246	(0.245)	−0.910*	(0.398)	0.014	(0.267)
Retail	−0.294	(0.318)	−1.254*	(0.575)	0.117	(0.383)
Energy	0.393	(0.337)	0.279	(0.469)	0.353	(0.439)
Transportation	0.388	(0.386)	0.604	(0.514)	−0.208	(0.626)
Revenue						
Fortune rank	−0.002*	(0.001)	−0.002[+]	(0.001)	−0.002[+]	(0.001)
Structural characteristics						
Employees (thousands)	0.240[+]	(0.123)	0.522**	(0.199)	0.102	(0.153)
Cash flow ($ billions)	0.070	(0.168)	−0.463	(0.339)	0.185	(0.188)
Market-to-book ratio	−0.103	(0.133)	0.074	(0.205)	−0.213	(0.175)
Constant	−1.326*	(0.620)	−2.483**	(0.871)	−0.942	(0.695)
N	340		165		175	
Pseudo R-square	**0.218**		**0.326**		**0.187**	
Log likelihood	−356.0		−123.9		−214.5	

Significance levels: $^+ p \le .10; ^* p \le .05; ^{**} p \le .01; ^{***} p \le .001$

as noted by management and organizations scholars.[49] Thus, the apparent bivariate effect of reputation is, in fact, an effect of revenue, in which the most resource-rich firms are among the most likely to hire a firm. The findings for *Fortune* rank confirm this, as firms with a lower rank (i.e., higher number on the ranking list) are significantly less likely to appear on grassroots lobbyists' client lists.

Comparing across the models, I find support for the expectation that organizations with external public controversies are among the most likely to mobilize grassroots participation, but that this effect is moderated by reputation. In particular, the models show that among low-reputation firms, the presence of community controversies, and poor environmental performance, and, to a lesser extent, consumer protest, are all significant and positive predictors of the count of consultants retained by the firm; none of these measures have any significant effect for high-reputation firms. Thus, comparing the leftmost model to the reputation-specific models presented in the center and right columns, it becomes clear that reputation moderates firms' responses to negative public information. In particular, additional models (not shown) illustrate that certain negative relations are among the most significant individual predictors of the volume of low-reputation firms' grassroots activities: negative economic impacts in the local communities in which a firm operates ($p < .05$), concerns about hazardous waste in the environment ($p < .05$), and evidence of environmental regulatory violations ($p < .10$). For high-reputation firms, however, none of these statistical relationships hold, as firms with a strong reputation can weather negative information without needing to engage in campaigns to mobilize stakeholders.[50] In a sense, then, reputation operates as a buffer against negative information in firms' institutional environments.[51]

A similar relation holds for protest, in that low-reputation firms that were the target of a major consumer protest were found to have significantly higher levels of corporate grassroots engagement, whereas this relationship does not hold for high-reputation firms. Thus, consistent

[49] E.g., Fryxell and Wang (1994).
[50] An augmented version of the "all firms" model in Table 5.1 (not shown) included a term for the interaction between reputation and community controversies. These results showed a significant ($p < .001$) negative interaction, consistent with the expectation of a moderating effect of reputation.
[51] E.g., King (2008).

with the case material described earlier, firms with poor reputations appear to engage in a strategy of fighting fire with fire: when targeted with protest, firms with relatively weak reputations do what they can to mobilize their own activism to counterbalance the claims of protest groups. Importantly, however, they do not appear to take this strategy when faced with labor protest, as only public protest by consumer groups draws this type of corporate response. Thus, although industry-leading organizations are among the most likely to face protest because they are expected to influence other firms in the field,[52] laggard firms are among the most likely to take strategic action in response to protest.

Firms that had internal controversies were generally not more likely to work with consultants, although the models show that low-reputation firms with controversies in their employee relations were slightly less likely ($p < .10$) to work with consultants; this relationship did not hold for high-reputation firms. Thus, while external controversies encourage a public response from low-reputation firms, internal controversies in a firm's relations with its employees lead these same firms to keep a lower profile.

Interestingly, I find no significant effects for three of the areas of stakeholder strength (community, environment, and, most consequentially, employee relations), and significant positive effects in one area (diversity strengths). It appears, then, that firms that have succeeded in building and maintaining diversity in their workforce and management are significantly more likely to hire grassroots consulting firms, suggesting that diversity programs are strengths on which constituency-building efforts can be launched.[53] Firms that feature such diversity programs appear to be more confident in their efforts to engage grassroots participation, even after introducing a wide variety of controls.

Moving to the control measures, I find no significant effect of the political context on firms' engagement in grassroots campaigns. For the other political measure, however, I do find a significant effect that also appears to be moderated by reputation: among low-reputation firms, higher levels of logged lobbying expenditures are associated with a significant increase in the count of consultants retained. Thus, expenditures on inside lobbying are also related to grassroots mobilization, and in a way that is also moderated by reputation.

---

[52] Rao, Morrill, and Zald (2000).   [53] See Keim (2005).

Regarding the effects of industry, I find that information and communications technology firms tend to engage in a greater volume of grassroots mobilization, as these firms are both highly regulated and also possess the capacity to mobilize participation using their own technologies.[54] This sector includes a number of major media firms that appear as clients of grassroots lobbyists (such as AT&T, Viacom, Virgin Media, and Disney), as well as communications companies like Verizon, Google, Yahoo!, and Sprint Nextel. This finding is consistent with what I found in another study about the predominant role of media and communications firms in grassroots mobilization among a broader set, including both *Fortune* 500 companies and smaller firms.[55] Grassroots lobbying methods rely upon the media and information and communications technologies, and the firms that provide access to media and ICTs appear to be its heaviest users. On the other hand, low-reputation manufacturing and retail firms are less likely to engage in these activities.

One of my interviews was particularly relevant for understanding the findings of this model regarding information and communications firms. When asked about differences across industries in their grassroots mobilization efforts, long-standing consultant Pat Samuels explained to me that communications firms are often at the forefront of such efforts not only because of the regulatory issues they face, but because of their relations with their vast consumer base:

[Companies] do unite from time to time on big issues. Usually taxes or some sort of restrictive legislation or oversight of one kind or another. [Firms in the telecommunications industry] deal with governments all of the time on rates. And they do have a big footprint. They have all of these subscribers. They are used to dealing with individuals all over the country, and they have data on all of those individuals. There's a culture of doing grassroots within their industry.

Lastly, coming back to the findings in Table 5.1, I found consistent support for the argument that revenue and public prominence affect firms' likelihood of mobilizing grassroots participation, as firms ranked lower in the *Fortune* 500 list are significantly less likely to hire one (let alone *many*) grassroots lobbying firms. I also find that

---

[54] For an analysis of the role of regulation in shaping trade associations' work with consultants, see Appendix 7.
[55] Walker (2012a).

low-reputation firms use large employee bases as an asset in mobilizing participation ($p < .01$), but do not find this effect for high-reputation firms. Finally, measures of firms' cash flow and market-to-book value both have no significant effect on grassroots mobilization in any of the three models.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to examine which circumstances tend to lead large companies to engage in grassroots mobilization campaigns with the support of consultants. In particular, this chapter asked how such organizational behavior is tied to companies' relationships with their external communities, the protest they face from consumer and labor groups, and the broader political context.

I expected to find, above all else, that corporate grassroots mobilization is a strategic response to protest and poor community relations. A secondary expectation was that firms' reputations could serve as a buffer against these dual threats, such that high-reputation firms might not need to hire consultants *when faced with these challenges* (but, lacking that buffer, low-reputation firms would be forced to respond). Although both high- and low-reputation firms are likely to emphasize commitments to CSR when faced with external challenges – as both Kimberly-Clark and Wal-Mart did in the case studies described at the outset of this chapter – only firms with a weaker reputational position should respond to controversy with grassroots counter-mobilization. Accordingly, I found support for the notion that reputation moderates the relationship between the public controversies and the hiring of public affairs consultants to defend companies. High-reputation firms hire consulting firms also, but for reasons that are more closely linked to operating in a regulated industry.

Most importantly, the findings of the case studies and the statistical models presented here indicate that neo-institutionalist analysts of organizations have been correct in calling attention to the ways that corporate-targeted contention has promoted more environmentally sustainable and pro-social policies among leading companies, as well as other industry-wide voluntary programs.[56] However, it also makes clear that a firm's position relative to its peers conditions its likelihood

---

[56] Bartley (2007).

of responding in this fashion, as firms with weaker reputations may supplement their CSR efforts with stakeholder mobilization campaigns to defend the firm. Strong reputations buffer firms against contention,[57] but firms in weaker reputational positions have a freer hand in responding to negative claims.

The findings of this chapter also suggest that one of the major outcomes of societal contention directed at private businesses has been the development of corporate public affairs programs designed to mobilize the firm's primary stakeholders as a political force. As contention against firms has expanded into a more regular aspect of many firms' public existence, so too has the institutionalization of grassroots programs for *Fortune* 500 firms. Politicized industry and the expansion of citizen groups, as I argued in Chapter 3, facilitated a significant expansion in the field of consultants, and this chapter illustrates how controversies, protest, and regulation drive firms to utilize their services.

Scholars investigating the role of social movements in reshaping organizational practices and institutional dynamics, then, need to examine not only whether social movements' corporate targets are forced to concede to protest groups' demands (or engage in increased self-regulation or reporting to ward off the threat of future protest), but should also investigate how firms take strategic measures to actively challenge the threat posed by protest and controversies. It appears that although high-reputation firms are more likely to face protest, low-reputation firms are more threatened by such negative claims-making, often engaging in efforts to mobilize stakeholders when few other political options are likely to be successful.

In total, the findings of this chapter show that now that the consultant field is well established, nearly 40 percent of *Fortune* 500 firms use them to gain a political edge. Grassroots practices aren't just for advocacy organizations now that public affairs consultants can be called upon to help companies manage complex political environments.

---

[57] King (2008).

6 | *Outsourcing advocacy? Consulting for associations*

Introduction

Public affairs consultants are quite logical service providers for corporations. After all, corporations are built for generating profits and distributing them to their owners or shareholders, not for mobilizing public participation. Thus, when a challenge like unwelcome regulation, a community controversy, and/or a public protest comes about, corporations often find that they need to enlist public affairs consultants' services.

Advocacy organizations, by contrast, are known for their ability to connect people to politics.[1] Public interest groups pressing for social change on issues like the environment and climate change, abortion, poverty, taxation, or health policy tend to be far more likely to have strong inherent capacities for galvanizing mass political participation than corporations do.[2] Why, then, do some advocacy organizations feel the need to, in a sense, "outsource" their member mobilization efforts to public affairs consultants? And what does their doing so mean for the infrastructure of civic and political organizations in a context of expanding participatory inequality, transforming communications technologies, and professionalization in the advocacy sector?

This chapter shows that although it is relatively rare for advocacy organizations to contract with grassroots public affairs consultants – indeed, they need not search for "grassroots for hire" when they already have these capacities internally – the practice is more common among very large national advocacy organizations, especially the most well-resourced federated organizations with headquarters in the nation's capital. And, in contrast to the expectation by many that the advocacy

---

[1] Weir and Ganz (1997).   [2] Kollman (1998: 43).

sector has been transformed since the 1970s by the rise of so-called associations without members[3] – that is, advocacy groups that mobilize participants primarily as check- and letter-writers rather than as face-to-face activists – this chapter shows that such groups are not significantly more likely than member-based groups to hire a public affairs consultant.

Notably, many consulting firms and their staff are instrumental players in both the broader conservative and progressive movements in the US. For example, the Richard Norman Company (Lansdowne, VA) is deeply rooted in the community of conservative politics and can boast clients like the Tea Party Patriots, Freedom Alliance, the Conservative Caucus, and controversial voter-ID law backers True the Vote. By contrast, Democracy Partners (Washington, DC) has worked with MoveOn.org, Americans United for Change, Every Child Matters, and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). The consultants at Democracy Partners, importantly, have backgrounds working as organizers in progressive advocacy groups and labor unions such as the NAACP, Emily's List, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), AFL-CIO, and low-income community organizations affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation.[4] There are slightly more firms in the data that fit the profile of groups like Democracy Partners; recall from Chapter 4 that firms with a primarily advocacy clientele are somewhat more likely to be affiliated with the Democrats than with the Republicans.

There are many firms like Richard Norman Company and Democracy Partners that hold similar ideological commitments and tend to see their work as a natural extension of their respective movement, envisioning their consulting work as rooted in deeply personal hopes that their side will win. As John Crate, the founder and president of the California-based Emmitt Strategies,[5] which has a clientele comprised exclusively of progressive advocacy organizations, explained to me,

I've been doing this [organizing work] since I was in high school ... I never stopped protesting. I mean, so aside from my training, which includes training

[3] Skocpol (2003); cf. Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner (2011).
[4] Democracy Partners (2012).
[5] Both "John Crate" and "Emmitt Strategies" are pseudonyms.

from the [United] Farm Workers – which sort of was like the Harvard of organizing with their people – [I've learned that] it's really an interactive process. I'm really analyzing ... "Where do you wanna go, what resources do you have to get there, and what's most important to you, and what paths would you not wanna take?" And then, I apply my own expertise, and, obviously, you know, consult other experts on data, and use data consultants and vendors for what's necessary. But, you know, I go through real analysis of how I can help them get where they think they want to go, which may not end up where we actually end up going together.[6]

John continues,

We're motivated by our interests, which are clearly progressive. That's my passion and that's what I want to spend my work time doing. So we're pretty flexible. Like if we find an organization that wants to work with us and we wanna work with them, we'll do whatever the hell they need. We've done fundraising, we've done grassroots organizing, media relations, advertising. "Hey, what do you need?"

I begin the chapter with two brief descriptions of consultants' work for advocacy groups, followed by a discussion of how their work dovetails with trends in the field of US advocacy organizations including professionalization, use of new media and communications technologies, and the changing meaning of "membership." I also describe, using the survey data, the services that consultants tend to provide to advocacy organizations. Then, using data from the client lists and from a systematic data source on national advocacy organizations, I examine which types of advocacy groups are most likely to hire public affairs consultants. I conclude by considering the implications of these findings for how best to understand the place of associations in contemporary American politics and society.

---

[6] I regularly heard from consultants that they often subcontract to other consultants when they require specific data services (e.g., targeted lists of particular demographic groups that the consultant did not already own) or if they required local knowledge of a particular community or region where the firm had not previously worked. Indeed, in the 2009 scandal over fraudulent letters sent to Virginia Rep. Tom Perriello on behalf of the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity, it was revealed that the responsible party for the fraudulent letters was in fact a subcontractor to the Alexandria, Virginia-based Hawthorn Group (Snyder, 2009).

Cases of public affairs work for associations

Crossroads Campaign Solutions

Crossroads Campaign Solutions (CCS) is a Washington, DC public affairs consulting firm founded in 2007, which as of this writing has a staff of sixteen consultants and a roster of fifty-five clients. Not to be mistaken for Karl Rove's nonprofit Republican-affiliated American Crossroads, CCS has a clientele comprised almost entirely of progressive advocacy organizations and Democratic candidates.[7] Consultants working for the firm have backgrounds in nonprofit fundraising, community organizing, think-tank work, staffing for policymakers, and field organizing for Democratic Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) efforts. The firm also has formal partnerships with Clifton Consulting (which handles training of association leaders on such skills as communications, leadership development, and media savvy) and also with Empowered Media Strategies (a one-person cause marketing firm known for its work with the viral LGBT youth project called "It Gets Better," run by a former consultant from Blue State Digital). The firm provides quite a broad range of services to advocacy organizations, ranging from activist targeting to communications training. CCS also helps advocacy groups locate and hire short-term employees to make sure a campaign has the staff it needs to be successful. As the firm describes itself on its website,

Crossroads can help organizations develop plans and gather the resources necessary to contact legislators and mobilize communities to take action on education, direct service, and advocacy campaigns. We have put together innovative strategies utilizing a variety of available tools for distributing campaign messages through traditional and non-traditional communications.

We can help your organization set up legislative meetings, create briefing material, and engage constituents through letter writing, phone call and email campaigns. Crossroads can also create person-to-person contact programs including but not limited to large-scale canvasses, forums and events, voter registration, and Get-Out-the-Vote (GOTV) efforts.

Looking at particular campaigns for associations, CCS has provided a variety of services. Working with National Council of La Raza (NCLR), CCS helped the organization to manage coalitions with over forty partner

---

[7] Crossroads Campaign Solutions (2012).

associations to "assist with field know-how, organizing tools, best practices advice, and developing print materials"; more recently, CCS has helped NCLR's organizational partners to become more professionalized through helping manage their grants, and to improve "internal processes and reporting mechanisms." For Reform Immigration for America, CCS helped the organization to develop targeting plans and to coordinate organizers and individual participants; as they describe it, they applied a "metrics-driving approach" to evaluate the effectiveness of various grassroots mobilization strategies. And, working with the Partnership for Working Families (PWF), CCS developed plans to increase organizational capacity and further build the civic engagement of participants.

Importantly, CCS makes considerable efforts beyond its work for PWF to build the capacities of the associations that hire it for assistance in their campaigns. This fits with a common theme that arose during my conversations with consultants who specialize in working with advocacy clients: they are happy to help these clients to meet their strategic goals, but also do not want to create long-term dependence on consultants. While this may seem counter-intuitive – after all, it might make more sense for a consultant to seek out retainer contracts with their advocacy clients – the consultants I talked with, like Crossroads, believe that there is a limit to what consultants should do for advocacy organizations. This is, of course, a stark contrast from consultants who work with a corporate clientele and often work their hardest to be kept on retainer (as described in Chapter 4). As Crossroads describes it, they

help campaigns and nonprofits become more effective in establishing and accomplishing their internal and public goals. We work hard to develop a strategy that aligns organizational capability with short- and long-term goals. Not content to apply a one-size-fits-all action-plan, we spend the necessary time to review and understand your organization's strengths and identify potential areas of improvement. The Crossroads team will assess current staffing, management, and capacity of your organization by participating in internal meetings, conference calls, and other activities as needed. Crossroads will then make recommendations and work with organizational staff and leadership to write plans and budgets that drive goal-oriented work.

This is quite similar to what Bill Hoover, the co-founder and president of Field Engagement, Inc.,[8] a well-connected Midwestern public affairs

---

[8] Both names are pseudonyms.

shop with a primarily advocacy clientele, told me when I interviewed him. As he made clear, consulting firms working in advocacy are often quite committed to the causes they promote for their clients, and put these values above their interest in lucrative contracts. This is not to say that such pecuniary concerns are disregarded completely, but the firm's reputation depends upon a balance:

I would say we are a grassroots consulting firm that intersects with the public affairs space, and so we're also a *value space firm*. And so as a firm of folks who all started off as grassroots organizers, our conception of the world is about building capacity ... So, our business model really is [that] if we help our clients [build capacity] and they learn how to do it well, two things are gonna happen. One, they're gonna tell others about it, and that's been the case [for our firm for] over thirteen years, and at three, or four, or five years they're gonna want to elevate to the next level of effectiveness and they're gonna come back to hire us again.[9]

Shirley & Banister Public Affairs

Shirley & Banister Public Affairs (SBPA) is a long-standing, Republican-affiliated consulting shop located in Alexandria, VA, with a mixed clientele comprised mainly of advocacy organizations, Republican candidates, and some corporations and industry groups. As a more generalist firm, SBPA provides services beyond facilitating activism, as the firm's principals also assist a number of pundits and conservative leaders in their relations with multiple media including television, radio, print, and internet-based outlets. Founded in 1987 as Keene, Shirley, & Associates, the firm today has five consultants and provides services such as grassroots coalition-building, traditional lobbying ("government relations"), and facilitating publicity events. They also carry out PR and advertising services like placing advertisements, helping clients develop a message and get it published in op-eds, and general media relations. Since 2001, the firm has been known as Shirley & Banister, after Craig Shirley offered Diana Banister – a lead consultant in organizing the GOTV efforts for the presidential runs of Bob Dole and Pat Buchanan – a partnership.

The firm's founder and CEO, Craig Shirley, is quite well known in his own right not only as a conservative intellectual and trusted consultant

---

[9] Emphases are mine.

but also as a *New York Times* best-selling author for his book about the days surrounding the attack on Pearl Harbor, *December 1941*. He had previously written two books about Ronald Reagan: one about his failed 1976 campaign that, Shirley argues, helped to revive the Republican Party, and another about Reagan's landslide victory in 1980. Shirley was not merely an outside observer to these events, as one of his first political posts was at the Fund for a Conservative Majority's "$750,000 independent expenditure campaign" in support of Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign, followed by a 1982 stint as a communications advisor to the RNC and another as director of communications for the National Conservative Political Action Committee during the 1984 campaign.[10] His involvement with the conservative movement has continued in the years since Reagan's presidency, not only through his consulting work but also through the Political Action Committee (PAC) affiliated with George H.W. Bush's 1988 presidential campaign, Bob Dole's 1992 run, and George W. Bush's election (and the Florida recount) in 2000.

SBPA's work on behalf of associations is extensive, and includes consulting for the Tea Party Patriots, Christian Coalition, Heritage Foundation, NRA, National Taxpayers Union, and Citizens United (the plaintiff and namesake in the landmark 2010 Supreme Court decision, *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, which removed restrictions on independent political expenditures by corporations and unions). And part of that work is the development of coalitions on behalf of the client, which the firm describes in the following manner:

Often, when developing a client's campaign, a key element can be the development of a coalition under which many voices can speak out in support of the client's efforts or concerns. We have developed many such coalitions dealing with a myriad of issues and have excellent relations with both Washington and state-based think tanks from the Heritage Foundation, AEI, Cato, Progress & Freedom Foundation, and Competitive Enterprise Institute to the Hudson Institute, the Manhattan Institute and many others. They can often be the difference between the success and failure of a public affairs campaign.

[10] Gill Report (2012).

The firm's work for particular advocacy clients has included helping to promote the Defund the Stimulus coalition, backed by advocacy groups including Let Freedom Ring, Americans for Tax Reform, and the Restore the Dream Foundation.[11] This follows earlier work in which SBPA helped Let Freedom Ring with their media relations and the grassroots presence for its WeNeedAFence.com campaign surrounding immigration reform.[12] SBPA also helped the Club for Growth with its message promoting tax reform, Social Security privatization, and "fiscal responsibility," and former CFG president Stephen Moore (now on the editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal*) suggested in promotional materials that the firm helped his organization to move from relative obscurity into being a household name during the 2004 elections.[13] SBPA also managed the Tea Party Patriots' "No Tax Compromise" petition drive in December 2010,[14] when Tea Party activists were furious over the agreement between President Obama and Congressional Republicans to extend the Bush-era tax cuts for two years while also maintaining benefits to the unemployed and temporarily cutting payroll taxes.[15]

What the work of firms like Crossroads Campaign Solutions and Shirley & Banister Public Affairs tells us is that public affairs consulting firms have become quite rooted in the advocacy communities in which they operate. They are trusted sources of guidance, providers of data, PR counselors, and advocacy experts. Consultants help to provide strategic guidance to associations' campaigns, while also extending their reach into otherwise untapped pools of support. Despite these benefits, these cases also make clear that consultants help to further professionalize associations and require that significant resources be paid to consulting firms rather than being devoted to other priorities.

As I explain in the next section, associational professionalism and contracting with consultants are tendencies that appear to go hand in hand.

Understanding contemporary advocacy

The field of American advocacy organizations has undergone some major changes over the past half-century. As shown in Chapter 3 (see

---

[11] SBPA (2011a).   [12] SBPA (2011b).   [13] SBPA (2011c).   [14] SBPA (2010).
[15] Herszenhorn and Calmes (2010).

Figure 3.2), the density of the advocacy sector has increased dramatically since the 1960s, in what political scientist Jeffrey Berry once called the "advocacy explosion."[16] Following the "long sixties" protest wave in the US and the major expansion of federal regulatory powers during that same period, organized advocates saw vast new opportunities to have their say through legislatures, agencies, and courts, which were all making attempts to become more transparent.[17] An increasingly educated populace with disposable resources to donate to advocacy causes provided further wind in the sails of civic and political associations. For Congress in particular, the 1970s-era "sunshine laws," which, of course, take their name from Justice Louis Brandeis's famous statement that sunlight is "the best of disinfectants," decentralized power in Congress and broadened the range of opportunities for advocacy groups to have a voice in legislative decision-making; one study showed that even for long-standing interest groups like the National Audubon Society and unions like the United Automobile Workers, their invitations to deliver testimony before the House of Representatives increased dramatically in the period following these reforms.[18]

The post-sixties explosion of advocacy organizations was indeed staggering. While there were only 627 national associations active on general matters of public affairs in 1972, that figure had climbed to 2,249 associations by 1990, seeing some decline but largely remaining steady throughout the 1990s.[19] Even after adjusting for population growth, the field of national advocacy groups per capita nearly doubled between 1972 and 2003.

Along with this came the professionalization of many organizations, as groups that emerged out of the sixties-era social movements of the left came to play the role of well-established interest groups with professional staff, more stable flows of resources (often from foundation

---

[16] Berry (1997); see also Walker (1991).
[17] On advocacy responses to the widening regulatory scope of the state, see Skocpol (2007); on disclosure policies, see, e.g., Fung, Graham, and Weil (2007).
[18] Heitshusen (2000: 153).
[19] Author tabulation using data from the *Encyclopedia of Associations*' "public affairs" subject heading. For a detailed description of this data source and justification for using it in research on advocacy, see Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner (2011: 1325–1329) and also Appendix 6.

grants), and relatively routinized means of engaging in politics. Not long thereafter, groups on the right gained traction, linked to Christian conservative organizations, right-wing entrepreneurs in the legal profession, anti-tax groups, and those pressing back against new regulations on business.[20] On both sides, groups learned how to pair the ground game of mass public participation with more professional tactics like advertising, direct lobbying, and campaign contributions.[21] Between the late 1960s and early years of the new century, there was also a large numeric (but not proportional) increase in "associations without members," including policy institutes, think tanks, centers, and research funds that advocate on public issues while not enrolling individuals as members (or, importantly, building social ties between those who engage on their behalf).[22] Membership organizations, for their part, were professionalizing their fundraising, using supply-side recruitment strategies, and packaging their activities in a desirable way for funding by foundations and other would-be patrons.[23]

Professionalization, in part, made advocacy groups more amenable to hiring public affairs consultants to help them to reach beyond their existing constituencies, especially when a pressing policy matter arose for an organization. It did so in at least three ways: by (1) Helping to redefine "grassroots" away from its traditional meaning as participation that is unique, unprompted, local, and spontaneous and shifting its meaning toward a more encompassing definition that focuses instead on mass participation in general, regardless of whether participation is prompted by an organization or professional; (2) The professionals working in public affairs firms often have backgrounds in campaign consulting and/or advocacy politics (as I described in Chapter 3), and employ many of the same tactics as advocacy groups in order to advance their client's cause; (3) The in-house staff of advocacy organizations often find that their time is quite scarce, and know that the hard work of grassroots advocacy through canvassing, signature gathering, micro-targeted communications, and phone banking can often be done

---

[20] Skocpol (2007); Teles (2010).
[21] See Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner (2011).
[22] Skocpol (2003); Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner (2011). See also Minkoff, Aisenbrey, and Agnone (2008).
[23] Jordan and Maloney (1997); Bosso (2005); Shaiko (1999); Jenkins (2006).

in a more cost-effective fashion by consulting shops and vendors. Some commentators worry that such "outsourcing" may be detracting from the vibrancy of civil society, while also removing the paid organizing staff of such campaigns from more meaningful political engagement.[24]

The link between the professionalization of advocacy organizations and their interest in hiring a consultant was described to me in rather succinct fashion by Bill Hoover of Field Engagement, Inc., introduced earlier in this chapter. As he argued in our conversation,

I would say the line of demarcation [between which groups hire us versus those who don't] is one of resources. Organizations that are more well resourced tend to turn to consultants more quickly.

He continued, arguing that such associations commonly have a professional staff who

understand . . . or will have familiarity working with, other sorts of consultants, and it's just more in their culture [. . .] There are groups . . . including some where I have good friends working, [that] think the idea of a for-profit grassroots consulting firm is anathema to their ideals, and my response to that is part of what we're able to do as consultants is stay on top of the very latest trends and developments, and we're also able to borrow and move things across worlds. So we take things from the political world to the advocacy world all the time; from faith organizing back into political organizing all the time. And when you're an organization – even if you're a really, really good grassroots organization – you're often operating in one world, and we're not.

I think we are supported by a growing recognition that traditional [grassroots] strategies are not getting you far enough.

However, while this provides some initial indication of the factors behind advocacy groups' work with consultants, it's unclear whether resources and professionalism are the only driving forces behind such collaborations between advocacy groups and consultants. In the following section, I describe the results of a systematic analysis of the hiring of consulting firms by national-level advocacy organizations. After presenting the results of that investigation, I return to the question of how best to understand the contemporary advocacy sector and the place of consultants within it.

---

[24] Fisher (2006).

Hiring of consultants by national advocacy organizations

The evidence presented in Chapter 3 provided some indication that public affairs consultants tend to have a complementary (rather than competitive or substitute) relationship with advocacy organizations. The "advocacy explosion" since the early 1970s helped to support the founding of new grassroots public affairs consultancies. But exactly which features of advocacy groups are most complementary to the work of consultants? I now consider a number of features that, based upon previous studies of civic and political associations, should be systematically linked with such participatory "outsourcing" by advocacy groups.

Professionalization and resources

Based upon Bill Hoover's commentary above, one might expect resources and professionalization to be central to consultants' associational work. An association can be said to be professionalized when certain individuals spend full-time hours doing advocacy work, when a set of normative constraints exist on staff (such as a code of ethics), when a professional organization exists to coordinate the efforts of staff, and when members of the profession possess specialized knowledge that they employ in their service to clients. Sarah Sobieraj argues that one consequence of these transformations has been to limit the development of participants' civic skills.[25]

Professional groups often use direct mail recruitment and mobilization of members, and, more recently, appeals through mass email and blogs. Many of these campaigns target primarily those with higher levels of education and income, both because of their increased likelihood to take action as well as to provide financial support.[26]

Associations with a heavy professional staff presence, although they are only a minority of the broader associational field, are likely to differ from the more common grassroots, member-driven organizational form in a variety of ways.[27] Primarily, groups with larger staffs should be likely to call on members to lobby their representatives, because

---

[25] Sobieraj (2006).   [26] Brady, Schlozman, and Verba (1999).
[27] On the prevalence of grassroots associations without any paid staff, see Smith (1997).

powerful interest groups can activate their constituents both as group members and as individual voters in legislative districts. And organizations with larger staffs have a greater organizational capacity to mobilize members, and can carry out a variety of activities to get members active on pertinent issues.

In addition, organizations may not wish to tie up their staffs with the somewhat mundane functions that a consultant could provide: mass mailings, phone banks, and the like, alongside media and PR strategies to support the organization's image; because those larger staffs could perhaps be put to better use, it is also possible that professionalized organizations will be more likely to hire a firm.

With respect to resources, Chapter 4 illustrated that the services of a consultant are expensive. Although a number of consultants I interviewed reported billing associational clients at a lower rate than they require of their business clients, nonetheless consultants often require a substantial outlay of funds on the part of an advocacy organization.

Overall, then, *I expect that groups having a larger staff size and a larger budget will be more likely to contract with a public affairs consultant.*

Federated structure

While the field of advocacy organizations has changed in many ways in recent years, the trend of federation – that is, of having regional, state, and/or local chapters – appears to have remained relatively stable.[28] Although federations come with the advantage of widespread coordination across geographic regions and levels of government, there are potential costs involved in maintaining such a structure, such as divided loyalties between branch groups and the national office, the potential for conflict over resources and members between chapters, and the risk that chapters will become autonomous.[29] Regardless of these challenges, federated organizations require extensive communication and harmonization between the various organizational levels. In addition, because the existence of a federated structure suggests that such groups are politically active at multiple levels of government,[30] these groups have an interest in promoting the grassroots activation of

---

[28] McCarthy (2005b: 204–205).   [29] Ibid.
[30] Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson (2000).

their members while employing mechanisms for coordinating those efforts. The services of a consultant, then, *should be more common among groups with regional, state, and/or local branches.*

Membership size and structure

Alongside the widespread growth of the field of associations throughout the 1970s and 1980s, particularly at the national level,[31] both large-scale membership organizations as well as non-membership groups (foundations, centers, think tanks, and other policy-planning organizations) came to play a more prominent role in American political life.

Although having a mass membership base does not *require* that an organization utilize mass marketing and public relations techniques in order to activate members, it certainly does appear to provide incentives for such action. In large associations, even though members may express strong commitment to the group and many volunteer for the organization, such groups often use telemarketing services to send messages to members and deploy targeted direct mail. It follows that *organizations with a larger membership base will be more likely to hire a grassroots lobbying firm not just because their large member base represents a political asset, but also because with scale comes an increased need for outside, specialized technical assistance.*

It is also reasonable to expect that so-called "associations without members," or "non-membership advocacy organizations," will be quite likely to work with consultants. These are advocacy groups with a paid staff but no individuals or organizations enrolled as members.[32] Such groups depend upon interested individuals who participate in the organization only as financial benefactors or as outside advocates that can be activated in grassroots lobbying campaigns. Therefore, it seems *especially likely that non-membership organizations will hire a grassroots lobbying firm.* Because these advocacy groups use targeted donor and advocate lists in order to recruit individuals into political participation (primarily into the act of contacting representatives), they may use firms to help create a constituency.

---

[31] Berry (1999).
[32] On such groups, see Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner (2011).

Founding cohort

As I described in Chapter 3, not long after the explosion of new advocacy organizations, a variety of organized interests began to focus on mobilizing public activism in lobbying efforts. The activism of the Public Interest Movement – one professionalized from the start, with a heavy focus on employing educated staff in order to shape the content of legislation – helped to make known the power of the media and negative publicity in shaping the action of political institutions.[33] I therefore *expect that organizations founded after 1975 will be most likely to hire a consultant*, because the founding of these advocacy group cohorts were contemporaneous with the rise of grassroots lobbying and the increasing professionalization of this organizational population. As Arthur Stinchcombe once argued, the formative experiences of an organization are likely to have substantial "imprinting" effects on its future actions.[34]

Capital location

Finally, the political emphasis of an association should be a strong predictor not only of an organization's likelihood to engage in inside lobbying, testimony before legislative committees, and campaign contributions, but also the mobilization of rank-and-file members. One of the central means by which an organization attempts to influence political outcomes is by having an office in the nation's capital. Therefore, *I expect that groups with a DC headquarters will be significantly more likely to hire a grassroots consultant*, regardless of the issue area in which a group is active.

Issue focus

Finally, groups interested in mobilizing their members in political action are likely to be those that engage in issues on which public input would be influential in swaying legislative decisions without requiring high levels of specialization or expertise. In addition, organizations active in lobbying are less likely to be those that engage in merely social activity – for example, a local cultural association – and more likely to engage in

---

[33] Vogel (1989).   [34] Stinchcombe (1965).

issues with broader political implications, such as those regarding public affairs, social welfare, health, and environmental quality. It was in these issue areas that many of the new, professionalized interest organizations became active, amplifying the voices of a variety of Americans formerly excluded from group representation.[35] It follows that I *expect groups involved in the issue areas of public affairs, health, social welfare, and the environment will be more likely to hire a consulting firm than groups working in other issue areas.*

Findings

Table 6.1 presents the results of a logistic regression model predicting the likelihood that an advocacy organization will contract with at least one grassroots public affairs consultant in 2010.[36] I use data from the *Encyclopedia of Associations* to identify the population of national advocacy associations in the US, and all data on the factors that shape their likelihood of contracting with a consultant are derived from that data source. Additional details about these models and the measurement of variables are available in Appendix 6.

I use a rare events logistic regression estimator because the outcome is binary (contracted with a consultant or did not), and because only a small fraction – 3 percent – of the thousands of national advocacy organizations in the US hire a consultant. Although this is a small number, one should not underestimate the importance of this subset of the US advocacy community. Because of their immense membership sizes and budgets – grouping this small number of associations together, they have a combined membership of nearly 150 million[37] and an aggregate budget of $7.86 billion – their work with consultants is nonetheless a substantial force in American politics.

The results in Model 1 (left) of Table 6.1 provide modest support for most of the expectations outlined above. The most statistically significant effects in the model include three factors in particular: resources (budget), professionalization (staff size), and whether the organization

---

[35] Berry (1997); see also Walker (1991).
[36] A logit estimator was employed because the dependent variable was collapsed into a binary; it was relatively rare for an association to appear on more than one firm's client list.
[37] Of course, many individuals are members of multiple organizations, so this figure is not directly applicable as a proportion of the US population.

Table 6.1 *Rare event logistic regression of hiring a consultant by an advocacy organization*

Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coef.	Robust S.E.	Coef.	Robust S.E.
Resources and professionalization				
Budget (logged)	0.437**	(0.136)	0.518***	(0.092)
Staff (logged)	0.501**	(0.147)	0.291**	(0.107)
Federated structure				
Regional chapters (dummy)	0.259	(0.320)	0.185	(0.277)
State chapters (dummy)	0.762**	(0.283)	1.060***	(0.240)
Local chapters (dummy)	–0.492+	(0.280)	–0.151	(0.282)
Membership size/structure				
Members (logged)	0.171**	(0.061)	–	–
Non-membership org. (dummy)	–	–	–0.316	(0.339)
Founding cohort				
Founded 1976–1985 (dummy)	0.014	(0.378)	0.139	(0.297)
Founded 1986–1995 (dummy)	0.109	(0.793)	–0.034	(0.639)
Capitol location				
Washington, DC headquarters (dummy)	1.038**	(0.300)	1.133***	(0.245)
Issue area				
Educational	0.415	(1.134)	0.944	(1.085)
Environmental	1.945*	(0.975)	1.984+	(1.036)
Governmental	1.817+	(0.985)	1.800+	(1.049)
Health/medical	1.997*	(0.913)	1.934+	(0.991)
Public affairs	2.646**	(0.952)	2.599**	(1.000)
Religious	0.453	(1.262)	0.174	(1.395)
Social welfare	1.938*	(0.963)	1.458	(1.027)
Constant	–14.999***	(1.926)	–14.203***	(1.455)
N	2738		3628	

Significance levels: + $p \leq .10$; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

has a Washington, DC headquarters. More specifically, these effects translate to notably higher rates of contracting for organizations with each of these characteristics: each additional 20 percent increase in budget leads to an 8 percent increase in contracting, each 20 percent increase in staff size is associated with a 10 percent increase, and organizations with a DC headquarters are nearly three times as likely as those outside the District to hire a consultant. Contracting advocacy groups have median budgets approximately fourteen times the median budget of non-contracting groups, and staff sizes around eight times larger. Above all else, then, contracting with consultants is most common among advocacy groups that are professionalized, exceptionally well resourced, and Washingtonbased, thus lending further support to the suggestion by Bill Hoover at the start of this chapter about the importance of funding and professionalism.

Other factors also have a significant effect on contracting with consultants. In particular, an organization's membership size matters quite considerably. The logistic regression estimates in Model 1 of Table 6.1 show that each additional 20 percent increase in membership size is associated with a statistically significant 3 percent increase in contracting. This finding suggests that contracting is concentrated among organizations with exceptionally large membership sizes, and is further confirmed by the fact that although non-contracting advocacy organizations have median memberships of 775, the comparable figure for contracting organizations is nearly thirty times larger, at 23,000.

Model 2, however, shows that non-membership organizations – policy-planning organizations, institutes, think tanks, and similar organizations that are dominated by paid staff and lack any membership in the usual sense – are no more or less likely to contract with consultants. Although a variety of non-membership advocacy organizations do contract with consultants – ranging from conservative groups like the American Family Foundation, Heritage Foundation, and the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation to progressive groups like Children's Defense Fund, NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, and Families USA Foundation – being a non-membership group is not systematically related to hiring a consultant. This reinforces a finding of my earlier study with John McCarthy and Frank Baumgartner: that there is a well-established division of labor in the broader advocacy community between non-membership groups

and more traditional member-based associations.[38] Non-membership groups leave the mass mobilization activities to membership groups, although they often support the latters' efforts to build public participation. Part of that repertoire of member mobilization by large advocacy groups now includes work with consultants to help win in policy battles.

Returning to the summary findings in Model 1, the results illustrate that groups that are federated and have state (or, to a lesser extent, local) chapters are significantly more likely to hire a firm. Groups with state chapters are, in fact, over twice as likely to hire a consultant, although those with local or regional chapters are no more or less likely to hire a consultant than those without such chapters. Importantly, then, it appears that engagement in *state* politics in particular drives national advocacy groups to hire consultants for assistance in those subnational policy environments. Consultants help advocacy groups with gathering signatures to support or oppose state ballot measures, to lobby state legislatures on issues of interest, and to influence state-level regulatory agencies, in addition to the services they provide to organizations on the federal level.

These models also make clear that advocacy groups active in certain issue areas are much more likely to work with a consultant. Associations active in the areas of public affairs, environment, health and medical issues, and general social welfare are much more likely to be involved than the reference category (cultural organizations), and I find a weak effect for groups that represent governmental interests. Educational, religious, and governmental organizations are not significantly more likely than cultural organizations to engage the services of a consultant.

Lastly, the results in Model 1 illustrate that an organization's founding cohort is not systematically related to its likelihood of working with a consultant. Organizations founded during the peak period of the "advocacy explosion" are not any more or less likely to work with a consultant, and this finding is robust to alternative model specifications.[39] Thus, although Chapter 3 illustrated that public affairs

---

[38] Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner (2011).
[39] The model was also estimated using dummy variables for additional cohorts, and was alternatively estimated using a continuous measure of organizational age. None of these variables were significant in either specification.

consulting expanded considerably in the years following the vast expansion of advocacy organizations in the 1970s and 1980s, associations founded during this period are not significantly more likely to work with consultants than groups founded before this period. The factors that seem to matter more involve resources, professionalization, membership size, and a focus on federal and/or state-level policy within particular issue domains.

Conclusion

This chapter started by suggesting that although corporations are not typically structured for grassroots advocacy and require the boundary-spanning services offered by public affairs consultants, advocacy organizations have less need for consultants because they can utilize their own in-house structures. However, as shown in Chapter 4, advocacy groups still represent nearly one out of every five clients for the average consulting firm, and also represent a roughly proportional share of consultants' revenue. Thus, although most advocacy groups will not need to work with consultants, certain (typically very large and well resourced) advocacy organizations do. And, as illustrated at the start of this chapter, in the cases of Crossroads Campaign Soultions and Shirley & Banister Public Affairs, some consulting firms are playing an important and active role in the progressive and conservative movements in the contemporary United States.

Taking a systematic look at which national advocacy associations appear on their client lists, the evidence in this chapter revealed that consultants seem to complement the member mobilization strategies of advocacy groups. Although only a fraction of groups hire consultants, they represent many of the very largest advocacy organizations in the United States. Consultants are significantly more likely to be hired by advocacy groups that are more professionalized, well resourced, and have a sizable body of members. In addition, groups that have state chapters, are Washington based, and those that are active on the issues of social welfare, public affairs, health, and environment are all significantly more likely to hire a consultant. Advocacy groups with only a professional staff and no members – so-called "associations without members" – are no more or less likely to hire a consultant than traditional membership groups.

The findings of this chapter, then, indicate that consultants complement the work of advocacy organizations rather than replacing their member-mobilization capacities. My investigations of the client lists of consultants as well as my interviews with them indicate that consultants are often called upon when groups need to reach beyond their existing membership base, often either to target specific demographic groups and/or to manage coalitions and partnerships with other organizations. They often do so using strategies and data provided by the staff and members of advocacy groups themselves. In many ways, then, their work represents the next step in the professionalization of social movements and grassroots organizing.

7 | *Participatory and policy impacts*

Introduction

The preceding chapters have developed an account of how civic and political change made possible the development of the field of public mobilization consultants. But while the evidence assembled thus far shows rather clearly that a market has indeed developed for these services and that these consultants are used widely by diverse organizations, the account has thus far left aside the question of the *effectiveness* of these campaigns in both mobilizing the public and also in generating policy change. Although the prevalence of these practices provides some indication that these grassroots campaigns are *seen* as effective, it remains possible that, like many other well-established organizational practices,[1] usage is decoupled from efficacy. That is, organizations often adopt practices believed to be effective even when they may be fruitless or even counterproductive.

Studies by scholars of social movements and organized advocacy draw attention to a variety of factors that tend to be influential in the mobilization and policy outcomes of grassroots campaigns: the resources that groups can bring to bear, their skill in making alliances with policy elites, and their ability to carefully craft and frame their message. Although these factors tend to be applied to informal citizen advocacy groups and those who lack routine access through existing channels of policy influence, I argue in this chapter that many of the same explanations can be applied to "grassroots for hire" campaigns in which elite political consultants target key public audiences for mobilization on behalf of their paying clients.[2]

---

[1] Meyer and Rowan (1977); Tolbert and Zucker (1983).

[2] Jeffrey Haydu (1999) makes a similar argument about elite counter-mobilization in his study of employers' strategic responses to unions in the late nineteenth century. See also Useem and Zald (1982).

However, there is one key difference in the effectiveness of consultant-driven campaigns as opposed to those organized by citizen groups on their own: the ability to mobilize displays of support from apparently *independent constituencies*. Thus, when a major big-box retailer seeks to open a new grocery and retail outlet in a low-income area despite strong community opposition, no one is surprised when the company's executives make forceful arguments that the new store should be permitted. Mobilization by suppliers and distributors also isn't likely to register much attention. But when public health advocates join the campaign and note that the proposed location is otherwise a "food desert"[3] where local residents lack access to quality food, policy-makers may be more likely to notice. Similarly, displays of support for the company among low-income local residents and small business owners would also seem to suggest a certain breadth of the company's coalition, indicating that those who are not obvious corporate benefi-ciaries are also on board with the company's plans. Such has, in fact, been Wal-Mart's strategy in its effort to open a new store in New York City (as described in Chapter 5).[4] Such strategies are consistent with the expectations of the resource mobilization approach to the study of advocacy, rooted in the classic work of John McCarthy and Mayer Zald.[5] As they suggested, advocacy causes whose primary base is among resource-providing outsiders must often mobilize those in the beneficiary group for strategic legitimating purposes, as the AFL-CIO did when it organized new senior citizen constituencies in favor of Medicare legislation in the 1960s.[6]

As the big-box retailer example above suggests, these seemingly *independent constituencies* are often the disadvantaged, especially in campaigns that are initiated by an elite corporate client. But we know, of course, from bodies of research in sociology and political science that the disadvantaged are uniquely difficult for political organizers to activate.[7] The less educated often lack access to the information

---

[3] See, for example, Cummins and Macintyre (2002).   [4] Olivo (2004).
[5] McCarthy and Zald (1977).   [6] Ibid.: 1215, 1235.
[7] E.g., Schattschneider (1960); Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (2012); Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995); Brady, Schlozman, and Verba (1999); Verba (2003).

necessary for participation,[8] those with low incomes are forced to prioritize meeting basic needs over finding the time to become politically active,[9] and racial inequalities also distort civic and political engagement.[10] Knowing this, recruiters for political causes tend to pay disproportionate attention to soliciting the activity of those who are most likely to say "yes" to their requests, and these tend to be those educated and well-resourced individuals already over-represented in the political system.[11] This is the process of supply-side recruitment described in Chapter 2.

Putting these considerations together raises a key question of whether consultant-driven campaigns either prioritize activating independent constituencies (often the disadvantaged), or, by contrast, follow a rational actor strategy and focus on those who are easiest to mobilize (often the advantaged). The consequences of these investigations have implications for whether consultants are promoting further inequality in political representation across the US, or are instead raising up the voice of the disadvantaged. What this chapter shows is that public affairs consultants attempt to optimize by employing *both strategies*. They seek out the likely voters among those who can be framed as independent of their client's interests. They disproportionately target the highly educated, but also seek to expand their client's coalition and make it more diverse. And recall the finding from Chapter 5 that regardless of a company's reputation, firms with more internal diversity are much more likely to take a grassroots approach.

I begin this chapter by using data from the SPAPCO survey to provide some general information on how consultants tend to rate their own effectiveness, in terms of winning campaigns for their clients and mobilizing public participation. These data reveal that above all else, consultants focus on meeting both of the above goals at once: focusing on pre-existing civic activists who represent *independent constituencies* on this particular campaign. They therefore promote civic inequality in some ways but work against it in others.

---

[8] As Verba and colleagues (1995: 433) put it, education is the "prime factor in most analyses of political activity . . . it affects the acquisition of [civic] skills; it channels opportunities for high levels of income and occupation; it places individuals in institutional settings where they can be recruited to political activity; and it fosters psychological and cognitive engagement with politics."

[9] Imig (1996).   [10] E.g., Burns, Schlozman, and Verba (2001: 274–306).

[11] Brady, Schlozman, and Verba (1999); Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (2012).

   I continue by describing two campaigns initiated by corporate clients, one of which failed (Working Families for Wal-Mart) and one of which was successful (rail company Canadian National's campaign to acquire another rail line despite fierce resistance). Both of these campaigns sought both policy change and to mobilize popular participation on behalf of the client. Both also developed strategic frames that resonated with key audiences, had some elite allies, brought substantial resources to bear on the problem, and faced organized opposition. However, the Canadian National campaign was successful because the company, with the help of consultants I interviewed, was able to mobilize *independent constituencies* who had an authentic grievance that aligned with the campaign's corporate sponsor. The Wal-Mart campaign failed because it was unable to generate independent participation despite substantial efforts to develop displays of political support among working-class residents, suppliers, and customers. Consistent with what other sociologists have suggested, effective campaigns sponsored by elites often "look very much like the [bottom-up] efforts that they are intended to replicate."[12]

   The major implication of these cases is that although elites can generate policy change through social movement-like channels, their ability to do so is constrained, in part, by the independent force of organized civil society. Thus, a major conclusion of this book is that influence mediated by civil society cannot simply be purchased by corporations or others who hire public affairs consultants to win on policy issues.

Ingredients for success in (commercial) grassroots campaigns

Theory and research on social movements and advocacy has drawn attention to a variety of social forces that shape collective actors' capacities both for mounting a campaign and also for winning their goals. It would not, in fact, be a stretch to argue that the evaluation of movement effectiveness has become the dominant strain of sociological research on collective action.[13] And political scientists have long sought answers to the question of how we can know whether interest groups of various types are successful both in setting elite policy

---

[12] McNutt and Boland (2007: 167).   [13] Amenta et al. (2010); Walder (2009).

agendas and in generating policy change.[14] Although not typically applied to paid lobbying, some commentators have begun to pay greater attention to the role of consulting firms, political professionals, and policy elites in helping grassroots advocates to make their case to the public and to policymakers.[15]

Undoubtedly, resources and organization are a major factor in determining the policy influence of any collective actor, from a low-income community organization to a major corporate effort to have a merger approved by regulators. In sociology, resource mobilization theory offers the suggestion that collective action is most likely to be mounted not just on the basis of shared public grievances about an issue, but more in response to the availability of new resources and organization that can be brought to bear on the issue.[16] Thus, funding of issue entrepreneurship is key for giving voice to popular grievances. Those who study interest groups make quite similar arguments about the importance of elite patronage for the vitality of the interest group sector.[17] Patrons tend to have less uncertainty about supporting more professionalized organizations, which may indirectly lead to under-representation for socially disadvantaged groups that are more informal and struggle to win patronage.[18] On the other hand, a detailed recent study of advocacy effectiveness by Frank Baumgartner and colleagues showed that resources are only weakly correlated with policy success.[19]

Organizers also need the policy environment to be poised to give their issue a full hearing.[20] Collective action, even when well funded and thoroughly organized, is likely to be unsuccessful when a movement lacks sympathetic leaders in established positions of power, such as in the leadership of legislatures, regulatory agencies, or the courts.[21] Edwin Amenta and colleagues refer to this as the "political mediation" model of collective action, in which grassroots social movements are dependent upon political insiders to carry their message forward and

---

[14] Baumgartner et al. (2009); Kingdon (1984); Baumgartner and Jones (1993).
[15] Fisher (2006); Skocpol and Williamson (2010); Howard (2006); Kreiss (2012).
[16] McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977); Jenkins and Eckert (1986); Soule and King (2008); Walker and McCarthy (2010).
[17] Walker (1991); Berry (1997).   [18] Ibid.
[19] Baumgartner et al. (2009: 221–232).
[20] Meyer (2004); Amenta et al. (2010).   [21] Ibid.

generate policy change.[22] Such opportunities may change depending on shifting configurations of power among political elites, whether the grassroots campaign has elite allies, how strong the opposition is (and whether the opposition can effectively shut off the claims-making of the campaign), and whether grassroots organizers are aware of such opportunities when they exist.[23]

Messaging is also crucial, especially in that advocacy campaigns need to develop a strategic frame that helps to diagnose the problem, offer a solution to that problem, and offer potential activists a compelling account to motivate participation on the issue.[24] Although effective messaging is likely to require resources, organization, and connections to elite political allies,[25] it is clear to many analysts that an advocacy campaign's broader message must resonate with audiences by seeming both credible and salient to activists.[26]

Campaigns organized by consultants need all of these factors to come together. Despite their greater level of professionalization, access to detailed data about likely activists, and backing of a paying sponsor (not to mention the sponsor's local knowledge about the issue and context), consultants nonetheless face many of the concerns of grassroots organizers of all stripes.

However, there is one factor that appears to matter even more when a paying (often elite) sponsor seeks to generate grassroots activism: *the breadth of the coalition that can be activated as a part of the campaign, especially by facilitating the support of audiences who do not appear to have an obviously self-interested motivation for engagement.* That is, in elite-sponsored advocacy campaigns, it becomes especially crucial to signal to the public and to policymakers that the campaign has support among a broad set of constituencies. Although scholars have recognized that the globalization of advocacy and changing character of civil society has encouraged a greater focus on coalition-building among collective actors,[27] the coalitions that elite actors build when seeking to mobilize participation are less well known.[28] Sometimes these coalitions are referred to as coalitions of "Baptists and bootleggers," as in

---

[22] Amenta, Carruthers, and Zylan (1992).
[23] Snow and Soule (2010: 64–86); Meyer and Staggenborg (1996).
[24] Snow et al. (1986); Benford and Snow (2000a).
[25] Ryan and Gamson (2006).   [26] Snow and Benford (1998).
[27] E.g., Van Dyke and McCammon (2010).
[28] But see McCarthy (2005a); Goldstein (1999: 106–124); Kollman (1998: 78–100).

Bruce Yandle's well-known parable; both are interested in restricting alcohol sales on Sunday, but for entirely different reasons. Still, the Baptists provide tacit moral cover for the more profane pecuniary interests of the bootleggers.[29]

The consideration of coalition breadth or *independent constituencies* offers a powerful line of defense for consultants when they are pressed by critical publics about their role in orchestrating a citizen response for a paying client. As discussed in Chapter 4, public affairs consultants are naturally quite sensitive to the concern that their campaigns might be dismissed as mere "astroturf" or ersatz grassroots mobilization. Consultants worry about this accusation and the appearance that their campaigns are subverting representative democracy. As a consultant with one of the most influential firms in the field told me,

People by definition think if you hire a Washington, DC firm, it's astroturf. You know, we're paid shills or whatever the term is. And I don't think that's entirely fair because we're here in Washington, and they're in, say, Michigan. [But] when we make a Michigan coalition, there is a Michigan chairperson, real businesses, [and] real citizens that are the members of that coalition. I think coalition-building is very important.

Given this consideration, and that their clients are often very powerful corporations, trade associations, and advocacy groups, consultants need to have a relatively light touch and build as broad a coalition as possible.

Participatory outcomes: who gets targeted

In order to focus directly on the question of participatory inequality, the SPAPCO survey asked a variety of questions about the types of demographic groups that consultant-driven campaigns target when working on behalf of their paying client. As mentioned earlier, campaigns need to balance the sometimes (but not always) competing concerns of being successful in their requests (quantity) versus establishing a broad coalition of genuine supporters (quality).

---

[29] Yandle (1983); Walker (2012c).
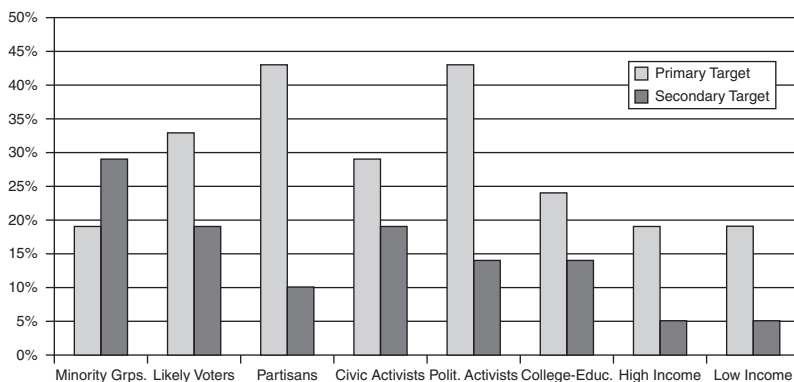
Figure 7.1 Demographic groups targeted in consultants' primary campaign (survey data)

To that end, the survey asked consultants to identify the demographic groups that they focused on mobilizing in their "primary campaign." This is defined as the campaign to which the consultant devoted the greatest amount of effort and resources (on behalf of a client) in the past six years.[30] Consultants were then asked, regarding this leading campaign, which demographic groups they targeted for activism. Respondents were given the option to identify groups as a "primary target," a "secondary target," "not a target," or "don't know." Figure 7.1 shows the percentage of respondents, respectively, who identified each demographic group as either a primary or secondary target.

Coming back to the discussion of supply-side recruitment from Chapter 2, what Figure 7.1 shows most clearly is that consultants, like other types of political recruiters, tend to prioritize those who are most likely to say yes to their requests. [31] Above all else, these citizens are pre-existing political activists and those who are strongly partisan. This partisanship may be on either side of the political spectrum, as Chapter 4 showed that the partisan consultants in the study tend to be distributed approximately evenly between the Democrats and the GOP. Consultants tend to focus on recruiting those who are most likely to say

[30] An overview of what distinguishes these primary campaigns was offered in Chapter 4.
[31] Brady, Schlozman, and Verba (1999).

"yes" to their appeals, and having a history of political activism and strong partisan commitments increases the chances that one is likely to acquiesce when a campaign reaches out.[32] This finding also squares nicely with the evidence presented in Chapter 3, which showed that an increasingly partisan public in the US has supported the founding of new public affairs consulting firms.

Figure 7.1 also indicates that public affairs consultants make serious efforts to reach out primarily to likely voters, civic activists, and the college educated, all of which are groups who are already over-represented in the political system. On the other hand, they do not seem to go out of their way to target particular income groups, whether those at the top or at the bottom of the income distribution. Combined, these findings make clear that consulting firms are playing a role in increasing participatory inequality in the US. This is especially significant, given that the leading campaign by the firms in the sample claims to have reached out to a median estimated 4,000 citizens and mobilized nearly 1,000 of those contacts.

While the bulk of evidence in Figure 7.1 provides support for the participatory inequality thesis, it also shows that campaigns seek a broad coalition. Importantly, nearly half of consultants said that their leading campaign involved either a primary or a secondary effort to target minority groups for participation. And nearly a quarter of consultants' main campaigns targeted low-income groups for participation.

As further evidence of the participatory outcomes of campaigns organized by public affairs consultants, Figure 7.2 shows how consultants prioritize groups of corporate stakeholders when the client is a company or industry group. Consultants were asked, again about their

---

[32] Brady and colleagues (1999: 157) find, however, that partisanship does not have an effect on requests for participation after controlling for other factors including political efficacy, information, interest, civic skills, education, and income. However, their study focuses on *any* requests received by their survey respondents, and the large majority of requests for participation come from friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, or fellow participants in civic associations (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995: 144–145). Those recruiters who are less likely to have a pre-existing personal connection to potential activists, such as public affairs consultants, need to rely on other cues that signal an individual's motivation to become active on an issue, such as whether the individual is strongly partisan. My interviews with public affairs consultants provided additional confirmation on this point, as a number of consultants noted that they focus on locating strong partisans on issues like taxation, regulation, or the environment.
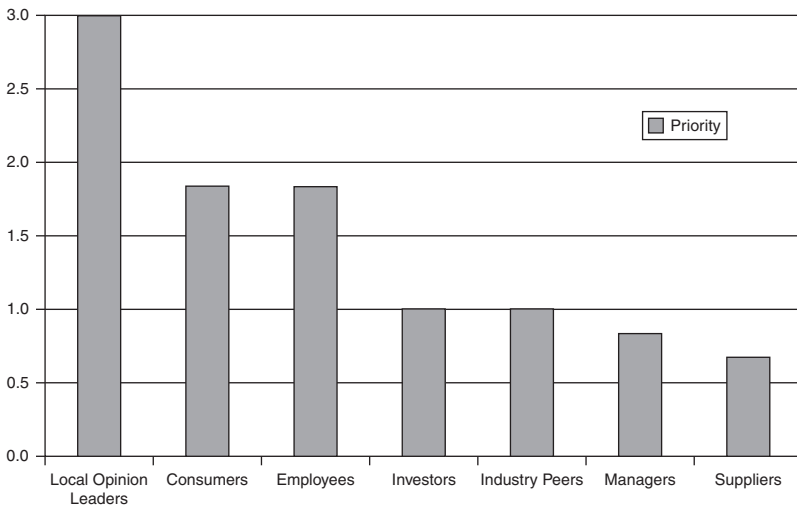
Figure 7.2 Stakeholder groups targeted for participation in corporate-sponsored campaigns (survey data)

most intensive campaign over the past six years, whether each of the following groups was a "top priority" (score of 3), a "medium priority" (2), a "low priority" (1), or "not a priority" (score of 0). The mean scores, by stakeholder type, are presented in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.2, then, provides additional evidence that both logics of organizing – rational prospecting and broad coalitions – are at work. Consulting firms are called upon by their corporate clients mainly to reach out to the broader public and to generate displays of support by local opinion leaders (described by the industry, as mentioned earlier, as the "grasstops"). In so doing, they try to reach those who are likely to influence others in their communities to support corporate projects, especially those outside the corporation's natural constituency.

Figure 7.2 also shows that consumers and employees are an important target for corporate-backed mobilization. The average consulting firm reported that while local opinion leaders are always a "top" priority, consumers and employees tend to be a "medium" priority for activation. Employees are a particularly important constituency, as management scholar Gerald Keim argues that a firm's workers are a crucial source of grassroots support in defense of a firm or industry.[33]

[33] Keim (2005).

They are not quite as significant in displaying the breadth of the coalition as local opinion leaders are, but they appear be placed a rung higher than other corporate constituencies like suppliers, managers, or investors. It is also worth noting, as argued in Chapter 4, that corporate clients often *turn to consultants for that very reason*: that consultants can help companies to reach audiences that might not be accessible through a firm's internal public affairs office.

Policy outcomes: helping the client to win

How often do consultants win for their clients?

The survey asked consultants about three of their most prominent campaigns over the past six years, listed in rank order based on the amount of effort and resources devoted to each campaign. Consultants were asked to rank campaigns on a scale of one to five, in which "1" represents not successful, "3" represents partial success, and "5" represents complete success. However, because these self-reports are subject to social desirability biases and consultants may be less willing to acknowledge devoting substantial resources to a failed campaign, I move beyond these data in the case studies that follow. Despite this concern, the anonymity of each consulting firm in the aggregate data, as well as the fact that the survey did not request that the specific client(s) be identified, should mitigate this limitation somewhat.

Overall, averaging across the three campaigns reported by each consultant, firms reported a mean success score of approximately 3.8. However, consultants varied in their success rate according to where they ranked each of the three campaigns in terms of their own effort and resources. Thus, 76 percent of consultants suggested that their primary campaign was more than a partial success (> 3), 67 percent said the same about their second campaign, and only 40 percent could claim a similar victory in their third campaign.

Campaigns also reported varying levels of success depending on the policy goal of their organizational client. Figure 7.3 breaks down the distribution of consultants' assessments of their success in meeting their client's goal according to the policy target of the campaign. For each of their three leading campaigns, consultants were asked if their client's primary goal was to "influence the outcome of a piece of legislation," "influence the policy of a government agency," "influence citizens'
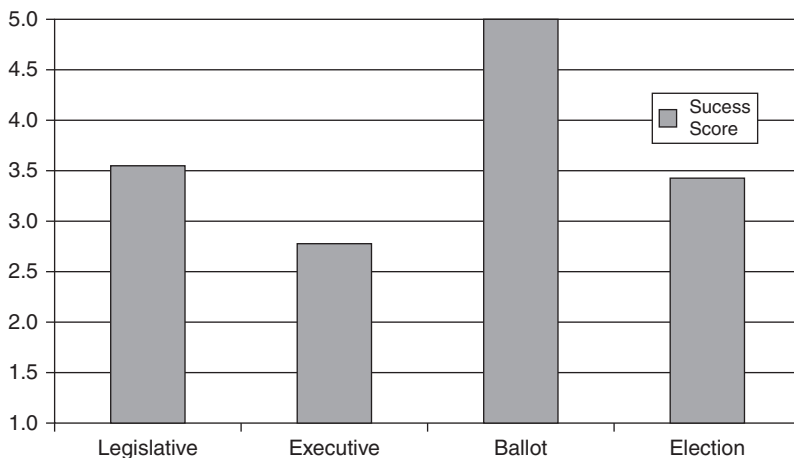
Figure 7.3 Self-reported success of campaigns, by policy goal of client (survey data)

preferences about a ballot measure, initiative, or referendum," or "influence citizens' preferences as voters about a specific candidate for office."[34] Figure 7.3 matches each success score with the client's primary goal for each campaign, and then averages those goal-specific scores across the three campaigns.

What Figure 7.3 shows most clearly is that consultants tend to report the greatest degree of success when working on shaping citizen views of ballot measures. All consultants who worked on ballot measures in one of their three leading campaigns found that they were completely successful in influencing citizen preferences about that ballot measure. Ballot measures are issue-specific and local or statewide, and voter fatigue and informational limitations plague direct democracy;[35] these factors appear to allow consultants to have a substantial influence.[36]

---

[34] Although consultants also work on campaigns that seek to influence citizen sentiments about a particular company (i.e., corporate reputation work) or the decisions of other organizations (e.g., to gain the support of a community organization, or to get another corporation to negotiate more fairly in a contract dispute), Figure 7.3 focuses on the broader public *policy outcomes* of public affairs campaigns (thus using a more restricted set of targets than those found in Figure 4.2).

[35] Bowler, Donovan, and Happ (1992).

[36] Bowler, Donovan, and Fernandez (1996).

Many consultants, in fact, specialize in getting ballot measures *qualified* rather than approved. They rate themselves much more modestly when it comes to shaping citizen opinions about a candidate for office through their grassroots mobilization services. As a consultant with Grassroots Amplifier, Inc.[37] who specializes in ballot measures told me,

[Our company has] such a simple operation ... all of our strategy has to do with just telling [our paid circulators] to keep it short and simple and understand you're not campaigning. You're just telling people, "Hey, your signature just gets you the chance to get this on the ballot." So ... when people say, "I don't know if I'm for that," well, that's OK. All that's gonna happen is that this is on the ballot. As you get more of a chance to get informed and if you're against it later, vote no.

It is also apparent that consultants have only modest success in shaping legislative decisions, and less success in influencing agency decisions. Grassroots organizing around agency decisions, as the Canadian National case below makes clear, can be more difficult. Agency-targeted campaigns are often somewhat restricted in scope due to the relatively narrow time frames of public comment periods,[38] and also because agencies themselves are constrained by the party in control of the White House and/or governorships.[39] It is also worth noting that consultants' campaigns on legislative issues were much more likely to be at the federal level (52 percent) than state (42 percent) or local (6 percent), whereas consultants were more active with agencies at the state level (50 percent) than the federal (21 percent) or local (29 percent) levels.

   Lastly, Figure 7.3 illustrates that, despite the fact that a plurality of grassroots consultants got their start in electoral consulting (see Chapter 3), they report only modest success in influencing voters; consultants report slightly less success in this realm than in shaping the outcomes of legislative votes.

Tactical effectiveness

Consultants also vary in the tactics they deploy on behalf of their clients. Consistent with the findings of proprietary reports about the field of public affairs consultants[40] and other studies that have looked at how

---

[37] A pseudonym.   [38] Carpenter et al. (2012).   [39] E.g., Shipan (2004).
[40] Public Affairs Council (2008).
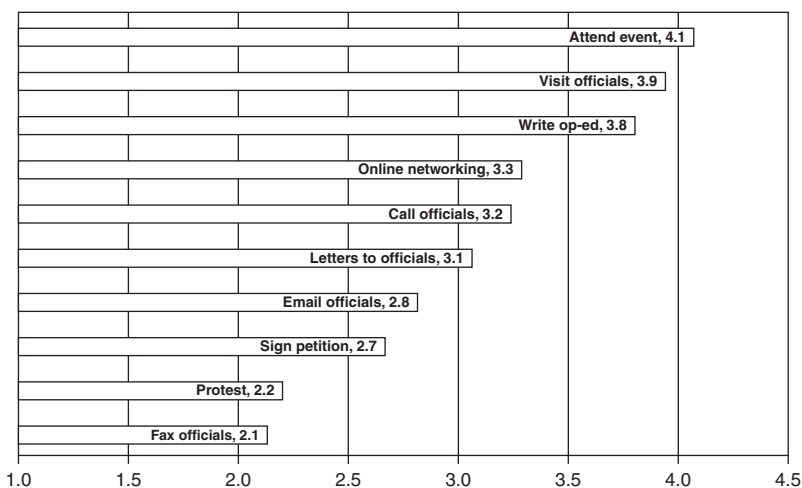
Figure 7.4 Perceived effectiveness of tactics for mobilizing public participation (survey data)

civic and political organizations mobilize public participation,[41] consultants often reported in interviews that they face a trade-off between mobilizing large volumes of participation using low-cost tactics versus smaller volumes of participation using higher-cost tactics. Although it would be appealing if every constituent from a Congressperson's district were willing to fly out for a meeting with their representative, very few are usually willing to bear that high cost.

In order to consider the effectiveness of the various forms of public participation that consultants request of those they target on behalf of their clients, Figure 7.4 displays consultants' evaluations of the effectiveness of each tactic for winning their client's goals, sorted in order of reported effectiveness.

Indeed, the effectiveness scores associated with each tactic do, by and large, fit with the expectation that high-cost tactics are most effective, while low-cost tactics that can be generated at higher volume are less effective. While this would not be surprising to political analysts,[42] it is nonetheless important to recognize that there are certain relatively low-cost tactics that consultants find effective (organizing through Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other online networks, writing op-eds

[41] Kollman (1998); Lord (2003).   [42] See Kollmann (1998: Ch. 3).

in newspapers) and also that some higher-cost tactics are seen as less effective, at least when facilitated by consultants (such as protest). Tried-and-true high-cost methods of in-person participation – such as meeting with public officials or attending public events – are among the most effective, and low-cost mediated forms that can be generated at high volume (emailing, faxing, petitioning) are the least. The volume of such mediated communications to policymakers has ballooned in the past decade,[43] forcing leaders to turn to computer scientists to help them to aggregate the data from such messages and also raising new questions about the authenticity of communications.[44] As the consultants with Williamson Strategists described in Chapter 4, policymakers also find electronic mass communication less trustworthy.

Understanding campaign effectiveness

Introduction

In order to further unpack these findings and to provide practical examples of what makes for a successful public affairs campaign, the remainder of this chapter examines in depth two cases of grassroots mobilization on behalf of a paying corporate client. Both cases involved a client facing strong organized resistance, and in each case the client also had powerful elite allies and substantial resources to expend. The difference between success and failure, as I explain, had to do with the breadth of the campaign's coalition, especially among audiences seen as independent of the paying client.

Ineffective without a broad coalition: Working Families for Wal-Mart

2005 was a particularly difficult year for Wal-Mart, despite being able to open over 150 new retail outlets in the US.[45] The company's stock price was in serious decline, such that Wal-Mart's market value

---

[43] See the following reports issued by the staff of the Congressional Management Foundation: Fitch and Goldschmidt (2005); Goldschmidt and Ochreiter (2008).
[44] Shulman (2006, 2009).   [45] Wal-Mart (2005, 2006).

dropped 17.3 percent between fiscal years 2003 and 2005.[46] A former executive at the firm was ousted from the board of directors after an internal investigation uncovered that he had misused nearly a half-million dollars of corporate funds.[47] The company's attempt to enter the online DVD rental market was declared a failure and abandoned.[48] And negative attention to the firm was mounting. For example, reports were surfacing that 46 percent of the children of Wal-Mart's employees were either uninsured or on Medicaid.[49] On top of all of this, in October 2005 an internal memo to the firm's board by Wal-Mart's Executive Vice President for Benefits was leaked, suggesting that the company was actively searching for innovative ways to hold down spending on employee healthcare, such as by discouraging unhealthy job applicants by requiring physical activity for most positions (including for cashiers).[50] As *New Yorker* columnist Jeffrey Goldberg summarized it when looking back at that period,

The company has had its bright moments, most notably in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when Wal-Mart mobilized its truck fleet to deliver goods to the storm zone. But that was a rare instance of good public relations. Owing in part to its status as a retail behemoth, Wal-Mart has met with resistance in numerous communities (including New York City) when it has tried to open stores. And its recent business performance has been less than stellar; sales have slowed, and the stock price is stagnant. Problems like these have concentrated the minds of Lee Scott, Wal-Mart's C.E.O., and his top executives. "We used to be the David and now we're seen as the Goliath," John Fleming, the company's chief merchandising officer, told me.[51]

It was also the year in which the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) International Union launched its Wake Up Wal-Mart campaign, hoping to move beyond attempting to unionize employees and focusing instead on developing a broad-based corporate campaign against the firm. Such "name and shame" strategies against firms are common among contemporary US labor organizers, reacting to the relatively hostile environment for organized labor today.[52] The idea

---

[46] Data were derived from my calculations using S&P's COMPUSTAT data file. Wal-Mart's market value was $232.15 billion in FY2003, compared to $192.05 billion in FY2005.
[47] Barbaro (2005).   [48] Hansell (2005).
[49] Greenhouse and Barbaro (2005d).   [50] Ibid.   [51] Goldberg (2007).
[52] Manheim (2000); Martin (2008).

behind the campaign was to enlist not only the support of labor advocates and frustrated employees, but environmentalists, small business owners, and local community stakeholders worried about big-box retailers.[53] Further fuel was thrown on the fire for UFCW's organizing with the allegation by a former executive that the firm was paying individuals to "keep tabs on organizing activity in Wal-Mart stores,"[54] and the company closed a Quebec store after its employees unionized.

UFCW's efforts were complemented by a parallel effort organized with the backing of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which called itself Wal-Mart Watch. Wal-Mart Watch was established with the SEIU president Andrew Stern and a Sierra Club director as key members of its board of directors, operating effectively as a project of the SEIU.[55] Stern and labor leader Anna Burger had only months earlier helped to lead the SEIU's effort, along with six other unions, to break away from the AFL-CIO by forming the Change to Win Coalition. Consistent with the focus of Change to Win on developing broad-based campaigns to challenge corporate reputations, Wal-Mart Watch brought together diverse organizational partners including Sojourners, American Independent Business Association, National Council of Women's Organizations, Sierra Club, Teamsters, and, at times, also the UFCW.[56] Still, Wal-Mart Watch operated independently of SEIU, with its own thirty-six employees, fourteen of whom were active in field organizing as of 2005.[57] Wal-Mart Watch was the campaign that secured the leaked memo about the company pushing out unhealthy workers.[58]

Comparing the two, the UFCW campaign (Wake Up Wal-Mart) was widely seen as the more aggressive, as it was involved not just in organizing constituencies but also running television ads, holding a national protest bus tour in 2006, and gaining endorsements by latter-day Democratic presidential candidates Barack Obama and John Edwards.[59] Although these two campaigns would eventually join together in 2009, for the most part each was independent of the other during the peak years of contention against Wal-Mart starting in 2004.[60] In fact, these separate campaigns often ran into disagreements with one another over tactics and whether to applaud particular Wal-Mart decisions, such as the company's 2006 expansion of healthcare benefits to new groups of employees.

---

[53] Spence (2005).   [54] Barbaro (2005).   [55] Higgins (2005).
[56] Armour (2005).   [57] Ibid.   [58] Mui (2007).
[59] AFX International Focus (2007a).   [60] PR Newswire (2009).
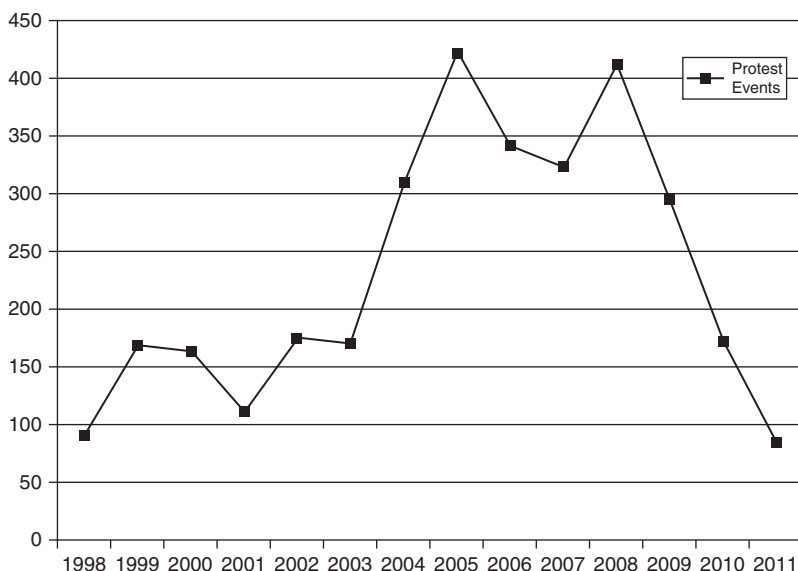
Figure 7.5 Protests against Wal-Mart, 1998–2011

Beyond the UFCW and SEIU campaigns, protests by diverse community stakeholders against Wal-Mart were also picking up steam at the same time. Figure 7.5, which uses data from the advocacy group Sprawl-Busters (which tracks protests against Wal-Mart and has been used in studies in the leading journals in sociology),[61] shows the trend in protests against Wal-Mart from 1998 to 2011. Using this data source, it is clear that protests against Wal-Mart increased 81 percent between 2003 and 2004, and an additional 36 percent between 2004 and 2005. The year 2005, in fact, represented the peak period of anti-Wal-Mart protests over the past fourteen years.[62]

Wal-Mart's response
What was the company to do under these circumstances? Consistent with earlier arguments (especially in Chapter 5), Wal-Mart found that reputational challenges, protest, and corporate controversies put them in a position to engage in grassroots mobilization that showed that they

[61] Ingram, Yue, and Rao (2010); Rao, Yue, and Ingram (2011).
[62] Zimmerman (2006).

have a broad coalition of support and can mobilize stakeholders in force to defend the company. But, also like other campaigns, they found that they couldn't do this on their own, especially when trying to reach beyond the company's natural allies. They needed the support of community opinion leaders, and especially those seen as concerned about local small businesses and the interests of working Americans.

At Wal-Mart's 2005 annual meeting, CEO Lee Scott sought to frame the company as embattled and facing a resourceful opposition. He said that Wal-Mart "is the focus of one of the most well-organized and well-financed corporate campaigns in history . . . A coalition of unions and others are spending over $25 million this year alone to try to do damage to this company."[63] Shortly thereafter, the company's executives heard pitches from three public affairs consulting firms: Edelman, APCO Worldwide, and DCI Group.[64] Edelman's winning pitch suggested that the effort would be a

campaign with all the trappings of a US presidential bid. A war room of publicists would respond quickly to attacks or adverse news. Operatives would be assigned to drum up popular support for Wal-Mart via internet blogs and grass-roots initiatives. Skeptical outside groups, such as environmentalists, would be recruited to team up with Wal-Mart. Edelman won and quickly put its plan into practice, with three dozen staffers working on the account in Washington, DC, and Bentonville.[65]

Thus was born, six months later, Working Families for Wal-Mart (WFW), with the support of the massive public affairs and PR consulting firm Edelman (although Edelman's role in WFW was not initially disclosed). In fact, the effort was meant to appear, in part, independent of Wal-Mart. The first reports about Working Families for Wal-Mart started to emerge in December 2005, when it was announced that

With backing from Wal-Mart Stores Inc., a group of community leaders – from clergy to Latino activists to businesswomen – announced the formation Tuesday of a national group to speak up for the world's largest retailer and launch counterattacks when they sense criticism is unfair. The steering committee of 16 people, *partially funded by Wal-Mart*, organized Working Families for Wal-Mart, whose job will be to talk about what they see as Wal-Mart's positive contributions [. . .] Wal-Mart is the largest financial backer of the group, company spokeswoman Sarah Clark said. Neither the

[63] Hudson (2006).   [64] Ibid.   [65] Ibid.

company nor group leaders would disclose how much Bentonville, Arkansas-based Wal-Mart is contributing to the effort.[66]

The Working Families for Wal-Mart campaign's key spokesperson and central steering committee member was Bishop Ira Combs Jr., an outspoken Republican activist and African-American leader of the Greater Bible Way Temple of the Apostolic Faith in Jackson, Michigan.[67] Combs claimed that neither Wal-Mart nor WFW were compensating him for his work on behalf of the organization.[68] However, half of the steering committee members had at least some financial ties, whether direct or indirect, to the firm.[69]

Other steering committee members included singer Pat Boone, conservative economist Charles Baird, Rep. Jennifer Carroll (R-FL), and Ron Galloway, director of a pro-Wal-Mart documentary film, as well as other diverse leaders.[70] These leaders often played the role of front-line defenders of the firm, especially for its contributions in low-income and minority communities. As Rep. Carroll – who also claimed that she wasn't being paid by WFW – put it, "Wal-Mart is ... proactive in hiring African-Americans," and she noted that the company was named one of the Top 25 companies by *Black Professionals Magazine* in 2005.[71]

The campaign also kept former White House spokesman Taylor Gross on staff, who was known for his efforts to coordinate media coverage for the Republican Party during the 2000 presidential election dispute in Florida and who is himself a consultant with the public affairs firm The Herald Group.[72] In February 2006, WFW announced that its campaign would be directed by former Civil Rights Movement leader, UN ambassador, and Atlanta mayor Andrew Young, who became the group's key spokesman.[73] Although Young also claimed that he was not being compensated, he acknowledged that his nonprofit organization Goodworks International, which pairs corporations and governments to work on global issues, was the recipient of a Wal-Mart contract for an undisclosed amount.[74] Young claimed, "I like to fight poverty ... For almost ten years, I've been using in my sermons the

---

[66] Kabel (2005), emphasis added.   [67] Associated Press (2005).   [68] Ibid.
[69] Barbaro (2006a).
[70] An archived version of the Working Families for Wal-Mart website, which includes full biographies for all steering committee members, is available here: http://web.archive.org/web/20060110112339/http://www.forwalmart.com/about_steering.php.
[71] Karkaria (2005).   [72] Associated Press (2005).   [73] Kabel (2006a).   [74] Ibid.

message that fighting poverty is good business, and I've used Wal-Mart as an example. The question is how do you fight poverty – with high wages or low prices? The answer is both."[75] Young's new position alienated many of his friends and supporters.[76]

Those on the left of the political spectrum, like Young, were core players at the top of WFW's organizing and PR efforts. Although the large majority of Wal-Mart's campaign contributions prior to 2007 went to Republicans, Democratic campaign strategists were at the heart of Wal-Mart's efforts to defend itself in 2005 and 2006.[77] Wal-Mart's Executive Vice President for Corporate Affairs and Government Relations, Leslie Dach, was a top staffer for both the Edward Kennedy and Michael Dukakis presidential campaigns, respectively, in 1980 and 1988,[78] as well as one of former President Clinton's advisors during the impeachment process.[79] Edelman executive Fred Baldassaro, a former lead aide to Howard Dean, served as a Wal-Mart strategist during this time.[80] Going out on a limb, Wal-Mart chief spokesperson Mona Williams claimed that the company "is taking care of the people the Democratic Party says it represents – the poor, the middle class. The Democrats are not taking care of them. We're like Lyndon Johnson's Great Society."[81]

WFW took a broad-based approach to fighting back against those the firm saw as a threat to its operations by marshaling research, organizing online at ForWalMart.com, canvassing in communities, and attacking both the ideas and the characters of those involved in anti-Wal-Mart activism. In January 2006, the group began releasing results of a poll, done by a nonpartisan polling firm, showing that 71 percent of US adults had favorable sentiments toward the company (a figure roughly matched by a contemporaneous Pew poll), and that even 63 percent of union households felt similarly.[82] In the state of Maryland, where Wal-Mart was threatened by the 2005 Fair Share Health Care Act – a piece of legislation also known informally as the "Wal-Mart Bill" because it would have required firms with more than 10,000 workers in the state to spend at least 8 percent of their payroll on employee health benefits – WFW issued press releases charging hypocrisy on the part of union activists who made substantial campaign contributions to legislative

[75] Saporta (2006).   [76] Geewax (2006a).   [77] Goldberg (2007).
[78] Ibid.; Kabel (2006b).   [79] Barbaro (2006b).   [80] Goldberg (2007).
[81] Ibid.   [82] Connolly (2006).

supporters of the act.[83] WFW started a state-level chapter in Colorado in March 2006,[84] followed shortly thereafter by Michigan, California, Ohio, and Indiana.[85] In April 2006, with the support of Republican-affiliated public affairs consulting firm Crosslink Strategy Group, WFW began canvassing Atlanta and Denver-area Wal-Mart shoppers asking for their contact information for WFW's outreach databases.[86] Shoppers who were interviewed suggested that they were not informed that the company was, in large part, funding the WFW operation.[87]

The core of WFW's campaign was to mobilize not only Wal-Mart's shoppers as members of the campaign – by May 2006 the campaign claimed to have 100,000 members across the US – but also the company's suppliers.[88] WFW sent a letter to suppliers stating that "Wal-Mart is under attack, and Wal-Mart and Sam's Club suppliers have the power to do something about it and help protect their businesses."[89] Responding to the concern that WFW's effort to mobilize suppliers amounted to unfair pressure – they might justifiably fear that the company could refuse to sell their product if they didn't join the campaign – the company responded that participation was strictly voluntary.[90]

By the summer and early fall of 2006, the rhetoric became sharper on both sides. Wal-Mart began to encourage its employees to vote against candidates who spoke out at anti-Wal-Mart rallies in the upcoming election.[91] Also, after Wal-Mart Watch took out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* in May 2006, WFW issued a statement saying, "Americans have to question why the same union leaders who are failing to address diversity, transparency, accountability and sustainability in their own organizations are spending millions of dollars in union dues attacking a company that is committed to these principles and creates tens of thousands of jobs per year."[92]

Matters became even more heated as WFW started a website, PaidCritics.com, dedicated to making personal attacks on anti-Wal-Mart activists.[93] Typical web entries on the PaidCritics.com blog suggested that these activists were interested in denying jobs to local communities, insinuating that specific organizers were enjoying lavish

---

[83] PR Newswire (2006a).   [84] Arellano (2006).
[85] PR Newswire (2006b, 2006c, 2006d, 2006e).   [86] Geewax (2006b).
[87] Ibid.   [88] Barbaro (2006a).   [89] Ibid.   [90] Ibid.
[91] PR Newswire (2006f).   [92] Geewax (2006c).
[93] AFX International Focus (2006a).

lifestyles, and predicting that the campaign is likely to backfire given that the company is so popular.[94] But even Ron Galloway, a leading member of the WFW steering committee and maker of a pro-Wal-Mart documentary, suggested that this was a step too far.[95]

Things began to take a turn against WFW toward the end of 2006 with a wave of resignations. First, Andrew Young was forced to resign his leadership position in WFW after making racially insensitive remarks.[96] Then, the same week, steering committee member Herman Cain suggested that Democratic critics of Wal-Mart were operating in a fashion akin to Hezbollah in their attempts to improve access to affordable healthcare for employees.[97] WFW was forced to back away from its defense of Cain, arguing that the comments were strictly his own.[98] In October, Ron Galloway quit WFW in protest.[99] Only days later, Republican consultant and WFW leader Terry Nelson was forced to resign after his firm aired ads against Tennessee Senate candidate Harold Ford, which were widely seen as racially offensive.[100]

The negative turn of events continued with a new WFW-sponsored effort, the Wal-Marting Across America RV tour,[101] which was later exposed as not only funded by Wal-Mart but hosted by individuals with personal connections to the firm and to Edelman.[102] The idea behind the tour was that two WFW supporters named Jim and Laura would drive an RV from Nevada to Georgia, parking at Wal-Mart stores along the way and signing up new volunteers for WFW.[103] As Laura put it, "Many RVers choose to make Wal-Mart an essential part of their travels ... Throughout the tour we will highlight the stories of these RVers and everyday working families that depend on Wal-Mart."[104] Jim and Laura's blog entries were unfailingly positive about employee experiences at the company.

Only a few weeks later, Jim's identity was revealed to be Jim Thresher, a *Washington Post* photographer who was not authorized to conduct freelance work and was told to remove his entries from WalMartingAcrossAmerica.com.[105] Laura was determined to be

---

[94] The PaidCritics.com blog is archived at http://web.archive.org/web/20060819175415/http://paidcritics.com/.
[95] AFX International Focus (2006a). [96] PR Newswire (2006g).
[97] PR Newswire (2006h). [98] Poole (2006).
[99] AFX International Focus (2006b). [100] Geewax (2006d).
[101] PR Newswire (2006i). [102] Gogoi (2006). [103] PR Newswire (2006i).
[104] Ibid. [105] Miller (2006).

Laura St. Claire, a freelance writer with a position in the federal government who came up with the RV tour idea, then approached her brother, an Edelman employee, about WFW sponsorship.[106] Widely discredited, the RV tour has since become a well-known cautionary tale for those who engage in less than transparent uses of social media in advocacy campaigns.[107]

The outcome
The outing of the RV campaign as a Wal-Mart-sponsored PR effort led to fallout for both the firm and also for Edelman, which was revealed as the mastermind behind the WFW campaign in the first place.[108] By the end of 2006, journalist Marilyn Geewax, who had followed the campaign from its outset, argued, "again and again, WFWM's public relations efforts backfired."[109] This happened in part because of union activists' efforts to monitor the company's every move, but even more so because of the company's efforts to avoid disclosure of its role and the campaign's inability to develop an independent constituency.

By March 2007, WFW suspended its controversial PaidCritics.com blog.[110] Later that year, Wal-Mart announced that it was suspending WFW and folding it into the company's in-house PR operation.[111] The company then announced sweeping changes to its employee health plans, and the most severe criticism and protest of the firm died down.[112] Wal-Mart apparently stopped fighting and started listening to its critics.[113] At the same time that the firm's financial performance improved, it wound down its internal "war room" as well.[114] The company began to focus less on politics and more on voluntary Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.[115]

The Working Families for Wal-Mart campaign makes clear that "grassroots for hire" campaigns are ineffective without a broad coalition of genuine support in civil society. Although quite well resourced and with powerful elite allies from business, elected office, and the voluntary sector, the campaign was largely ineffective in generating favorable political support for Wal-Mart.

---

[106] Kurtz (2006).   [107] Goh (2007).   [108] Rubin (2006).
[109] Geewax (2006e).   [110] AFX International Focus (2007b).
[111] Kabel (2007).   [112] Barbaro (2008).   [113] Foley (2008a).
[114] Foley (2008b).   [115] Foley (2008a).

Successful with a broad coalition: Canadian National and suburban activists

The Working Families for Wal-Mart campaign, which was waged in response to community and labor contention, was unsuccessful because the firm was not able to generate the authentic and independent support of a broad coalition. They relied too heavily on suppliers, who felt unduly pressured by the retail behemoth. They had the resources, elite support, and had built some limited organizational infrastructure needed in order to mount their campaign, but they were limited by the independent force of civil society.

But what happens when a firm faces a major controversy about its practices but is more effective in mobilizing the authentic support of *independent constituencies*? The following case shows how consultant-driven grassroots campaigns can be successful in shaping participatory and policy outcomes. The key to victory is to build a broad base of support among those stakeholders who have an interest in the campaign independent of the client's financial and/or political interests; also needed is transparency by the consulting firm about their client's identity, as well as a multi-pronged approach that creatively applies a diverse set of tactics for mobilizing public support.

The case

Railroad company Canadian National (CN), a firm previously under the control of the Canadian government but which was privatized and restructured as a publicly traded firm in 1995,[116] has made major moves to expand its US holdings in the nearly two decades since. Buoyed by the increase in US–Canadian trade following the 1994 enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as well as the increasing appeal of rail for transporting imports from Asia, the firm acquired, in rapid succession, a variety of US rail lines.[117] Although these acquisitions faced some resistance, the company's US expansion continued to press forward without very many substantial hiccups along the way.[118]

---

[116] Hallman (1995).   [117] Market News Publishing (2005).
[118] However, there were exceptions, such as when the city of Chicago sought to block CN's purchase of the Illinois Central Railroad because CN refused to stop using a controversial lakefront track in the city (Tita, 2007).

The same could not be said of the challenges faced by the firm in its next planned acquisition. In October 2007, CN announced its intent to purchase the Elgin, Joliet, and Eastern Railway (EJ&E) from US Steel's Transtar subsidiary,[119] at a cost of approximately $300 million.[120] The US government estimates that around one-third of all freight in the US passes through Chicago's rail lines,[121] and CN's existing Chicagoland holdings forced the company to route its trains primarily through grid-locked central Chicago rail lines. The idea behind the purchase was to re-route many of these trains around the city center on EJ&E's tracks that ring the city and run through suburban areas.[122] Overall, CN projected in early 2008 that thirty-four Chicago-area towns would see increased rail traffic, whereas eighty other localities would see a decline.[123] The approval of the purchase would also offer a partial solution to the city's fraught debate about whether taxpayer funds should be used to build additional tracks to relieve the congestion.[124]

Despite these benefits to many Chicago areas and to the company, and to the company's surprise, the announcement galvanized an almost immediate response of livid community protest. While the approximately 200 miles of EJ&E rail line holdings were used only lightly prior to 2007, their acquisition by CN could mean a substantial increase in the number of freight trains passing through the backyards of many suburban communities.[125] Recognizing the potential for a significant increase, suburban activists began organizing against the purchase soon after the announcement.[126] As a geographer described the dispute, CN's "opponents framed their protest in terms of a *foreign* railroad disrupting *American* communities, suggesting deeper underlying concerns about the transnational nature of the transaction."[127]

CN announced that it planned to increase the number of daily freight trains using the EJ&E stretch from five to about twenty; community activists worried that this could pick up to a volume far higher. Suburban activists, then, with the support of municipal government leaders, formed a coalition in November known as Barrington Communities against CN Rail Congestion, named after the village in Illinois where aggrieved citizens were most organized.[128] The EJ&E line

---

[119] Brooks (2007a); Associated Press (2007).   [120] *Globe & Mail* (2007).
[121] Surface Transportation Board (2008).   [122] Deveau (2007).
[123] Pyke (2008a).   [124] Tita (2007).   [125] Associated Press (2007).
[126] Deveau (2007).   [127] Cidell (2012); emphases in original.
[128] Deveau (2007); Pyke (2008a).

runs directly through Barrington and crosses through eight roads in the village,[129] three of which are within one mile of one another.[130] In Barrington's official regulatory filing against the deal, the city said that it felt forced to oppose the deal in order to protect the city's "beauty, character, and protected open spaces."[131] The acquisition also faced another immediate roadblock when the federal Surface Transportation Board (STB) announced that it would need to complete a thorough environmental review of the proposal, which could delay the deal by more than eighteen months.[132]

Federal regulators began to hold a series of public hearings on the EJ&E purchase during the early months of 2008, many of which became quite heated.[133] At a meeting on January 10, over 1,000 local residents packed the meeting space of the Makray Memorial Golf Club. Members of the federal Surface Transportation Board heard comments suggesting that the deal's approval would "cripple an entire community," that road closures due to train crossings could be the difference between life and death for those serviced by local fire departments, and similar concerns were voiced about ambulance delays.[134] Community activists noted that many of these long freight trains clog surface crossings for up to six minutes each, putting first responders in a dire situation.[135] Residents also worried about noise. Such imminent threats, sociological research suggests,[136] are quite significant in mobilizing Not-In-My-Backyard (NIMBY) opposition to local environmental "bads," and the citizens in Barrington and surrounding communities decided it was time to take action. And so-called "site fights" like these have, for good reason, drawn increasing attention from sociologists and political scientists.[137]

Forums held in other communities beyond Barrington were also venues for expressing popular frustrations about the impending deal. In a West Chicago hearing, a resident told regulators, "I love living in Bartlett [Illinois], but the train is already a sore spot … I just want to find out all I can to help stop this project from happening."[138] The mayor of Lake Zurich, IL, argued that if the deal did go through, Canadian National should be forced to pay financial compensation to

---

129 Brooks (2007b).   130 Deveau (2007).   131 Jang (2007).
132 Deveau (2007).   133 Pyke (2008a).   134 Brooks (2008a).
135 Deveau (2007).   136 Benford, Moore, and Williams (1993).
137 Aldrich (2010); McAdam and Boudet (2012).   138 Komperda (2008).

impacted communities.[139] Concerns like these were also voiced among a number of Indiana communities in similarly contentious town-hall meetings.[140] In total, over 2,500 local citizens attended public hearings in Illinois and Indiana throughout January 2008.[141]

As the battle raged on, federal legislators started to get into the mix. Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL) issued a public statement acknowledging that the deal would help maintain Chicago's status as the nation's leading rail hub and promote the flow of commerce, but his much larger concerns were the same as suburban community opponents.[142] Durbin called for an expanded scope of environmental review and more public hearings.[143] Reps. Judy Biggert, Melissa Bean, and Peter Roskam raised similar concerns about traffic, pollution, safety, and noise.[144]

Still, despite all of this resistance, the company remained optimistic about the deal. Despite a year characterized by high diesel prices, increasing economic instability, and threats to many US markets, in 2008 CN CEO Hunter Harris was resolute that the company would nonetheless "fight the good fight" against regulators and local community groups standing in the way of the EJ&E deal.[145] Harris also saw the vociferous community opposition to the deal as "exaggerated,"[146] and he called the demands of community groups "unreasonable." As he saw it, CN might not be "in a position to accept the burden" of these mitigation demands.[147]

Perhaps Harris felt confident because of the company's strong allies. CN knew that it had the support of Chicago mayor Richard M. Daley, who favored less congestion through inner-city routes.[148] The railway also began to find that the deal had some powerful backers among peer firms in the industry, including both the Union Pacific Railroad and Norfolk Southern Railway; both companies worried that the STB's rejection of the deal could set a dangerous precedent as railways across the nation coped with increasing demand.[149] The whole industry was watching.

Community groups, fearful that their moment to challenge the company might be passing, took an even more aggressive approach as the

---

[139] Krishnamurthy (2008).   [140] Associated Press (2008a).
[141] Brooks (2008b).   [142] States News Service (2008a).   [143] Ibid.
[144] States News Service (2008b); Associated Press State & Local Wire (2008a);
States News Service (2008c).
[145] Jang (2008a).   [146] Deveau (2008a).   [147] Boyd (2008).
[148] Selvam (2008).   [149] Jang (2008b).

campaign wore on. A second community organization formed to oppose the deal, known as The Regional Answer to Canadian National (TRAC). Outside an April 2008 shareholders' meeting, leaders of both community groups held a rally, and some activists even had to be removed from the building.[150]

By the late spring, CN started to show signs that they might walk away from the deal if regulators dragged out the process for an extended period. Noting that EJ&E's owner, US Steel, had only agreed to wait until December 31, CN filed a request with the STB that the environmental impact statement be completed by November 3.[151] Sen. Durbin and Rep. Bean wrote to the STB urging the board to reject this "fast-track" of the review.[152] Shortly thereafter, then presidential hopeful Sen. Barack Obama chimed in to voice his opposition to the deal.[153] It wasn't just the company that was becoming impatient with regulators, as the US Department of Transportation began to pressure the STB to move before US Steel's offer would expire at the close of the year.[154]

Toward the end of the summer, the STB released its draft environmental impact statement and formally refused CN's request to fast-track the review,[155] although it also announced that the review would be concluded by no later than January 2009.[156] Still, CN worried that US Steel would walk away from the deal after the end of 2008, which forced CN to take legal action to try to pressure the STB to move earlier (this legal maneuver was ineffective).[157] The announcement of the draft statement initiated a new public comment period in early fall 2008, with even larger numbers of suburban citizens voicing their concerns. For example, although organizers only expected a turnout of 3,000 for a hearing in late August in Barrington, over 5,100 residents came out to have their say.[158]

Rallies against the deal continued throughout the summer and during the public comment period of the STB's Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Figure 7.6 below maps the locations of these public meetings.

Describing one such gathering, a local high school in Aurora, IL was converted for an evening into an impromptu recruiting station for local

---

[150] Brooks (2008c).   [151] Deveau (2008b).   [152] States News Service (2008d).
[153] Deveau (2008c).   [154] Pyke (2008b).   [155] States News Service (2008e).
[156] *Globe & Mail* (2008).   [157] Brooks (2008d); Associated Press (2008b).
[158] States News Service (2008f).
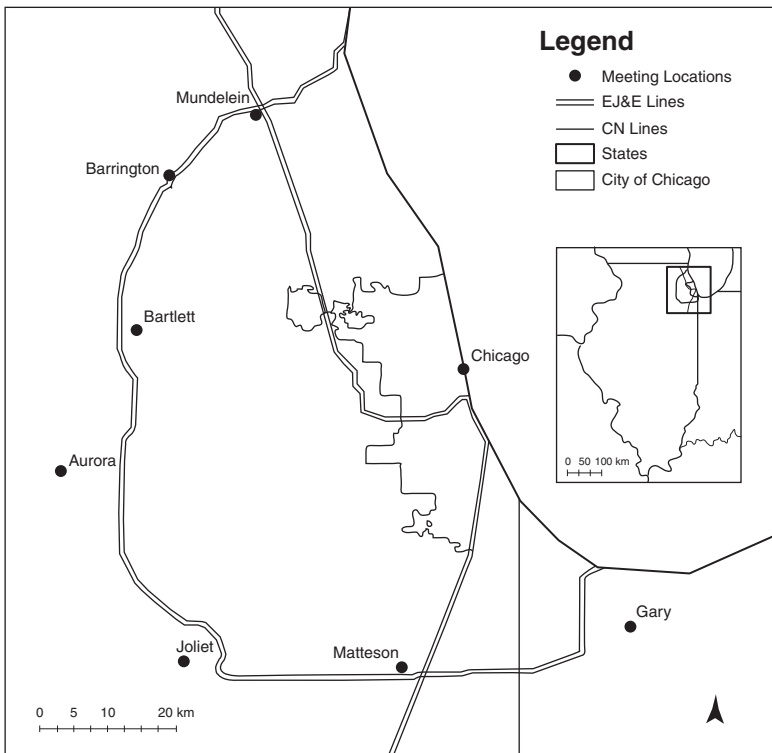
Figure 7.6 Location of the CN and EJ&E lines, and locations of public meetings concerning the STB's draft environmental impact statement between August and September 2008
Source: Cidell (2012). Reproduced by permission

protestors, with more than 600 volunteers inside the building and a line out the door.[159] Aurora mayor Tom Weisner spoke at one such rally, arguing that local citizens are "fighting a very powerful industry, a very powerful lobby. We are fighting a history of the STB almost perfunctorily approving these kinds of deals ... but with the unified voice and effort here I think we have a good shot."[160]

The summer also saw the introduction by Rep. Biggert of a bill in the US House, the Taking Responsible Action for Community Safety (TRACS) Act, which would have amended the laws governing STB

[159] Kmitch (2008). [160] Ibid.

reviews of railway mergers, especially by requiring stricter mitigation conditions.[161] Although the bill failed a vote in the House, Biggert continued to press the STB to reject the deal.[162]

CN's response

Compared to the Wal-Mart case described above, CN's strategy was much more effective in generating authentic, broad-based community support for the company's interests. Importantly, they were much more successful in generating a broad coalition to back the company against its opponents. Whereas Wal-Mart took a heavy hand in pressuring suppliers and customers to participate, and did not as effectively mobilize support among community interests independent of the company, they were accordingly more open to the charge that their campaign was "astroturf" and lacked real support among the public. Canadian National, by contrast, was able to demonstrate a genuine community interest in having their deal approved by the Surface Transportation Board.

They did so by working with a public affairs consulting firm I refer to as Grassroots Advocates Company (GAC),[163] senior consultants of which I interviewed in December 2009. During the public comment periods described above, it was clear that suburban community activists were being heard loud and clear by regulators, legislators, and local government officials. What could the company do to counterbalance all of this negative attention to the purchase of the EJ&E line, especially when it was rooted in such deep local concerns as public safety, property values, noise, and traffic?

CN's answer, in the campaign that GAC helped to orchestrate, sought to mobilize a coalition of community members who resided along the corridor of CN's existing holdings, and who would stand to see a substantial *decrease* in train traffic if the deal were to go through. After all, the primary goal of the EJ&E purchase was to re-route rail traffic away from central and South Side Chicago areas that were gridlocked. Those communities would stand to benefit considerably if the purchase were to be approved, and these community members had a genuine interest in having their voice heard before the Surface Transportation Board. This was true despite the fact that the Surface

---

[161] States News Service (2008f).   [162] Ibid.
[163] A pseudonym; for additional details on the use of this case, see Appendix 4.2.

Transportation Board held only one of its thirty-nine hearings about the deal in the city of Chicago; as Ethan Bueno de Mesquita of the University of Chicago put it, the lesson seemed to be that "Wealthy, white suburbs have clout. Poor, minority neighborhoods do not."[164]

In response, then, residents of central Chicago communities, already facing the hazards of rail gridlock, began to send numerous letters and emails to their local, state, and federal representatives, as well as to the federal agency charged with approving the purchase. Why, they asked, should only certain communities be forced to pay the price of rail commerce through the region? Why should certain wealthy communities not share the costs? As one local official said, "all parts of the metropolitan area profit from the economic benefits [of rail transportation] . . . as such, all parts should work together to bear the burden."[165]

How did GAC mobilize the deal's local beneficiaries to have their say with the STB? GAC didn't simply call local citizens and ask that they repeat a set of talking points in the emails, phone calls, and hard-copy letters they hoped citizens would send to public officials. Instead, their staff directly called people identified as likely voters in those communities and informed them of the pertinent details of the regulatory review and how it could affect their community, a fact of which few in the community were, they say, otherwise aware. When they called, after informing the target residents of the most basic aspects of the proposed rail purchase, *openly disclosing their client's identity*, and without much additional prompting, GAC staff asked residents what their thoughts on the issue were. Unsurprisingly, many on the other end of the phone line expressed serious concerns about the existing level of rail traffic, and said they would be happy to see it decline. And, as political scientist Hahrie Han has shown in her research, disclosing their client's identity was a wise strategy, as those campaigns that do so are likely to be more effective in gaining support and raising funds.[166]

Listening closely to these residents, GAC staff recorded their concerns during phone conversations, and, at the conclusion of each call, asked if the individual would be willing to express their comments to the relevant public officials. A significant number of residents said "yes," and GAC produced a unique letter from each call, using direct quotes from the earlier phone conversations. GAC staff then sent this fully prepared letter back to the resident, asking that they sign and send it to the listed

---

[164] Bueno de Mesquita (2008).   [165] Silvestri (2008).   [166] Han (2009).

officials. Importantly, staff at the firm asked all those who submitted letters to send a carbon copy to the firm, which would allow them to track how many contacts were being made (and what was communicated therein). A senior representative at GAC said that they received copies of approximately 60 percent of the letters they produced, which, based on past experience, led them to very crudely estimate that a majority of their prepared letters were actually sent.

One of GAC's lead consultants, who I will refer to as Lily Abraham, described to me how this campaign was similar to others in the field of public affairs:

Say we are targeting drilling on the Arctic shelf. We might try to get people involved who are worried about high gas prices. We might work with trucking companies, Chambers of Commerce, and others who understand the impacts. We start making some calls, and we, of course, disclose who the client is that is sponsoring the call. We ask them to write a letter. But it's not standardized. In fact, what we do is get personal anecdotes. We describe the issue in general terms to them, and then ask them why they care about the issue. Then, taking those anecdotes, we craft their letter, aiding them in the process. We understand that unique letters matter more. These "cut and paste" campaigns – that's what we see as astroturf, and it's not that effective. Unique letters matter more.

Using this strategy, GAC was able to generate over eight hundred unique communications to the STB from community members who would stand to benefit from the approval of the rail deal. This included over six hundred personal letters of support, nearly one hundred patch-through calls to the STB department charged with conducting the environmental review, and multiple op-ed submissions (one of which was published in a leading local newspaper). Also, consistent with the idea that consultants seek to target their requests both at those most likely to say "yes" but also those likely to broaden the coalition, this campaign was effective in meeting both of those goals by activating likely voters who had an interest in the case independent of the consultant's corporate client.

The outcome
When the final environmental impact report was issued in early December 2008, it was seen largely as a victory for CN.[167] Although

---

[167] Pyke (2008c).

the mitigation measures it required were quite extensive – including contributions to communities to pay for rail crossings, video cameras installed so that train blockages of emergency vehicles could be monitored, and myriad noise and environmental mitigation efforts – nonetheless it pointed the way toward a closed deal for CN.[168] A wave of agreements with localities and housing developments in Illinois and Indiana followed in the weeks after, suggesting that many saw the deal as increasingly inevitable. Indeed, on December 24, 2008 the STB formally approved the deal, to the great chagrin of suburban activists and their representatives at the local, state, and federal levels.[169]

When the decision was handed down, it highlighted themes that were shared both by the firm and by the local residents mobilized by the campaign: that the rail congestion along CN's existing holdings was a major social problem that called out for relief, and that large-scale transportation decisions should be guided by concerns about what is best for an entire region rather than just certain communities. The STB's final approval statement reflected these precise concerns rather clearly in a few passages:

Many of those expressing support talked generally of project benefits, such as reduced noise or congestion along CN rail lines that would experience a decreased volume of freight rail traffic or improved regional rail traffic efficiency.[170]

Although some communities on the EJ&E line will experience adverse environmental effects, the Board finds that these effects are outweighed by the many transportation and environmental impact benefits that approval of this transaction would bring about.[171]

Many communities along CN's existing lines will experience environmental benefits from the reduction in rail traffic as CN reroutes traffic around Chicago over the EJ&E line. The Board does not believe that it is appropriate for these communities to continue to bear the full adverse environmental impacts of rail congestion in Chicago in order to protect the communities along the EJ&E line from traffic increases.[172]

What made the rail campaign so effective was not that it generated a large volume of contacts with public officials in support of regulatory approval for the rail line purchase (although, to be sure, it did that).

---

[168] Ibid.   [169] States News Service (2008g).
[170] Surface Transportation Board (2008: 35).   [171] Ibid.: 37.   [172] Ibid.: 38.

Instead, what made it so effective was the uniqueness and genuineness of the contacts that regulators and legislators were receiving. And, above all else, the campaign had a strong coalition of genuine community supporters who had a strong interest in the issue independent of the campaign's sponsor or the consulting firm who helped them to get their message out.

As Lily, a senior staff member at GAC put it, "We don't do astroturf [that is, campaigns with artificial grassroots support]. Besides, it isn't effective anyway. People on the receiving end can see right through it."

Conclusion

Building on the discussion in previous chapters on how public affairs consultants organize their campaigns on behalf of their paying clients, this chapter examined the effectiveness of "grassroots for hire" strategies in mobilizing participation and generating policy change.

Considering the effects these consultant-driven campaigns have on participation, I found that public affairs campaigns *both* reinforce participatory inequalities *and* seek to develop broad coalitions. Grassroots lobbying consultants seek, above all else, to recruit citizen activists who are most likely to say "yes" to their requests, and these are disproportionately those with a history of political activism, propensity to vote, and those known to be strongly partisan. They also prioritize civic activists and the college educated. However, consultants also hope to construct a broad and diverse coalition. Therefore, the most common "secondary targets" for consultants are minority groups. The fact that such groups are seen as a "secondary" priority by the consultants in this study suggests that a certain degree of apparent political tokenism may be at work, rather than a broad-based effort to increase the political representation of minority groups.

This chapter also showed that, even when considering evidence based upon the self-reports of consultants on how effective they are at meeting their clients' goals, consultants tend to be only moderately successful in achieving those ends. Nearly 25 percent of the campaigns that a consultant devoted the most effort to were no better than a partial success, and this failure rate increases to 33 percent for the second-highest priority campaign and 60 percent for the third. And, of course, it is worth noting again that "meeting a client's goal" is not the same thing

as achieving success in generating policy change, as clients' objectives are often more modest than generating large-scale political change.

Using data from my survey of public affairs consultants, this chapter also showed that consultants tend to have a moderate degree of success when working on campaigns targeted at legislatures, government agencies, or the voting public, but have greater success in shaping the public's views on ballot measures. They also reported greater effectiveness in campaigns that were able to motivate in-person forms of public participation, such as attending events and visiting officials, with lesser success using mass contacting methods. These findings are consistent with research that suggests that political organizers often face a trade-off between quality and quantity. This trade-off helps to explain, in part, the popularity of "grasstops" or "key contact" approaches as described in Chapter 4.

Comparing the case studies of a failed grassroots campaign (Working Families for Wal-Mart) with a successful one (Canadian National's grassroots campaign in Chicago) helps to add substance to these broader findings and to further clarify the mechanisms at work. In both cases, companies faced off against contentious citizen challengers and social movement groups. Similarly, both cases involved substantial corporate resources put to work by public affairs consultants to try to develop and mobilize pro-corporate activism. Both campaigns had strong elite supporters in positions of power. But what separated the two cases was that Canadian National was transparent and able to locate and amplify an authentic and *independent constituency* who had an interest in the case for its own purposes. Although it is clear that Canadian National's consultant, Grassroots Advocates Co., helped that constituency to become aware of the issue and offered those citizens a venue to express their concerns, they were neither putting words in those citizens' mouths nor misrepresenting their ideas. GAC's consultants also made clear that they were calling on behalf of Canadian National. By contrast, Working Families for Wal-Mart was not able to broaden its coalition beyond the company's suppliers, certain consumers, and those with a financial stake in the company. They were also not transparent about the fact that WFW was funded entirely by Wal-Mart and was constructed by its consulting firm. Thus, they were not able to develop or partner with an independent constituency aligned with the company's interests.

A major conclusion of this chapter, which I elaborate further in the final chapter that follows, is that although "grassroots for hire" campaigns can (and do) have effects both on citizen participation and on policy outcomes, their force is limited by the independent power of organized civil society. They may be commercializing public participation and spending vast resources in doing so, but influence cannot simply be bought.

8 | *Conclusion*

Summary

The previous chapters have shown how grassroots political action, typically understood as the exclusive purview of citizen organizers, has been adapted as a commercial practice deployed by consultants on behalf of corporations, trade associations, the wealthiest and most professionalized advocacy organizations, and electoral campaigns in their Get-Out-The-Vote efforts. Although the practice of political consulting has been around for centuries and professional consulting firms have been around at least since Whitaker and Baxter opened up their firm Campaigns, Inc. in the 1930s, it wasn't until a variety of forces came together in the 1970s and 1980s that the field of grassroots public affairs consultants gained traction. These forces included the "interest group explosion" in which scores of new advocacy groups were founded, the rise of business political mobilization, and the widening gap between political partisans. This has now become a lucrative industry that is reshaping policymaking and Americans' civic and political participation.

Businesses, finding themselves on the receiving end of negative public attention through public interest advocacy, social movement pressure, and the new regulatory agencies established in the 1960s and 1970s, began to find that they needed a grassroots force to respond. A more politically partisan public was, in turn, more receptive to messages about the role of government on partisan issues such as regulation, taxation, health, and environmental policy. Once the field of consultants was established, advocacy organizations and labor unions began to find that they, too, could benefit by outsourcing a certain amount of their member mobilization efforts to the grassroots consultants who borrowed their own methods of generating mass political support. Still, only the most large and wealthy associations could afford to do so.

Consultants are having an effect both on public participation and on how policy is made. Their effects on public participation are such that,

192

consistent with the "rational prospecting" model described by Henry Brady and colleagues,[1] consultants tend to focus their efforts on those most likely to acquiesce to their recruitment requests. But, as strangers to those they recruit, not all factors are equally important. Above all else, consultants recruit those who have a history of political or civic activism, are strongly partisan, are likely voters, or are college educated. When working for corporate clients in particular, they search out those identified as "opinion leaders" in their local community. Consultants also seek to mobilize minority groups, but this goal is only secondary, raising concerns of political tokenism. On balance, then, the work of grassroots public affairs consultants does encourage greater amounts of public participation: recall that the leading campaign by an average consulting firm targets over 750,000 Americans for participation, and that targeted requests for action are one of the most direct routes into political engagement.[2] But in doing so, these political strategists help to exacerbate participatory inequalities in the United States by amplifying the voice of those who are already over-represented in the system.

Given the major findings of this book, how best should we understand its broader significance?

Implications for the study of advocacy, organizations, and social movements

The importance of these findings for scholars of social movements and contentious politics more broadly are that both the institutionalization of grassroots organizing tactics and the creation of modular repertoires have allowed the spread of tactics well beyond other social movement actors through social contagion among fundamentally similar actors. As tactics become institutionalized (or, in Tarrow's words, repertoires become modular and adaptable to new circumstances), then, they may spread exogenously through the work of professionals such as consultants. The field of grassroots public affairs consultants represents both a mechanism for the diffusion of contentious tactics to new actors – recall Bill Hoover's remark in Chapter 6 that consultants like him "borrow and move things across worlds" – and also a means of converting such strategies into lucrative commercial services. Indeed, their practices

---

[1] Brady, Schlozman, and Verba (1999).   [2] Walker (2008).

reflect the blurring of sectoral boundaries in a complex modern environment.

Although much of this organizational learning involved corporations and industry groups borrowing strategies of mass mobilization developed by increasingly media-savvy advocacy groups such as the Public Interest Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, today the well-established consultant field is facilitating advocacy groups' engagement in practices of political marketing that were originally developed for commercial applications. Similarly, today social movements regularly target corporations to encourage them to change their practices; although this may be pressuring firms to become more socially responsible, it may also be encouraging firms under certain conditions to adopt social movement-like strategies for their own purposes. As Chapter 5 showed, taking the high road of exclusive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) engagement represents a position of relative privilege, and firms facing major controversies or protest while also having a poor reputation are more likely to organize their stakeholders to fight back. Firms in regulated industries also do significantly more work with consultants.

Counter-campaigns organized by companies to resist social movement pressures might be seen as a form of soft repression against anti-corporate activists. The targets of social movement mobilization have a range of response options available to them beyond the expected decision of whether to partner/co-opt the movement, pre-empt its claims, concede to it, or ignore it.[3] Importantly, although scholars of social movements have paid a considerable amount of attention to repression by the state, we still know relatively little about how non-state organizations engage in forms of activist repression ranging from soft forms such as PR and grassroots campaigning all the way to more extreme measures such as the filing of so-called Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPPs) against social movement groups.[4] The findings of this study encourage further exploration into the dynamics of repression and co-option of activist groups by non-state organizations like corporations, educational institutions, and trade, professional, and other associations. Although these organizations lack the monopoly on the legitimate use of force possessed by the state, organizations

---

[3] Gamson (1990: Ch. 3).
[4] But see Meyer and Staggenborg (1996). On SLAPPs, see Pring and Canan (1996).

outside the state have considerable capacities for repressing popular activism.

This study also illustrates, consistent with the expectations of the resource mobilization theory of social movements, the important role of external patrons in funding popular mobilization.[5] However, the evidence presented here suggests that this expectation should be modified somewhat. This theory assumes that elite patrons will generally play the role of "conscience constituents": that is, those who contribute resources to a cause but will not benefit directly if movement actors win their cause. But the elite patrons who fund public advocacy through the conduit of consultants' campaigns are better understood in resource mobilization terms as *beneficiary* constituents, because they fund popular activism that benefits their own interests directly. This point is important, because it reminds us that although social movement-like tactics are *favored* by disadvantaged groups who lack resources, they are not the *exclusive purview* of those groups. Recent research, for example, on movements of the wealthy suggests similar conclusions.[6] Instead, and more consistent with the work of Schattschneider and his students, the findings of this study suggest that well-resourced elites support mass political engagement when they expect that they would otherwise end up on the losing side of a policy battle.

Accordingly, it is also worth exploring further the role of elites in contentious fields, following prominent calls for such research by Mayer Zald, Michael Lounsbury, Stephen Barley, Royston Greenwood, and others.[7] Consultants are an important type of elite in the "asteroid belt" of associations contending for power in the contemporary state, and are, in one sense, where the rubber meets the road in terms of how powerful organizations reshape civil society and policy-making domains. As experts, they attempt to distill knowledge about civic organization, the political process, and how best to market advocacy causes to distant publics. Organizational theorists, going back at least to classic work by Paul DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, have recognized that consultants are important institutional agents, in that consultants serve as "Johnny Appleseeds" in spreading practices in

---

[5] McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977).   [6] Martin (2013).
[7] Zald and Lounsbury (2010); Barley (2007, 2010); Greenwood (2008); Reed (2012).

mimetic fashion across organizational fields.[8] Despite the important role of elite consultants and other professional service firms in shaping the practices and politics of the leading global corporations and associations, sociological research on such intermediary organizations (and their boundary-spanning functions) is still relatively underdeveloped.[9] Thus, much more research is needed on the place of professional service firms in politics and advocacy, and particularly how such elites are reshaping both lobbying and contentious politics.

Lastly, the findings of this study help to recognize an under-appreciated point in the wide-ranging debates over the past two decades regarding the seeming paradox of declines in broad-based public participation alongside the explosion of growth in advocacy organizations. Prominent research by both Robert Putnam and Theda Skocpol suggests that we are witnessing an expansion of advocacy without a widening population of advocates, in part because many associations today lobby on their constituents' behalf without providing those citizens with meaningful, face-to-face socialization into politics. While most of the blame in these discussions was focused on the transforming structures of advocacy organizations and the changing ways that Americans spend their leisure time, existing research has largely overlooked how professional firms are generating advocacy without offering real political socialization to citizens. This is not a trivial omission, given that the aggregate campaigns of these consulting firms mobilize millions of selectively targeted citizens in what are often short-term and transactional advocacy campaigns. Campaigns like those organized by grassroots consultants allow for advocacy without the cultivation of social capital, enabled by communications technologies and media advertisements.

However, this is not to say that consultants are exclusively focused on the atomistic targeting of individuals who fit the demographic profiles desired by their client, as (a) these professionals tend to seek out those who are seen as opinion leaders in their community, as revealed in Chapter 7, and (b) they often hope that their campaign will independently take root among stakeholders, especially by using social networking technologies like Facebook and Twitter. As Owen Taylor described to me, consultants' highest hope is that local advocates will adopt the

---

[8] DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 152).
[9] Greenwood, Suddaby, and McDougald (2006).

campaign's cause as their own. In one campaign his firm organized, a local convenience store chain was seeking to open a new retail store in a suburb of a large mid-Atlantic city. This convenience store had recently begun to add gas pumps to their locations, thus threatening the interests of local gas stations, who began to lobby against the chain. Taylor described a set of fortuitous circumstances:

Everybody loves [this chain in our area], except for gas station owners who charge a lot for gas, as well as stores who sell [deli sandwiches]. So, you know, we're sort of like in a little bit of fight in [this suburb], and we've done not only traditional canvassing, but we've done a lot with Facebook advertising and things like that, and it's actually been very effective. It's so effective. One of the most hilarious things is that on the Facebook site there's a bunch of guys [from this suburb] who took up the cause. I guess they have a band, and they wrote a song and did a video, basically saying that they want [this chain to open a store in our town], and they posted it on Facebook and it circulated around. I mean, it's hilarious. And, again, that was organic. We didn't do that. But we provided the environment, you know, from a social media standpoint for these guys to do that.

Without putting too fine a point on it, examples like this show that even when such campaigns do go beyond atomistic targeting and make possible the endogenous diffusion of participation among civic and social groups, such strategies obviously do very little to encourage broad-based and meaningful public participation in which citizens generate social capital through their participation. The structures of civil society are being borrowed to help a paying client win a campaign.

Displacing the traditional grassroots?

A foremost conclusion of this book is that transformations in organized civil society in the US – particularly the political mobilization of business, the expansion of organized public advocacy, and growing political partisanship – helped make possible a market for grassroots advocacy services and promote the shift toward a subsidized public. Still, the expansion of this field need not mean that consultant-driven campaigns are necessarily *replacing* traditional grassroots advocacy by volunteers and staff of advocacy associations. In fact, the evidence presented in this book suggests that although grassroots participation consultants are, in fact, "behind the curtain" of much popular advocacy today; it also indicates that consultants have to play by many of the same rules as

other kinds of organized advocates. They need to consider the decision-making processes of policymakers, study their opposition, frame their message in a resonant fashion, and effectively mobilize constituencies. While they may have more resources and better data than other kinds of organized advocates, nonetheless they face many of the same challenges. And when working with advocacy groups, consultants hope to further build associations' mobilization capacities and extend their organizational reach, without necessarily harming organizations or generating long-term dependence on outside experts. In fact, consulting firms like Crossroads Campaign Solutions and Democracy Partners, both described in Chapter 6, are integrated into the progressive movement and are committed to helping their advocacy clients win and to become even stronger associations. While only the wealthiest associations can typically afford such services, there is relatively little evidence that consultants detract from their capacity as associations.

What's more, the ad hoc nature of most of the campaigns organized by public affairs consultants makes them a far cry from the thick forms of civic and political activism for which the term "grassroots" is more commonly known: action rooted in rich networks of local community-based organizations, religious congregations, ethnic associations, and other informal building blocks of civil society. Consultant-backed campaigns are generally efforts to build upon these structures to gain political support for their client's interests, and they are more often short-term efforts that do not build long-term organizing structures. Chapter 7, for example, showed that consultants tend to target, above all else, would-be activists who have histories of political activism, thus perhaps shifting these activists over to the client's issue but focusing less on generating *new* activists. Perhaps even more importantly, I also illustrated how consultant-backed campaigns are particularly in need of sources of support that are *independent* of the paying client, such that these activists cannot easily be dismissed as those who have a personal or financial stake in the issue by being directly tied to the client. Consultants need to locate and amplify the voices of those who have a genuine interest in the issue, regardless of the incentives involved. But such voices are often difficult to locate, and when facing major crises or controversies, some consulting firms or associations may cut corners.

It also remains true that campaigns that are less than fully transparent about their sponsorship may decrease public trust in advocacy groups and lead to searches for ever-more exhaustive information on the

patronage behind advocacy. But there is little reason to expect that "grassroots for hire" strategies should lead to less member participation, fundraising, or organizing by those engaged in thicker forms of civic and/or political activism. If anything, it seems more reasonable to expect that their campaigns lead to even more political activism (even if highly partisan), given that advocacy groups often need to counter the influence of consultants' campaigns. Such has been the case, for instance, in environmental groups' campaigns to counter the industry-backed mobilization in favor of the controversial natural gas extraction method of hydraulic fracturing.[10]

In sum, then, although grassroots public affairs consultants are amplifying certain voices of the privileged and politically active, they are nonetheless limited by the independent force of organized civil society. They can generate displays of mass support on behalf of elite interests, but the effectiveness of their doing so is constrained by their ability to connect those interests with those shared by constituencies who care about such issues for their own purposes. And, as I explain in more detail below, they must work particularly hard to get past the growing public perception – which firms like these have, in part, helped to create – that much advocacy today is untrustworthy, inauthentic, and covertly funded by elite interests.

Debate over disclosure

As described in Chapter 2 and in examples throughout the book, a regular concern is that consultants often fail to disclose the identity of their client to the would-be citizen activists they recruit. Consultants generally prefer to keep their own role (and their client's) in the background, such that the activism they generate appears as an independent expression of genuine public opinion rather than a top-down, elite-driven effort lacking in legitimacy. Or, at the very least, they hope that their role doesn't overshadow what may at times be a very genuine expression of popular support aligned with the interests of their client. A common refrain in my interviews was the argument that if the campaign doesn't involve fraud or a misrepresentation of citizens' authentic views, then it shouldn't matter who helped those individuals or groups find their voice.

---

[10] See, for example, Parks (2012).

The broader political context in the wake of the Supreme Court's landmark 2010 decision in *Citizens United v Federal Election Commission* also bears on this topic. This decision held that the US government is not permitted under the First Amendment to restrict independent political expenditures by corporations and labor unions.[11] In effect, the ruling opened up the floodgates for corporations and unions to independently – that is, without officially coordinating with a candidate campaign – express opposition or support for a political candidate through communications such as television or radio advertisements. A key additional consequence that followed from the *Citizens United* ruling was the provision that groups incorporated under code 501(c)4 of the United States Internal Revenue Code – typically described as "Social Welfare" organizations – as well as trade associations and unions, would now be allowed to make expenditures that expressly support candidates for office (although they still may not, under the law, engage in electoral advocacy as their primary purpose).[12] And, most importantly, these nonprofit organizations are required only to disclose their expenditures, not the identities of their donors, including major corporations and industry groups. Thus, a broad national debate is taking place about how these anonymous donations by corporations, the very wealthy, and other advocacy groups are reshaping elections and American democracy.[13] It is indeed quite difficult for the public to interpret these communications when their sponsors are not disclosed; even if citizens agree with the message, they might not necessarily feel the same way if they knew who was asking.

While this vast influx of dollars into third-party groups is new since the 2010 *Citizens United* decision, the strategy of funding third-party advocacy without disclosure is age-old, and raises a similar set of questions for policymakers. While the federal Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) of 1995 requires registration and disclosure of political activity in which a lobbyist (either in-house or for a client) seeks to influence, through their own direct efforts, the decisions of specific legislative or executive branch officials, lobbying that involves mobilizing mass public participation continues to be unregulated at the federal level. Amendments to lobbyist disclosure laws in 1998 and 2007 clarified the definition of lobbying and elaborated on which types of activities are covered by it, but nonetheless kept grassroots activities out of

---

[11] Winik (2010).   [12] Ibid.   [13] E.g., Lessig (2011).

that definition. Indeed, grassroots lobbying is not even considered "lobbying" under federal lobbyist disclosure laws, any more than the activity of making a rousing political speech in public is.[14] Some states require disclosure of grassroots lobbying activity, but these regulations are incredibly heterogeneous across states and difficult to enforce.[15]

First Amendment concerns, of course, are at the forefront of why grassroots lobbying is generally exempted from lobbying disclosure laws. The failure of the grassroots lobbying provisions in the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act (HLOGA) of 2007 are telling in this respect. Taken up in the months following the Jack Abramoff scandal – in which Abramoff was paid by Native American tribes in part for grassroots lobbying work – the HLOGA legislation was intended to curb lobbyist influence by integrating legislation on lobbying disclosure, gifts to members of Congress, and federal election law.[16] When introduced in the Senate, the lobbying ethics bill included a rather encompassing provision to regulate grassroots lobbying, which would have included efforts by all advocacy groups, consultants, and a range of others who encourage members of the public to engage in indirect lobbying.[17] Although supported by government transparency advocates like Common Cause, Democracy 21, and OMB Watch, it was met with vociferous opposition mainly from other advocacy groups, and the regulations on grassroots lobbying were stripped from the Senate's bill before being passed. Groups ranging from the ACLU to the Traditional Values Coalition spoke up, worried that the proposed regulations would stifle their grassroots advocacy. A provision regulating grassroots activity was reintroduced when the bill was taken up in the House, although many concerns remained. Considering how the House should address the matter, a Republican former Federal Election Commission director put it succinctly, arguing that the problem is "not that citizens are contacting Washington too much ... The purpose of disclosure is to inform the citizens of what government is doing – it's not to inform the government of what citizens are doing."[18] Although the House bill's relevant provisions were essentially restricted to the firms described in this book – "lobbying firms hired by a client to do grassroots work, and only to the firm's paid communications that urge

---

[14] Vladeck (2009: 416).   [15] Milyo (2010).
[16] Luneburg, Susman, and Gordon (2009: iii).   [17] Caruso (2007).
[18] Newmyer (2007).

grassroots action"[19] – these regulations were also eventually removed before the HLOGA's passage.

The debate over the grassroots lobbying provision in the HLOGA is important because it helps to set an agenda for federal policymakers as they consider whether to regulate grassroots lobbying activity. On the one hand, the campaigns of the consultants in this study do, at times, exploit public trust in advocacy causes and fail to be transparent. Their doing so distorts the democratic process and offers a new source of political power and influence to already-privileged elites, not to mention that the activists they target are already politically over-represented.

On the other hand, policymakers have in the past faced, and will continue to face, significant difficulties in drawing boundaries around which types of grassroots activities should require disclosure. If they require disclosure of all payments above a certain threshold to grassroots public affairs consultants, this could ensnare not only corporate- and industry-backed campaigns, but also efforts by large advocacy organizations, labor unions, and other groups. Also, since some of the work consultants do for organizations involves internal communications with their own members, employees, or shareholders, such regulations could raise concerns about whether associations have the right to expect a degree of privacy in their communications with members (or corporations with their shareholders). In sum, critics of mandated disclosure of otherwise anonymous grassroots lobbying argue that such laws could be harmful by being overly broad, restricting free speech, and violating constitutionally recognized principles supporting the use of pseudonyms or other anonymity-granting devices in making public claims (which have a long tradition in US politics dating back to the nation's founding).[20]

Nonetheless, a few sensible measures regarding corporate grassroots expenditures are advisable. Most importantly, laws protecting anonymous speech have generally covered what might best be called "anonymous speech in the public sphere" or "on the street," rather more than explicit requests for citizens to petition government bodies.[21] The courts have found compelling reasons to support disclosure of the funding sources for other forms of lobbying as well as electoral contributions through Political Action Committees (PACs), such as those required, respectively, by the 1995 LDA and the 1974

---

[19] Caruso (2007).   [20] Zellner (2010: 375).   [21] Ibid.: 382.

Federal Campaign Election Act. Given that this book has documented a lucrative industry of firms active in mobilizing grassroots support in a fashion intended to influence legislatures, agencies, and electoral decision-making, basic disclosure of funding sources would seem to be justified on similar grounds.

More specifically, it would be justified to put in place regulations that would resurrect sections of the 2007 HLOGA that were initially in the bill in its earlier form as the Lobbying Transparency and Accountability Act. In addition to expanding the definition of lobbying to include grassroots efforts, the law would have required the identification of sponsors of campaigns – involving a consultant or not – that spend over $25,000 in a quarter on paid grassroots mobilization efforts.[22] The law would have exempted internal communications within an organization.[23] Importantly for the firms in my study, it would also have required public affairs firms that receive more than $25,000 per quarter for mobilizing the public *to register as lobbyists and disclose the sources of their funding*.[24] Given the very high threshold that would need to be crossed in order to trigger such disclosure, there is relatively little reason to expect that such regulations would harm the work of advocacy groups working at even a modest-to-high scale. The vast majority of groups in civil society, after all, are small-scale and local associations.[25] Disclosure of these very large-scale campaigns, although not a perfect solution, would likely enhance trust in both government and associations. It would also impose no new limits on how much can be spent in such efforts – ensuring only that they be disclosed.

Outside of state regulation, industry self-regulation and voluntary compliance on their own are not very promising avenues, although some steps have been made in that direction. The George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management, for example, has drafted a code of ethics for the public participation professionals, suggesting that consultants should abide by the principles that they only promote legitimate and authentic communications, that they not send irrelevant messages to policymakers, be transparent about the client's identity, and be civil and honest.[26] Similarly, the Public Relations Society of America suggests that it is unethical to create front groups

---

[22] "Grassroots lobbying" was defined as an effort to influence more than 500 members of the public to contact a federal official on a particular issue.
[23] Zellner (2010: 392).   [24] Ibid.: 393.   [25] Smith (1997).   [26] GSPM (2012).

or to have people pose as grassroots volunteers for a cause.[27] But efforts such as these have not been welcomed by most consultants. In fact, many of the consultants I spoke with had either never heard of this proposed code of ethics or, unsurprisingly, thought it would be unnecessary. As long-standing grassroots consultant Amy Showalter put it in a co-authored essay, the industry features many friendly and personable individuals, but will never be "a profession that will naturally enjoy respect and admiration." She continues, "the public knows that we get paid to persuade. A grass-roots code of ethics that stifles free speech won't change that."[28]

Grassroots campaigns facilitated by consultants appear to be here to stay. Given the policy challenges inherent in mandating disclosure, as well as the relatively weak power of institutional pressures for normative change, two additional factors seem also to be promising in curbing some of the industry's more egregious practices: (1) strengthening advocacy associations' powers to monitor and uncover the sponsors behind campaigns that do not disclose the identity of their client, and (2) growing recognition by the industry that although a lack of transparency may be appealing when a client faces conditions of crisis or controversy, the costs are often even greater – and likely to lead to a failed campaign – when a client's covert support is revealed. Regarding the latter, grassroots consultants would be well served in recognizing that their most effective practices are those that look like traditional grassroots politics, but with a particular sensitivity to being transparent, genuine, and honest in their dealings with both citizens and policymakers.

Civil society and politics in a context of "grassroots for hire"

Elite-sponsored grassroots campaigns have become a prominent feature of American civic society and political engagement by the opening years of the twenty-first century. In a context of heightened inequality and a lack of disclosure about the funding sources of campaigns organized both by consultants and also those by other kinds of advocacy and nonprofit groups, advocacy claims are (perhaps rightfully) met with a healthy dose of skepticism. The widespread engagement of elites in mass politics has only fueled these feelings of mistrust. For example, elite

[27] Fitzpatrick and Palenchar (2006: 220).   [28] Showalter and Rhoads (2010).

advocates have become incredibly active in seeking to reshape public opinion and advocacy surrounding climate change, with some initial evidence that they have been effective in doing so.[29] The sugar-sweetened beverage industry has been mobilized in full force to press back – with varying degrees of success – against new taxes and regulations on soda sales in a variety of localities. The natural gas industry is fighting battles on multiple fronts against citizens who raise critical health and environmental questions about the safety of the new gas extraction method of hydraulic fracturing. And contention has been sustained around elite sponsorship in domains like charter schools, real estate development, gambling, food and agriculture policy, and internet regulation.

Even if consultants' campaigns may not be displacing other forms of grassroots participation, their efforts are often effective in shifting public debates and channeling participation in directions favored by elite consultants and their clients. As I have argued, their campaigns encourage participation without necessarily improving citizens' social capital or civic skills, any more than one learns how to craft a political argument or network with other activists through attaching one's name to a ready-made form letter.[30] Philip Howard has argued, along the same lines, that campaigns like the ones described in this book encourage "thin citizenship" in which democracy is reduced to short-term, transactional, and individualistic exchanges between citizens and leaders.[31] Similar to worries that some have expressed about "plug-in volunteering" in civic associations,[32] the plug-in political participation requested by grassroots consultants is facilitating the decoupling of participation from the cultivation of democratic citizenship. The toolkit of mass mobilization may have been borrowed from grassroots associations, but something significant has been lost along the way.

The hope for a revitalization of the modern public sphere, expressed by Jürgen Habermas and deliberative democratic theorists today, imagines potential futures in which the interests of capitalist markets and state administrative practices are not so powerful as to close off the independent space of a democratic public sphere rooted in civil society.[33] Theorists expect that these powerful interests will make efforts to

---

[29] Brulle, Carmichael, and Jenkins (2012).   [30] Walker (2009: 84).
[31] Howard (2006: 184–191).   [32] Lichterman (2006).
[33] Habermas (1987, 1989); Fishkin (1992).

"colonize" those spaces for their own purposes through advertising, public relations, and other interventions in public life.[34] However, despite these influences, there are reasons to remain optimistic that the force of organized civil society is likely to limit these colonization efforts, mainly in that the public is attentive to these strategies and often effective at discrediting them. As Habermas argued,

Public opinions that can acquire visibility only because of an undeclared infusion of money or organizational power lose their credibility as soon as these sources of social power are made public. Public opinion can be manipulated but neither publicly bought or publicly blackmailed . . . a public sphere cannot be "manufactured" as one pleases.[35]

Accordingly, the evidence presented in this book suggests both challenges for a healthy democracy and potentials to limit what damage might be imposed by some (although not all) consultants' campaigns. The challenges are clear: the work of these consultants makes for a more unequal democracy in which narrow-casted recruitment appeals facilitate transactional participation aligned with the interests of well-resourced business groups, industry associations, elite leaders, and advocacy causes. But the limits to their influence are equally clear, in that campaigns that engage in "astroturf" strategies – heavy use of incentives, fraudulent misrepresentation of citizens' views, and/or the failure to disclose the predominant sponsorship of elite patrons – are often revealed and contested effectively by critical observers and advocacy organizations. Thus, even in a context in which mass participation is reshaped by elites, the power of critical publics to challenge those elite campaigns becomes even more important.

[34] Ibid.   [35] Habermas (1996: 364).

Appendix 1
Identifying consulting firms
(baseline data)

The population of consulting firms active in providing grassroots mobilization services to organizational clients is one that has not previously been studied in systematic fashion. A number of studies nod toward the presence of such consulting firms and the role that they play in interest group or corporate politics, but these consultants have otherwise successfully remained "behind the curtain" and have been largely overlooked in such studies.[1] Thus, a crucial initial task in this work was to identify the relevant population of consulting firms. Luckily, even for a field that remains somewhat secretive, their efforts to win the business of new clients can be successfully exploited for research purposes.

Following a long tradition in analyses of organizational populations, I searched widely for a directory source that would provide a comprehensive census of organizations active in providing grassroots mobilization services. The accuracy of such a directory is crucial to minimizing systematic bias in an analyst's depiction of an organizational field.[2] When this project was still in its infancy, I was fortunate enough to locate precisely such a comprehensive directory: the listings of political consulting firms published annually by *Campaigns & Elections* (*C&E*) magazine. Perhaps even more importantly, this directory enjoys something of a monopoly on providing listings of political consultants. The directory is, as the *C&E* editors argue, the "only comprehensive directory of political consultants, political products and services, public affairs professionals, and lobbyists [in the United States]."

Indeed, the *C&E* directories are a better fit for this study than alternative sources such as the *Washington Representatives* directory, which focuses mainly on traditional lobbyists who do not include mobilizing the public in their service portfolio (for those firms that do, they

---

[1] E.g., Kollman (1998: 46, 74–80); Goldstein (1999: 2, 64); Lyon and Maxwell (2004: 563).

[2] Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner (2011: 1325–1331).

generally appear in the *C&E* listings anyway).[3] *C&E* is also more comprehensive than the listings provided through professional or trade groups like the American Association of Political Consultants, Public Relations Society of America, or the Public Affairs Council; a substantial subset of organizations, of course, are not members of these associations and would otherwise be ignored by an analyst who relied exclusively on such lists (even when aggregated). Further, in the interviews I conducted for this study – consistent with the field's weak professionalization – many consultants suggested that they derive relatively few benefits from joining such associations, in that this is not a field known for sharing best practices across firms. In addition, given that *C&E*'s directory is more or less the "only game in town" as a centralized source for those shopping for the services of a political professional, it would be quite unwise for a consulting firm to remain unlisted in the directory.[4]

With a team of research assistants, I collected all directory listings of firms in two *C&E* sources: (1) fifteen editions of the *C&E* "Political Pages" (CEPP) directory published annually from 1990 to 2004, and (2) a series of pullout "Grassroots Lobbying Buyers' Guides" (GLBGs) published in five special issues in 1995, 1996, 1999, 2001, and 2003. For the GLBG listings, we collected every firm listed in this pullout guide. For the CEPP listings, we collected all entries that appeared under any of the subheadings relevant for grassroots participation, taking an inclusive but not over-broad approach. Thus, the CEPP subheadings included were: "Grass-roots Lobbying," "Public Affairs – Grass-roots Strategy/Mobilization," "Petitions & Signature Gathering," and "Field Operations & Organizing."[5]

---

[3] Still, in an earlier analysis (Walker, 2009: S1) I found that less than 3 percent of the firms in the baseline data from *C&E* are focused mainly on "government affairs" (that is, inside lobbying that does not involve mobilizing the public).

[4] These listings are, as of this writing, also available online at www.campaignsand elections.com/resources/political-pages/.

[5] Other relevant subheadings were considered but then excluded. These are the following topics: "Public Affairs," "Direct Mail," "Telephone Contact Services," "Media Buying & Placement," "Database/file Management," and "Crisis Management." Since many firms in any given directory year are cross-listed under a number of categories, those which did not claim to be directly involved in grassroots lobbying, field organizing, or petitioning activity *for any year of the directory listings* were assumed to be only peripherally engaged in grassroots mobilization activity. Recall also that many of the firms in the data provide services

Our research team then reduced these grouped firm-year listings into a set of unique firms, using a set of coding rules we agreed to at the outset.[6] Thus, the baseline data include all unique firms that *appeared at least once* in either of these two *C&E* sources at some point between 1990 and 2004. The CEPP listings for every year between 1990 and 2004 offered, on average, 115 listings per year, although many of these listings overlap both within and across years. Such overlap occurred within years because consulting shops may choose to be listed under more than one of the selected headings in each year, should they wish to stand out for providing those more specialized services. As for the GLBG, an average guide provided 89 listings of individual firms, for a raw total of 445 listings across its five editions.

To merge these two sources, CEPP cases were added into a database that already included the GLBG listings as described above. Comparisons of the GLBG and CEPP entries suggest that combining both sources was necessary in order to complement one another, in that each source introduced a significant number of exclusive cases. Once all repeating firms were reduced to unique cases, the CEPP and GLBG case data produced a listing of $N=712$ unique firms to constitute the baseline data file.

For each of these $N=712$ firms, our research team also searched a number of directories, as well as firms' websites, for evidence of firms' client bases, primary service focus, partisanship, founding year, and a number of other measures. Directories searched include *O'Dwyer's Directory of Public Relations Firms*, *Washington Representatives*, and the Thomson-Gale *Goliath* directory of public and private firms. For each of the directory sources, we searched the firm over a three-year window surrounding the year of the firm's most recent appearance in one of the *C&E* directories. These data are used in Table A.1 below.

such as direct mail mobilization or phone calling as part of their broader portfolio of grassroots engagement practices (see Chapter 4).

[6] In the merging process, firms that have the same name but listed different cities were treated as separate cases, unless one of the addresses was in Washington, DC (which generally suggests that the firm has a branch in the capital). Firms that added an additional partner in later years were considered the same firm, whereas those cases in which the partners split up and founded a new firm were considered two cases.

Appendix 2

2.1 Identifying firms to survey

While the baseline data proved useful in developing an account of the founding patterns of consulting firms, this study, of course, required a much more in-depth account of the current field of consultants: not just about their clients, service portfolio, staffing, and revenue, but more detailed information about particular campaigns, demographic groups targeted, the outcomes of campaigns, and more. To do so would require reaching out directly to consultants through a survey. But a prior task before fielding the survey was to determine which of the 712 firms in the baseline data – again, these were firms active at any point between 1990 and 2004 – continued to be active in providing services to their clients. This is especially important to do in a relatively high-mortality organizational population such as in a field of lobbying firms dependent on variable campaign revenue.

In the planning phase of the survey in 2008, my research team made initial efforts to ascertain which organizations had survived to the present day. This was done with the understanding that this provisional list would need to be culled further once the survey would go into the field, as additional organizations would experience mortality by that point. Thus, in summer 2008, with a team of research assistants, we made efforts to contact all 712 organizations in the baseline data in order to determine whether they continued to be active. Team members first searched firm websites (where applicable) for the most up-to-date contact information for firms, cross-checking these data against the *C&E* entries from the baseline data and updating information where necessary. Then, using these updated contacts, my research assistants and I placed calls to all firms, simply requesting to confirm organizations' email and mailing addresses. We were able to directly confirm survival for 194 of these organizations through phone contacts, and we also counted as surviving an additional 39 firms for which we did not speak to an individual but

whose voicemail message confirmed the group's identity (for a sum of 233 surviving groups as of 2008, or 32.9 percent). Firms that had a disconnected number, as well as those that rang ten or more times without an answer (after repeated attempts during daytime hours in the firm's time zone), were considered effectively defunct.

In 2010, just before fielding the survey (see Appendix 2.2 below), this list of firms was culled further after making additional efforts to confirm the survival of these 233 firms. In addition, I excluded those firms for whom grassroots mobilization services are *not* a core service offering; many of these more technically focused vendor firms do not themselves target and recruit citizens into participatory action (they merely sell data, software, printing services, or similar technical services to other firms that do engage in recruitment or coalition-building). Thus, the study would need to exclude from the survey sample those firms that provide only one particular technical service without providing general counsel on the development of grassroots strategy (if they offer these specialized services while also providing general grassroots services, they remained in the sample). These exclusions – based on both additional mortality and how central grassroots strategies are to an organization's service portfolio – reduced the sample to 171 grassroots public affairs consultants active in providing mobilization services to clients in 2010.

After the conclusion of the survey, in 2011, one final attempt to assess the population was made, both with respect to mortality and with respect to continuing to provide grassroots services; such searches were necessary given the potential that the 2008 financial crisis and "Great Recession" that followed may have increased organizational mortality even over this short timespan. The former was determined by conducting a series of phone calls and website searches, and the latter was determined through examining organizational websites. Through these searches, it became clear that an additional sixteen organizations experienced mortality, and there were another seventeen who shifted away from providing grassroots mobilization services. The study was therefore left with an effective sample of 138 public affairs consultants.

Given all of these layers of selection, as well as because these firms in the effective sample represent only 19.4 percent of the firms in the baseline data, one might raise concerns that the study could suffer from what organizational analysts call "survivorship bias." That is, characteristics that are associated with organizational failure may be systematically related to certain group characteristics of interest to the study, as in

Table A.1 *Comparing consulting firms in the sample with excluded firms (baseline data)*

	In survey sample	In baseline only	Difference
Firm clients[1]			
Average % corporations	31.8	30.5	1.3
Average % non-trade advocacy groups	15.4	20.3	–4.9
Average % trade associations	21.1	16.5	4.6
Average % political parties	16.2	17.1	–0.9
Average % government agencies	8.3	8.4	–0.1
Average % other clients	7.1	7.1	0.0
Party affiliation of firm[1]			
Democratic	29.4%	39.1%	–9.7%
Republican	27.9%	33.3%	–5.4%
Non- or bipartisan	42.6%	27.6%	15.0%
Focus of services[1]			
Public affairs / public relations	21.7%	24.6%	–2.8%
Government affairs	3.5%	2.3%	1.2%
Mix PR / government affairs	61.7%	21.8%	39.9%
Service provider (e.g., direct mail)	13.0%	36.8%	–23.8%
Other, NEC	0.0%	14.6%	–14.6%
Median year founded	1988	1985	3
N	138	574	

Note: [1] Columns may not total to 100% due to rounding error.

studies of the long-term financial performance of firms that do not account for differential mortality. Even though such worries are more pronounced for studies of organizational change, differential mortality may also bias an analyst's portrait of a later cross-section of a field.

To address this concern, I compared the 138 consulting firms in the effective sample with the 574 organizations from the baseline data which are not in this group.[1] Table A.1 summarizes these findings.

---

[1] Recall that with the exception of data on founding, the baseline data uses information collected about each firm around the year of their *most recent* appearance in the CEPP or GLBG listings.

Before reviewing these findings, however, note that the data for this comparison comes from the baseline data file, and thus the distribution of clients and their categories differs, naturally, from what is presented in Chapter 4.

Table A.1 offers some perspective on how the firms in the survey sample differ from the broader population of firms that were originally included in the *C&E* listings. In general, their client bases are somewhat similar, although sampled groups have a lower representation of advocacy groups and a somewhat higher share of trade associations among their clients. Although only suggestive (and worthy of further research), this evidence fits with the finding in Chapter 4 that trade associations are better-paying clients than advocacy groups are, thus perhaps boosting a firm's chances of survival.

Moving beyond these differences in client representation, the firms that are in the sample are generally much less partisan than those that were in the original set of listings: 42.6 percent of firms in the sample were bi- or nonpartisan (according to the baseline data), compared to only 27.6 percent of non-sampled firms from the baseline data. This is likely because nonpartisan firms are more durable and less threatened by the vagaries of the election cycle, and, as Phil Frederick suggested in Chapter 4, they have greater flexibility. Beyond this finding on non-partisanship, the share of firms in the sample is more evenly partisan, while non-sampled baseline firms were more heavily Democratic.

As for the particular services provided, the key difference is that service providers were generally excluded from the sample unless they also showed evidence of offering services to recruit public participation directly. Other organizations (e.g., law firms that counsel grassroots organizations on strategy, or firms that only provide media training services) were excluded. Thus, firms that fit the profile of "mixed PR/ government affairs" are a much larger share of the sampled firms, and general public affairs and government affairs firms are represented approximately evenly.

Lastly, I compared sampled firms against non-sampled firms on the metric of founding year, finding that the median firm among the sampled group was founded three years later than those that appeared only in the baseline data. In additional analyses, I also found that firms in the sample have about five more employees than those that were excluded, as well as approximately 80 percent higher revenues. Thus, beyond the other differences already described, sampled firms tended to

be somewhat newer, larger, and more lucrative than those that disbanded or only provided technical services.

2.2 SPAPCO survey procedures

In summer 2009, I began to draft a survey to be sent to surviving consulting firms. The survey emphasized five general areas: basic organizational characteristics of the firm, clients, service areas, revenue, and the details of specific campaigns. Because I expected that consultants tailor the services they offer to the particular circumstances of a client, a focus on particular campaigns would help to identify these particular linkages. As originally proposed, the survey was designed to study each firm's ten most prominent campaigns over the eight years prior to the survey. Given that the large majority of firms were founded prior to 2000, and the overwhelming majority of firms continue to include their founder, it was reasonable to expect that problems of limited organizational memory would be less of a concern (and that nearly all firms have been in existence for at least eight years). For each of these campaigns, the survey would inquire about the firm's client, the client's industry (if corporate or trade association), which demographic groups were targeted in the campaign, how much revenue the campaign generated, which services were used (and how effective those services were), which policy targets were involved, and how effective the consultant judged they were in meeting the client's goals.

In late 2009, I met with three leading grassroots consulting firms in Washington, DC in order to pretest the survey: one Republican-affiliated firm, one Democratic, and one nonpartisan. I emailed the draft survey and cover letter to those consultants a few weeks prior to my visit, and spent between one and three hours talking with those consultants about the framing of the survey questions. Aside from helping to improve question wording, consultants suggested that the survey be limited to asking about a firm's *three* most prominent campaigns over the past *six* years. Respondents suggested that identifying these three campaigns would be a reasonable task to expect of respondents, while still having a broader temporal reach that would minimize the limitations of a single-year cross-section (and its sensitivity to year-to-year fluctuations).

After revising the survey based upon this pretest feedback, in 2010 the survey began to be fielded by the study's survey contractor, the

Pennsylvania State University Survey Research Center (PSU-SRC). The survey was fielded over three waves using up-to-date contact information for all firms in the sample: a web-based survey, to be followed by a mail survey sent to non-respondents, followed by phone calls encouraging participation among those who failed to respond to the web or paper survey waves. Electronic invitations were sent to all respondents, followed by follow-up email reminders to non-respondents one week after the initial email. Three weeks after the first email invitation was sent, non-respondents and any organizations with inactive email addresses were mailed paper surveys. Reminder postcards were sent to all current non-respondents at the four-week point. After an additional month, phone calls to remaining non-respondents began, offering to either re-send the email invitation or re-mail the paper survey. In the final stages, an additional round of postcard reminders were mailed, followed by a round of phone calls I made directly to consulting firms encouraging their participation.

In the end, 22.5 percent of consulting firms responded to the survey. Although this response rate is low by standards of individual-level surveys, it is comparable to other samples of organizations, which tend to have (often markedly) lower response rates.[2] Indeed, organizational surveys often face challenges to their response rates in that (a) individual respondents within organizations may not always have authority to speak on behalf of the organization, (b) capacity to respond requires significant organizational knowledge of an individual respondent, (c) individual participants' motives to take part on behalf of their group may vary considerably across organizations.[3] The survey required a significant amount of detail about organizational practices, which may have presented challenges in all three of the above respects. Compounding these concerns, these consultants in general may wish to stay off of the radar of journalists and academics.

However, a comparison of responding and non-responding organizations showed remarkable similarity based on data disclosed on firms' public websites; these findings suggest that the survey results may nonetheless provide, with some qualification, generalizable information about the

---

[2] E.g., Denison and Mishra (1995); Lincoln and Kalleberg (1985); Bartholomew and Smith (2006).

[3] Tomaskovic-Devey, Leiter, and Thompson (1994).

broader organizational population of consulting firms. For example, building from the website data (Appendix 3), responding and non-responding organizations include, respectively, similar proportions of primarily business-serving firms (45.2 percent vs 49.5 percent), nearly identical shares of firms that serve campaign clients (32.3 percent vs 32.7 percent), and relatively similar proportions of consultants that have primarily association (19.4 percent vs 15 percent) or government (3.2 percent vs 2.8 percent) clients. They also have very similar median staff sizes (five staff for responding groups, six staff for non-responders). Still, some notable differences appear between respondents and non-respondents in their partisanship; although Republican and Republican-leaning firms are represented similarly (25.8 percent of respondents vs 29 percent of non-respondents), Democratic-affiliated firms were markedly more likely to fill out the survey (45.2 percent vs 24.3 percent) and non- or bipartisan firms were notably less likely (29 percent vs 46.7 percent). It would appear, then, that those firms that see themselves as either "apolitical" in nature or are not tied to one party more closely than the other were less likely to respond to a survey that asks mainly about the mobilization of political activity. Many of these non-responding firms are active in the field of corporate public relations, in which some of the firms are also focused on providing corporate communications services on issues that often lack strongly partisan content.

2.3 SPAPCO survey questions

Although space limitations prevent a full reproduction of the survey here, I now provide background on the parts of the survey that were used as data sources for this book project.

The survey began with an opening page that included the statement shown in Figure A.1.

Relevant questions from the survey fall into three categories: (1) those that refer to overall characteristics of the firm, (2) the identification of three of the firm's most prominent campaigns, and (3) campaign-level data based upon these three prominent campaigns. Items below are organized according to this classification.

But first, I note that the survey defined a "campaign" in a precise fashion, repeating this definition where necessary throughout the survey to remind respondents. Thus, the survey included the following

```
Strategic Public Affairs and Political Consulting
Firms in the United States


A study with support from the
National Science Foundation

Affiliated Institutions
University of Michigan
University of Vermont
The Pennsylvania State University Survey Research Center


This study is directed at firms that were listed in the magazine
Campaigns & Elections who engage in strategic public affairs,
grassroots lobbying, constituency building, campaign communications,
petitions & signature-gathering, field operations, and related services
on behalf of client organizations. This survey covers a range of
questions concerning your firm's history, client base, services
offered, strategies, administration, and resources. This survey, which
is supported by the National Science Foundation, takes an objective
approach to understanding how public affairs firms facilitate and
subsidize civic engagement, political participation, and policy-making;
despite much media discussion, there is a lack of understanding of the
importance of strategic public affairs firms among the public,
scholars, and policymakers. All responses are confidential and the
survey does not ask you to identify your firm's clients by name. The
interest of this study is in the field as a whole, and not any
individual firm. Because we know you are busy, we thank you in advance
for taking the time to complete this survey.
```

Figure A.1 Introductory statement for SPAPCO survey

statement: "By 'campaign,' we mean any sustained effort, on behalf of a client or set of clients, to influence public opinion or voter activity, legislative decision-making, or regulatory decision-making. We are only interested in those efforts that involve getting citizens involved in political and/or civic activity in order to help clients meet their stated goals; please do not provide information about campaigns that did not involve activating citizens in public participation."

(1a) Service offerings and areas of expertise

All firms were asked to "Please identify the services that your firm has provided in at least one campaign in the past year (check all that apply)." The question then repeated the campaign definition provided above. The response options for this question are the services listed in Table 4.2.

Then, as a follow-up, respondents were asked to "Please identify the five services in which your firm has the greatest degree of expertise." The follow-up question also repeated the language about

campaign definition from the previous question; these results appear in Table 4.3.

(1b) Staff

This question asked, "How many full-time staff work for your firm?"

(1c) Revenue from all sources

Following tradition in survey research, questions about income were kept at the back of the survey, given their more sensitive nature. The revenue question asked, "Overall, what was the approximate revenue for your firm in the previous year?"

(1d) Revenue by client type

After the overall revenue question, respondents were asked to break down the distribution of that revenue according to which type of client provided it. Specifically, the question asked, "Of the revenue you reported, in your best estimation, approximately what percentage of your firm's revenue in the previous year comes from each of the following sources? Please be sure that these percentages total to 100 percent." These responses were grouped into the categories presented in Figure 4.1.

(2) Identifying a firm's most prominent campaigns

The bulk of the space in the survey comprised detailed questions about a firm's major campaigns over the past six years. After reminding respondents of the definition of a campaign (above), respondents received the following instructions: "A primary goal of this study is to identify the major activities of your firm in its three most prominent campaigns over the six-year period of January 1, 2004 through December 31, 2009. This survey asks that you identify those three most prominent campaigns and provide some details about those campaigns [...] You will be asked to identify the three campaigns over this time period (1/1/04 to 12/31/09) on which your firm exerted the greatest effort. By 'effort,' we ask you to provide your best summary judgment as to how much each of these three campaigns required of your firm's total labor hours, commitment of resources, and amount of fees collected from clients. You will be asked to identify the campaign requiring the most effort and answer some

questions specifically for that campaign. This process will be repeated for the second and third campaigns."

(3a) Tactics and their perceived effectiveness

This campaign-level measure, asked for each of the three major campaigns (as is true for all measures below), requested that respondents discuss all methods they used for mobilizing public participation. The lead-in statement to the question stated the following: "Campaigns often seek to enlist the participation of members of the public to help clients achieve their goals. Which types of citizen political activity did the campaign seek to encourage, and which were most effective in helping to meet the client's goals? For each type of participation, select 'Did not use' if this type of participation was not sought among those targeted for involvement **in this campaign**. If used, please rate its effectiveness in achieving the goals identified above on a scale from 1 (ineffective) to 5 (highly effective)." This book used data from responses about the following tactics: In-person visits with public officials; Hard-copy letters mailed to officials; Phone calls to public officials; Emails sent to public officials; Faxes sent to public officials; Attend a public protest; Petition signatures; Attend a public forum or other public event; Write an op-ed piece for a newspaper; Write about the issue on a blog or social networking site like Facebook or Twitter; Other (specify).

(3b) Policy targets

To identify the policy target of each campaign, consultants were asked, "Regardless of whether this campaign had corporate, non-corporate, or some other type of client, in your estimation, what were the <u>foremost</u> goals sought by this campaign's client(s)? That is, for what purposes did this campaign seek to motivate the civic or political participation of certain individuals or groups? **Please check all that apply**. Also, please indicate which one, in your estimation, was the top priority of this campaign." I use data about each of the following possible policy targets of consultants' indirect influence: The outcome of a piece of legislation; The policy of a governmental agency; Citizens' preferences about a ballot measure, initiative, or referendum; Citizens' preferences as voters about a specific candidate for office; Citizens' sentiments about a business corporation or an industry.

(3c) Corporate stakeholder groups

After asking for the *client type* of the primary client in each campaign, a follow-up question asked about which corporate stakeholders were mobilized by the campaign, and what priority was placed on generating activism by each stakeholder group. The question read, "Thinking about the corporation, industry group, or corporate-affiliated Political Action Committee (PAC) that was the primary client in this campaign, which particular stakeholder groups was your firm most interested in motivating to become active on this issue? Indicate whether activating each group was a top priority, a medium priority, a low priority, not a priority. If you don't know, mark 'Don't Know.'" I employ data about each of the following types of corporate stakeholders: Consumers of the firm's or industry's products/services; Employees working in this corporation or industry; Opinion leaders in the community in which a corporation is located; Suppliers of products or services to this corporation or industry; Investors or shareholders with a stake in this firm or industry; Members of industry associations; Top management in this corporation or industry.

(3d) Demographic targeting

This series of questions began with the prompt, "In making it easier for citizens to become involved in public participation, public affairs campaigns often target specific demographic groups. Considering the demographic characteristics of those citizens who were targeted for involvement by your firm at any point in this campaign, please categorize which groups were a primary target, a secondary target, or not targeted. (If you do not have enough information to provide an estimate, select 'Don't know')." This was asked about the following demographic groups: "Citizens from low-income households (i.e., with annual income below $20,000); Citizens that are members of racial/ ethnic minority groups; Citizens from households with annual income greater than approximately $50,000; Citizens with a college degree or greater level of education; Citizens thought to be already active in civic groups; Citizens thought to be already active in political groups; Citizens considered likely voters in federal Congressional elections; Citizens thought to be strong partisans (i.e., those who either identify strongly with the Republican or the Democratic Party)."

(3e) Number of citizens targeted

For each campaign, consultants were asked, "In your best estimation, how many citizens were targeted for involvement in this campaign throughout its course?"

(3f) Perceived success in meeting the client's goals

For each campaign, consultants were asked, "On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing 'not successful,' 3 representing 'partial success,' and 5 representing 'complete success,' how successful would you say this campaign was in meeting the goals of the client(s)? (If you do not have enough information to answer, mark 'Don't Know')."

Appendix 3

3.1 Website data: general firm characteristics

The data culled from organizational websites were necessary in order to be able to check for biases in survey non-response, as well as to address similar concerns associated with a firm's failure to disclose its clients. The website data include five measures about each firm: political partisanship, predominant client type, staff size, founding consultant's occupation prior to establishing this firm, and founder's gender.

Partisanship

The partisanship measure was constructed on the basis of (1) if there were any party or campaign clients on firms' client lists, and if so whether they were exclusively Democratic or Republican (if both, the firm was coded bipartisan), (2) if there were no party or campaign clients, whether the biographical statements of the firm's principals suggest backgrounds of working as a campaigner, legislative staff, or consultant for only one party, (3) if there are any statements on the website claiming that the firm favors clients or causes that are affiliated with the Democrats or the Republicans. Failing these three tests, firms were considered either non- or bipartisan.

Predominant client type

Because not every firm discloses its clients, but every firm provides some indication of which client market they are targeting, it was possible to generate a measure of which client type consultants work with most often (using a simplified classification of client types). For those firms that did disclose clients, this variable is simply the modal client type. For those that did not, coders searched firms' websites for evidence of which client type is predominant. Most commonly, firms that fail to disclose clients will offer anonymized case studies from their portfolio, such as "grassroots campaign for a large energy firm," and these tend to be

ordered such that a consultant's most important cases are listed first. In such cases, we presumed that the client type of the first case represented the most predominant client type. In other cases, non-disclosing firms said explicitly that they work for particular types of clients, even if not offering examples from their portfolio. Firms that did not disclose clients and neither described their portfolio nor clarified their target client market were marked as missing on this measure.

Staff size

Most consulting firms include on their website an "our team" page that describes the firm's founders, consultants, and staff. As a rough proxy for a firm's staff size, I counted the number of executives and staff listed on a firm's "team" page.

Founder characteristics

Coders searched within each company's "team" page to identify the consultant who founded the firm. In the case of firms with two or more co-founders, coders took the information from the entry placed higher on the page (given that such team listings are typically sorted by status in a fashion not unlike film credits). Coders then searched within that founder's biographical statement for evidence of the founder's occupation prior to starting the firm. In addition, using photographs when available and pronouns in the biographical statement when they were not, coders made a judgment of the gender of founding consultants.

3.2 Website data: client lists

The analyses in Chapters 5 and 6, as well as those in Appendices 5, 6, and 7 below, rely upon client lists disclosed by firms in the survey sample on their websites, which were downloaded and aggregated in 2010. 67.8 percent of firms disclosed a client list on their website. This figure may strike some readers as high, given that this is an industry that is not always fully transparent about its practices. However, there are a few reasons why this data source proves promising: (1) consultants have an interest in identifying the clients they are working for, such that they can win new business, (2) there is relatively little cost to the consultant in disclosing merely that they have worked with a particular client, given that they do not need to say which service they provided nor for which

particular campaign, (3) because grassroots lobbying is unregulated at the federal level and unevenly regulated in the states (see Chapter 8), this unobtrusive measure provides insights into data otherwise unavailable to researchers.

Analysis of likelihood to disclose clients

Nonetheless, further investigation is warranted in order to understand whether other organizational characteristics are associated with a firm's willingness to disclose its clients. Using two measures from the website data – primary client type and partisanship – I examined whether firms who disclosed their clients were significantly different from those that did not. Even when firms did not disclose their client lists, websites generally included a statement identifying their target market (e.g., "coalition building for corporations," "targeting strategies for associations"), and statements such as these were used to help ascertain the firm's primary client type.

   These comparisons revealed that there were not substantial differences in disclosure between firms with varying client types. Those with primarily campaign clients were the most likely to disclose (77.8 percent), followed by those with government clients (75 percent). Primarily association-serving firms were slightly less likely to disclose, at 72 percent, and those focused on corporations were similar at 70.7 percent. The average was pulled down by firms that failed to disclose both their primary client type and their client list.

   The more noteworthy difference between firms that disclosed their clients and those that did not relates to their partisanship. I found that whereas 83 percent of firms that have Democratic affiliations disclosed their clients, only 65.9 percent of Republican firms did, and 60 percent of non- or bipartisan firms disclosed. Although the Republican-affiliated firms I spoke with in the interviews (see Appendix 4.1 below) were remarkably open and candid, these data are similar to the survey responses, which also drew notably higher levels of Democratic participation relative to Republicans. A provisional conclusion of these analyses is that firms on the left of the political spectrum are generally more open about their participation in commercial grassroots mobilization efforts than groups on the right generally are. And non- or bipartisan groups are even less likely to disclose, likely because doing so could send signals of allegiance to one side or the other, thus

cutting off potential sources of business. Readers are asked to keep these caveats in mind when reviewing the findings in Chapters 5 and 6.

Summary of the client data

Grouping together all disclosed links between firms and their clients, a data file was generated that included 9,401 firm–client ties in 2010. With a team of coders, we grouped these clients into eight categories: single corporation, trade or professional association, non-trade advocacy group, government agency, labor union, candidate campaign, political party organization, or other client type. Coders were instructed to enter into Google the name of each client. All coders made a decision about each case, and discrepant cases were discussed and reviewed in a later joint meeting.

Appendix 4

4.1 Interview procedures

Over the course of 2009–2012, I interviewed twenty public affairs consultants. These interviews were designed to further flesh out the findings of the survey data as well as to understand the processes behind the formation of firm–client ties and the factors that led entrepreneurs to found new consulting firms.

These interviews, ranging in length from one half-hour to over two hours, were selected to be broadly representative of the field of consultants, such that a plurality of interviews would be with nonpartisan firms, and with a roughly even split between Republican and Democratic consultants. In the end, I interviewed five Democratic, three Republican, and twelve nonpartisan firms. Firms serving predominantly corporate clients comprised twelve of the interviewed firms, whereas three interviews were with those focusing on electoral campaigns, four interviewees worked primarily with associations, and one worked mainly with government clients. Eight of the interviewed firms are located in greater Washington, DC, seven are located in the West, two are from the South, two are from the Midwest, and one hails from the mid-Atlantic. Firms varied widely in their service offerings, as described in the quotations throughout this book. Interviewed firms were slightly larger than other firms in the sample, having a median staff size of ten.

4.2 Confidentiality practices

At the outset of all interviews, consultants were promised the confidentiality of their responses, and informed that publications resulting from this research would not identify their firm, its clients, or the interviewed consultant's personal identity. Any information shared from these interviews took steps to protect the identity of these entities by using pseudonyms and omitting crucial identifying details. However, there is one

exception to this rule, found in the case of Grassroots Advocates Company in Chapter 7; because the client's name is revealed, I first acquired written permission from the relevant consultant quoted in this chapter for permission to make use of our interview in a fashion that identifies the client without identifying the individual consultant or the consulting firm's name.

Information about firms that did not participate in this study comes from published records about those firms. Of course, as the firms were non-participants in the surveys and interviews for this book, no confidential information was shared with me. Thus, pseudonyms are not used for these firms, their consultants, or their clients. Similarly, the client lists described in Appendix 3.2 were collected from firms' public websites and used in aggregate fashion that does not identify which firms responded to my survey or interview requests.

Appendix 5

5.1 Models of corporate grassroots: dependent variable

All of the publicly traded firms listed in the 2007 *Fortune* 500 were searched to see if they appeared as the client of at least one public affairs consulting firm, using searches for alternative spellings and abbreviated versions of the firm's name, as well as major subsidiaries of the firm in question (e.g., both "AMR Corp." and "American Airlines").

Thus, the dependent measure in Chapter 6 is a count of the number of times a *Fortune* 500 firm appeared as the client of a professional grassroots lobbying / public affairs consulting firm; 60.6 percent of firms did not appear on any client list, while 19.8 percent of firms appeared on one list, 7.7 percent appeared on two, and the remaining 12 percent appeared on more than two lists. The firms that appeared on the greatest number of client lists include Wal-Mart, IBM, AT&T, Comcast, Ford, PG&E, Pfizer, Procter & Gamble, Verizon, and Waste Management, all of which are *Fortune* 200 firms with major interests in managing their public image. As public affairs consultants often make clear, any corporation in the middle of a serious grassroots campaign almost always requires certain services from an outside consultant, as such campaigns regularly overwhelm the capacities of firms' in-house public or government affairs offices.[1] Therefore, this measure is a better indication of firms' grassroots activities than any alternative measure that might be available, such as firms' membership in the Public Affairs Council.[2] I find that out of the 444 publicly traded firms in the 2007 *Fortune* 500 list, some 39 percent (174 corporations) appeared as the client of a grassroots lobbyist in 2010.

---

[1] Jalonick (2003); see also Griffin and Dunn (2004); Public Affairs Council (2008).

[2] Indeed, fewer firms appear in the public directory of corporate members of the Public Affairs Council (29.2%) than are listed as the client of a grassroots lobbying consultant (39.4%).

5.2 Models of corporate grassroots: independent variables and estimation

Reputation

The reputation measure comes from *Fortune*'s Most Admired Companies list, which its collectors describe as the "definitive report card on corporate reputations." Collected by *Fortune*'s partner The Hay Group, the data collection effort started with the *Fortune* 1,000 list, sorted into 63 industry categories for 2007. Executives and analysts in each of those industries were asked to rate all other firms in their industry on eight criteria: innovativeness, employee talent, use of corporate assets, social responsibility, quality of management, financial soundness, long-term investment value, and quality of products and services; however, financial performance is the single most influential factor. The *Fortune* web listing of firms provides these scores, which range from 3.09 (Visteon Corp.) to 8.53 (FedEx Corp.). Firms that were not listed among these highly admired firms (109 firms) were assigned a value of 0.[3] Thus, the median reputational score is 5.92, with a mean of 4.75. In order to test the moderating effects of reputation, I also created a dummy measure such that firms that were at or below the median reputation score (i.e., $\leq$ 5.915) were assigned a value of "1," and firms with higher reputations were assigned a "0."

Controversies and stakeholder strengths

The measures of stakeholder relations come from the KLD Research & Analytics database, otherwise known as the Statistical Tool for Analyzing Trends in Social and Environmental Performance (KLD STATS). For each year starting with 1991, this data file includes data on social, civic, environmental, employer, and product quality, and other indications of non-market activities. From 2003 on, the data file includes firms in the S&P 500, the Domini 400 Social, the Russell 1000 and 2000, the Large Cap Social, and the Broad Market Social Indices. For the present models, 444 publicly traded *Fortune* 500 firms are included, and their 2007 KLD measures are used.

---

[3] Additional checks of the findings were carried out with these 109 firms excluded. The finding that high-reputation firms are buffered from outside controversies holds.

KLD codes these measures through a five-step process.[4] First, analysts that specialize in the sector are assigned to collecting data about a given firm. In concert with other KLD staff, KLD specialists first engage in direct communication with the firm in question. Then, staff members consult research done by partner organizations that examine the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) characteristics of major firms. Following this, KLD staff take the third step of consulting global media reports about the firm in question. The fourth step is to search public documents including SEC filings, 10-K, annual, and proxy reports. Lastly, KLD staff search government and NGO reports about the firm, including information from the Department of Labor, EPA, OSHA, Department of Defense, Human Rights Watch, CANNICOR (a faith-based organization that examines bank mortgage practices), Ceres, and the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR). Once this process is complete, KLD staff continue to monitor media sources, NGO reports, and government data about the firm, as well as documents filed by the firm with state agencies and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports issued by the firm. Although not without limitations, KLD STATS has been used by a wide variety of scholars in management and sociology in order to understand firms' social activities and civic practices.[5] *For each of the following measures, I consider "external controversies" to be those related to community or environmental relations, whereas "internal controversies" are those related to diversity or employment practices.*

Community relations

The KLD data include seven indications of corporate–community strengths and four indications that the firm has had noteworthy controversies in its community relations, all of which are coded as 0/1 binary measures. The community strengths measures include the following: (1) charitable giving (7.7 percent of firms), (2) innovative giving (5.4 percent), (3) non-US charitable giving (7 percent), (4) support for housing (5.9 percent), (5) support for education (13.3 percent), (6) volunteer programs (5.2 percent), and (7) other community ties

---

[4] KLD Analytics (2010).
[5] E.g., Briscoe and Safford (2008); Marquis, Glynn, and Davis (2007).

(1.6 percent). The measures of negative community relations include: (1) evidence of the firm being involved in an investment controversy (3.8 percent), (2) evidence that the firm is having a negative economic impact on certain communities in which it is involved (11.3 percent), (3) tax disputes (10.8 percent), and (4) evidence of other community opposition to the firm (2.5 percent). Overall, 28.8 percent have at least one indication of a significant strength in community relations, and 25.5 percent have at least one community-related controversy. Among firms that have any community strengths, the median number of strengths (summing the list of seven types above) is 1; the same median value holds for firms that show evidence of at least one community controversy. Importantly, some of the same firms that have community strengths are those that have community controversies, as 5.2 percent – largely concentrated among the top 100 firms in the *Fortune* 500 – show both community strengths *and* controversies (7.5 percent have only positive relations and no controversies; 19.6 percent have only controversies and no strengths; the remaining 67.8 percent remain off-radar, showing evidence of neither positive community relations nor major controversies). For purposes of the models below, I use the aggregate counts of positive strengths and community controversies, but in additional models (not presented) I estimated the effects of the individual binary measures that comprise the scales.

Employee relations

Employee relations should be a crucial factor in shaping whether a firm engages in efforts to mobilize stakeholders, as poor employee relations may take away the crucial social capital on which grassroots campaigns are built.[6] The KLD data for 2007 include six strengths in employee relations and five areas of concern. The strengths include positive union relations (8.8 percent), the presence of a cash profit-sharing program (9 percent), programs that encourage worker involvement in ownership and management decision-making (9.2 percent), strong retirement benefits (11.5 percent), strong health and safety programs (23 percent), and other positive employee initiatives (10.8 percent); the median firm has zero of these strengths (mean of .72). The areas of concern include poor

---

[6] Dyer and Singh (1998); Keim and Baysinger (1988).

union relations (7.9 percent), health and safety concerns (42.1 percent), significant workforce reductions (3.4 percent), inadequate retirement benefits (31.5 percent), and other concerns about the firm's employment practices (17.3 percent); the median firm has one of these concerns (mean of 1.02).

Diversity issues

Firms that have a diverse base of employees and managers should be more likely to feel confident in highlighting that diversity before the public. KLD STATS includes eight areas of strong stakeholder relations in the diversity realm, as well as three areas of concern. The positive relations include: the presence of a woman or minority CEO (5 percent), progress in promoting women and/or minority group members (31.3 percent), at least one-third of the board seats are held by women, minorities, or the disabled (24.5 percent), work-life benefits (24.1 percent), a strong record of women/minority contracting (19.1 percent), a strong program for hiring the disabled (7.7 percent), gay- and lesbian-friendly policies (57.7 percent), and other commitments to diversity (0.7 percent); the median firm has one of these characteristics (mean is 1.7). The areas of concern are affirmative action controversies (17.8 percent), no women on the board or in senior management (9.7 percent), and other diversity controversies (3.2 percent); the median firm has zero of these controversies (mean of 0.3).

Environmental issues

Lastly, the data include six environmental strengths and six areas of concern. The strengths include providing a product or service with environmental benefits (6.1 percent), strong pollution prevention programs (5 percent), substantial recycling programs (5.6 percent), use of renewable and/or clean energy sources (16.2 percent), environmental management systems (18 percent), other environmentally friendly activities (1.3 percent); the median firm has zero of these (mean of .5). The areas of concern are hazardous waste liabilities (18 percent), environmental regulatory problems (20.3 percent), substantial levels of emissions (19.6 percent), major producer of agricultural chemicals (1.1 percent), the firm has been identified with major revenue from fossil fuels (11.9 percent), or some other environmental controversy (5.2 percent); the median firm has zero of these (mean of 0.8).

Consumer and labor protest

Scholars of social movements and collective behavior regularly rely upon media accounts in order to account for the protest a state, government, educational, or other institution faces.[7] In examining corporate protest, it is common to rely upon national newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal* for reports of protests and/or boycotts.[8] While it is reasonable to argue that coverage of anti-corporate protest in national media outlets offers, given a degree of selection bias, approximate coverage of the largest and most prominent protests, there are compelling reasons to use a more comprehensive range of sources than national newspapers: (1) national newspapers are not as attuned to particular industries, and may therefore provide disproportionate coverage of prominent firms at the expense of firms that are not household names, (2) business newswire sources and especially trade publications are often more aware of protests against firms in their industry than national sources are likely to be, and (3) scholars of social movements have made clear that newspaper selection bias is often a function of the distance of the event from the newspaper,[9] such that protests against firms with operations outside of major cities should be more likely to be overlooked by national papers. Thus, to mitigate these biases, the measure of consumer protest relies upon searches of three databases available through ProQuest: ABI/ INFORM Dateline (local and regional business publications), ABI/ INFORM Global (including company profiles, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Financial Times*), and ABI/INFORM Trade & Industry (over 1,200 trade publications such as *Airline Industry Information*, *Candy Industry*, *Hospital Business Week*, and *R&D*). The inclusion of these trade publications and regional business-specific sources along with national business publications makes it unlikely that major consumer or labor protests during this period would remain unreported.

These three ABI/INFORM databases were searched simultaneously for all articles that appeared under the following search string for the full years' publications for 2006 and 2007: "protest" OR "boycott" AND "[FIRM NAME]." Multiple variations on each firm's name were

---

[7] See Earl et al. (2004); Ortiz et al. (2005) for reviews.
[8] E.g., King and Soule (2007); Walker, Martin, and McCarthy (2008).
[9] Myers and Caniglia (2004).

searched, including searches of subsidiaries (e.g., KFC, Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut for Yum! Brands). Every article returned by each search was scanned for the name of the firm, and checked to see whether the article (1) referenced the announcement of a collective boycott by an organization or informal collective that was targeted against the firm in question at some point during 2006 or 2007, or (2) reported that a collective protest had occurred in which the firm in question was a direct target. As in the Dynamics of Collective Action study of protests in the *New York Times*,[10] only collective public protests that articulate a particular claim against a target are included. Given this definition, the following were excluded: (A) boycotts that were merely threatened if the firm did not make concessions to the protest group, but not formally announced as an active boycott, (B) protests that were planned, but there was no evidence that the protest actually took place, (C) boycotts called for by individuals rather than collectives, as in a quote from an irate airline passenger suggesting others should boycott the airline, (D) boycotts of a whole industry without any one firm being named, (E) "protest votes" by shareholders that did not involve collective public protest, (F) "bid protests" issued by defense contractors, (G) reports of one company "boycotting" another's products or services, or (H) campaigns that "protest" a firm by publishing negative advertisements in a newspaper, but do not include any collective protest events in person in public settings.

Any articles that met the above criteria in strict fashion were then classified according to whether the claims-makers were consumers or members of concerned outside publics, or instead were "insiders" to the firm (labor unions, employees, or retirees of the firm), using these indications to create two separate measures of consumer protest and labor protest. If the same article announced, for example, a consumer boycott along with a labor picket, both of the measures would be coded "1." Using the above methodology, I find that 20.5 percent of the *Fortune* 500 were the subject of a consumer protest or boycott over this two-year span, and 9.5 percent were the target of public labor contention significant enough to make it into the pages of a major trade publication, business newswire or newspaper, or national business newspaper.

---

[10] McAdam et al. (2009).

Political context

The political context variable relies upon measures of the average political ideology of legislators in the US House of Representatives in the home state of the firm. In addition, as Liston-Heyes and Ceton argue about CSR, "strategic decisions are traditionally made at a firm's HQ. It follows that this is where its leaders tend to be based ... political agents interested in influencing the CSR strategy of the firm will target its HQ."[11] Similar arguments also apply in reference to firms' stakeholder mobilization strategies, as their central primary stakeholders will often have close community ties near firm headquarters. I include measures of the House composition rather than the Senate because of the House's closer reflection of the political and public opinion landscape in a given state. As well, as Otto Lerbinger points out, "the target of corporate grassroots activity is more likely to be the House than the Senate because it is more likely to be influenced," especially because of its two-year re-election cycle.[12]

For the measure of firms' political context, I gathered the first-dimension DW-Nominate scores for all representatives in the 110th Congress (available at www.voteview.com). The first dimension in DW-Nominate scores can be interpreted as a measure of legislator resistance to the idea of government intervention in the economy, such that values that approach "1" indicate absolute legislator conservatism, whereas values that approach "–1" indicate liberalism. After gathering these measures, I averaged these values for all of the representatives within each state.

(Inside) lobbying expenditures

As an additional check on the robustness of the findings – and to be certain that corporate grassroots mobilization represents a unique aspect of firms' political repertoires – a measure of logged lobbying expenditures is included as a control. The measure of lobbying activity comes from the Center for Responsive Politics, whose OpenSecrets website allows for searches of each firm's spending on lobbying (as disclosed under the conditions of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995). Passed after the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994, the

---

[11] Liston-Heyes and Ceton (2007: 102).   [12] Lerbinger (2006: 251).

LDA stipulates that firms that spend more than $20,500 annually on total lobbying activities (including the salaries of staff members who engage in lobbying) or make any payment of at least $5,000 to a single lobbying firm are required to register. These reports are filed annually. Searches for each firm indicated that the large majority of firms (78.8 percent) had disclosed non-zero lobbying expenditures in 2007, with the median expenditure coming in at approximately $505,000. However, within the industries of storage, courier services (e.g., FedEx, UPS), transportation, information and communications, finance, and energy/utilities, the median contribution for firms in those industries was greater than $1 million in 2007.

Additional models (not shown) also controlled for logged party-specific Political Action Committee (PAC) expenditures given by firms to federal electoral candidates, using data from the Center for Responsive Politics for the 2008 election cycle. For neither high-reputation nor low-reputation firms were these expenditures a significant predictor of a firm's grassroots activity.

Industry

There are reasons to expect that certain industries will be more likely to mobilize public participation than others. In a previous study, I illustrated that among those firms that engaged in a significant enough amount of paid federal-level lobbying to warrant disclosure of their lobbying payments, firms in certain industries were significantly more likely to contract with a grassroots lobbying consultant.[13] Using grouped two-digit NAICS classifications, the following dummy variables are included for firms' industry: information and communications (5.4 percent), retail (11 percent), energy and utilities (7 percent), manufacturing (34.7 percent), and transportation (3.6 percent). The reference category in the model includes all other industries.

Firm rank in the Fortune 500

The *Fortune* 500 is, of course, a ranked list of firms according to their gross revenue after adjustments for collected excise taxes. It stands to reason that being at the top of this list is indicative not only of firms' revenues, but also of their social prominence. Firms that are at the top of

---

[13] Walker (2012a).

this list, then, are firms that have a greater presence in public life, and should have greater resources and interests in mobilizing stakeholders in issue campaigns.

Firm structural characteristics

A number of measures of the size and resources of the firm are also controlled. First, the logged number of employees of the firm in 2007 is controlled, as firms with a larger employee base should be likely to seek to mobilize these individuals as voters and letter-writers on behalf of the firm.[14] Simply put, larger organizations have a larger potential number of primary stakeholders that can be encouraged to take political action. Second, the firm's logged market-to-book ratio is also controlled as a measure of the firm's financial strength. Third, following tradition in research on management and organizations,[15] I control for a firm's logged free cash flow as a measure of excess resources, which may make it easier for firms to engage both in community-based activities and also for firms to put additional resources into mobilizing the political action of stakeholders.

Estimation

The statistical models in Chapter 5 are negative binomial regressions of the count of firms hired by a *Fortune* 500 corporation; such a model is appropriate for a count-based dependent variable that is over-dispersed (mean of .93 with a variance of 3.28).

---

[14] Cochran (2006).
[15] Davis and Stout (1992); King (2008); King and Soule (2007).

Appendix 6
Models of consulting for non-trade associations

Census of associations

I employ data from two sources in this analysis. First, my data on public interest groups comes from the full set of directory listings provided in the 30th edition (1995) of the *Encyclopedia of Associations* (*EA*), published by Gale Corp.[1] The file includes groups that represent more than 18 broad subject areas and 1,548 specific keyword areas, therefore representing a broad cross-section of the group population in the US. However, because these analyses are only interested in consultants' work for general national advocacy organizations, the models only include *EA* subject areas *other* than those involved in trade (e.g., trade associations, chambers), labor unions, and athletic/sports associations, engineering organizations, fan clubs, fraternities and sororities, or hobby clubs. After removing these cases, the models examine the hiring of consulting firms among those associations involved in issue areas including social welfare, public affairs, environment, health/medical, governmental, fraternal, educational, cultural, religious, and veterans' associations. The *Encyclopedia* data provide all independent variables described in the relevant section below.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable is a binary measure of whether an association appearing in the *EA* data file also appeared in the aggregate client data (i.e., as a client of any of the consultants in the data). Associations were searched in the client lists both by the association's full name and using common abbreviations (e.g., "Assn.," "Nat'l"). Associations were also searched using their acronyms, but acronym matches were only accepted

---

[1] 1995 is the most recent year available for which full data have been collected on all available measures in the *EA* listings. For a more general discussion of the public affairs section of this data source, see Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner (2011: 1325–1331).

if the association in question was the only one in the *EA* data to have that acronym (e.g., NARAL) or was particularly well known (e.g., NRA, AARP).

Independent variables

I employ a variety of measures in order to explain variance in patterns of firm-hiring among interest groups. First and foremost, I consider the influences of resources and professionalization. I therefore control for the reported budget and staff sizes of associations as they appear in the *EA* listings (both logged). Second, I control for whether an organization is federated. My measures of organizational federation come from information on the regional, state, and local chapters of each organization. For each of these levels of federation, an organization that has at least one chapter at that level is assigned a value of "1," whereas those that do not are assigned a "0" value. Third, the models include measures of reported membership size (logged) and whether the organization has a non-membership advocacy structure (using the definition and operationalization I have used in other work).[2] Fourth, I measure organizational founding cohort by creating dummy categories for each cohort by decade, examining groups founded in 1986–1995 and 1976–1985, and groups founded prior to 1976. Fifth, I created a dummy variable for whether the association is headquartered in Washington, DC. Finally, the issue areas data come from the *EA*'s classification of organizations into particular subject areas.

Estimation

Because only 3 percent of associations hire consultants, standard logit estimation is likely to lead to misleading estimates, as these models tend to "sharply underestimate the probability of rare events."[3] I therefore employ King and Zeng's RELOGIT estimator in Stata. Model 1 uses the measure of logged membership without the (highly collinear) measure of non-membership structure, and Model 2 includes non-membership structure without the count of logged members.

---

[2] Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner (2011: 1299–1300).
[3] King and Zeng (2001: 137).

Appendix 7
Models of consulting for trade associations

Using the data from the *EA*, I also estimated models of the hiring of grassroots public affairs consultants by trade associations, using two subject areas of this data source: trade associations and chambers of commerce. I included the majority of the same measures as displayed in Table 6.1, although there are some differences: (1) due to concerns of missing data among these associations, the measure of budget is omitted, (2) the measure of federated structure is simplified to include only the dummy variable for the presence of state chapters (a significant predictor among other advocacy organizations), (3) it does not display results analogous to Model 2 (on non-membership associations),[1] and (4) it adds a dummy variable for whether the association represents a highly regulated industry.[2] Findings from these models are presented in Table A.2.

Importantly, these findings tell a largely similar story both to the model of consultant hiring by corporations and to that of hiring by associations. First, consistent with the discussion in Chapter 5, regulated industries are significantly more likely to hire a consultant. In additional analyses, I examined which regulated industry was most likely to hire a public affairs consultant; these investigations revealed that trade associations for the insurance, petroleum, real estate, and transportation and warehousing industries were among the most likely to hire a consultant. Pharmaceuticals, telecom firms, alcohol interests,

---

[1] Additional models (not shown) make clear that there is no significant effect of having a non-membership structure on hiring a consultant among trade associations.

[2] Building from studies of regulated industries (Pittman, 1977: 44; Grier, Munger, and Roberts 1994), the following *EA* keywords were used to identify trade associations representing regulated industries: Alcoholic Beverages, Banking, Biotechnology, Broadcasting, Communications, Credit Unions, Fuel, Insurance, Investments, Petroleum, Pharmaceuticals, Railroads, Real Estate, Securities, Telecommunications, Tobacco, Transportation, Utilities, Warehousing, and Water.

Table A.2 *Rare event logistic regression of hiring a consultant by a trade association*

	Model 1	
Variable	Coef.	Robust S.E.
Professionalization		
Staff (logged)	0.745***	(0.090)
Federated structure		
State chapters (dummy)	0.849*	(0.351)
Membership size/structure		
Members (logged)	0.138*	(0.061)
Founding cohort		
Founded 1976–1985 (dummy)	0.024	(0.347)
Founded 1986–1995 (dummy)	–0.232	(0.525)
Capitol location		
Washington, DC headquarters (dummy)	2.122***	(0.259)
Regulation		
Regulated industry (dummy)	0.540*	(0.269)
Constant	–7.025***	(0.522)
N	2316	

Significance levels: $^+ p \leq .10$; $^* p \leq .05$; $^{**} p \leq .01$; $^{***} p \leq .001$

and banks/credit unions also appeared regularly. Second, the organizational characteristics that were significant predictors of hiring a consultant among non-trade advocacy groups are generally the same as those that mattered for trade associations: professionalization, membership size, having state chapters, and having a headquarters in the nation's capital.

Appendix 8
On public affairs consulting as
a profession

Public affairs consulting is at best a partially professionalized field. In some respects, the firms' work is a "craft," which involves control over a particular technique without control over the abstractions used in generating new techniques (which "professions" enjoy).[1] Additionally, their professionalization is only partial because, as others have argued about electoral campaign consulting,[2] a number of considerable barriers exist to the professionalization of those who specialize in generating citizen activism: a lack of closure or control over entry, few requirements to hold credentials (and a limited number of training or degree programs), and a quite blurry boundary between this domain and related fields such as government affairs ("lobbying"), public relations, and campaign consulting.

Still, there are professional training programs now in existence for the field, key professional associations like the Public Affairs Council, semiformal networking groups like the Grassroots Roundtable and Innovate to Motivate, and support from related professional associations.[3]

Courses on grassroots advocacy are offered, for instance, through the George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management (GSPM); the GSPM program offers master's degrees in legislative affairs, political management, and political public relations, as well as certificates in community advocacy. Notably, the program also offers a focused course on how to mobilize grassroots advocates. The course, PMGT 233, is described as an introduction to the "use of

---

[1] Abbott (1988: 8).   [2] Thurber (1998); Scammell (1998); Grossman (2009).
[3] Reflecting the field overlap described above, the professional associations of related fields have a stake in public affairs: the American Association of Political Consultants includes as members many noted public affairs firms and also gives a "Pollie" award annually for the best public affairs campaign; the American League of Lobbyists conducts grassroots advocacy certification and training; and the Public Relations Society of America has a subsection devoted to "Public Affairs and Government."

micro-targeting and database layering technology to identify potential advocates, plus a study of motivational techniques to mobilize volunteers for political campaigns, lobbying efforts, and community advocacy. [The course also reviews] techniques used by grassroots organizers to help corporations, unions, civic and nonprofit organizations, and special interest groups achieve strategic goals." Outside of the GSPM, The Washington Campus – a nonprofit that provides educational programs on lobbying for business executives – offers seminars on topics like "Training and Motivating Grassroots Participants." While courses like these are undoubtedly helpful for practitioners, they are by no means a requirement for entry into the field.

The leading corporate and industry public affairs association is the Public Affairs Council (PAC), which offers to its members training services, research, and counseling services. Most of PAC's members are the representatives of in-house public affairs offices within major corporations, but their members also include industry associations, professional groups, and public affairs consultancies. Importantly, the PAC maintains an ethical code for its members, which stipulates, in part, that public affairs professionals are to provide reliable information, avoid misrepresenting their organization's policies to government officials and/or stakeholders, and, perhaps most importantly, acknowledge the "dual obligation" of a public affairs professional to advocate a particular political interest while also working to "preserve the openness and integrity of the democratic process." Professions are typically obliged to serve the betterment of society, and PAC's ethical code expresses a response to that necessity for public affairs professionals.

A barrier to professionalization for this field regards its lack of closure, seen by many to be a key aspect of this process.[4] The training and certification programs offered by the above-mentioned professional associations serve as credentials to consultants as they seek to build their legitimacy before clients, but do not serve as a barrier to entry. Further, and perhaps more significantly, political consultants in general tend not to seek the support of the state in certifying new entrants into the field. In fact, as Grossman points out,[5] political professionals tend to be deeply embedded in governmental processes, yet they resist fiercely even the suggestion of certification by the parties (let alone by an

---

[4] Abbott (1988); Larson (1977).   [5] Grossman (2009: 92).

administrative agency like the Federal Election Commission). Instead, practitioners make their reputation through their experience and background on behalf of their clients. Indeed, the success or failure of work by an electoral campaign consultant is often widely publicized in sources such as *Campaigns & Elections* magazine's "Winners & Losers" list, which compiles and publishes a sport-like win–loss record for each consulting firm. Thus, electoral consultants are thereby incentivized to exercise considerable caution in accepting a candidate's campaign. By comparison, "wins" and "losses" for public affairs consultants are much more difficult to track, given the less discrete nature of the outcomes and the diverse organizational forms and sectors of their clients.

In the absence of clear standards and a requirement for certification – compare this with the more rigorous requirement that a management consultant be recognized as a Certified Management Consultant – there can be difficulties in developing trust with clients. Although the above credentials and/or training in political science, communications, or law may help to remove barriers to strong client relationships, this is a far cry from the strong occupational closure reflected in bar exams, airline pilot certification by the FAA, or board certification for medical doctors. What one political scientist said generations ago may still be true today:

It is not easy to determine who or what a professional public relations man is. He runs for no office; he passes no "bar" examination; nor is he licensed by the state. Anyone can hang out his shingle, although without adequate training the chances for success are slim.[6]

---

[6] Pitchell (1958: 280).

Bibliography

Abbott, Andrew. 1988. *The System of Professions*. University of Chicago Press.

Aguirre, B. E. 1984. "The Conventionalization of Collective Behavior in Cuba." *American Journal of Sociology* 90: 541–566.

Akard, Patrick. 1992. "Corporate Mobilization and Political Power: The Transformation of US Economic Policy in the 1970s." *American Sociological Review* 57: 597–615.

Aldrich, Daniel. 2010. *Site Fights*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Aldrich, Howard, and Diane Herker. 1977. "Boundary Spanning Roles and Organization Structure." *Academy of Management Review* 2: 217–230.

Almond, Gabriel A., and Sidney Verba. 1963. *The Civic Culture*. Princeton University Press.

Amenta, Edwin, Bruce G. Carruthers, and Yvonne Zylan. 1992. "A Hero for the Aged? The Townsend Movement, the Political Mediation Model, and US Old-Age Policy, 1934–1950." *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (2): 308–339.

Amenta, Edwin, Neal Caren, Elizabeth Chiarello, and Yang Su. 2010. "The Political Consequences of Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36: 287–307.

Andrews, Kenneth T., and Bob Edwards. 2004. "Advocacy Organizations in the US Political Process." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 479–506.

Armstrong, Elizabeth A., and Mary Bernstein. 2008. "Culture, Power, and Institutions: A Multi-Institutional Politics Approach to Social Movements." *Sociological Theory* 26: 74–99.

Barley, Stephen R. 2007. "Corporations, Democracy, and the Public Good." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 16: 201–215.

2010. "Building an Institutional Field to Corral a Government: A Case to Set an Agenda for Organization Studies." *Organization Studies* 31: 777–805.

Bartholomew, Susan, and Anne D. Smith. 2006. "Improving Survey Response Rates from Chief Executive Officers in Small Firms: The Importance of Social Networks." *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 30: 83–96.

Bartley, Tim. 2007. "Institutional Emergence in an Era of Globalization: The Rise of Transnational Private Regulation of Labor and Environmental Conditions." *American Journal of Sociology* 113: 297–351.

Baumgartner, Frank R. 1989. "Independent and Politicized Policy Communities: Education and Nuclear Energy in France and in the United States." *Governance* 2(1): 42–66.

Baumgartner, Frank R., and Bryan D. Jones. 1993. *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*. University of Chicago Press.

Baumgartner, Frank R., and Beth L. Leech. 2001. "Interest Niches and Policy Bandwagons: Patterns of Interest Group Involvement in National Politics." *Journal of Politics* 63: 1191–1213.

Baumgartner, Frank R., Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, David C. Kimball, and Beth L. Leech. 2009. *Lobbying and Policy Change*. University of Chicago Press.

Beder, Sharon. 1998. *Global Spin*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green.

Bellah, Robert, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. 1985. *Habits of the Heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Benford, Robert D., and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611–639.

Benford, Robert D., Helen A. Moore, and J. Allen Williams. 1993. "In Whose Backyard? Concern about Siting a Nuclear Waste Facility." *Sociological Inquiry* 63: 30–48.

Berry, Jeffrey M. 1977. *Lobbying for the People*. Princeton University Press.
    1997. *The Interest Group Society*, 3rd edn. New York: Longman.
    1999. "The Rise of Citizen Groups." Pp. 367–393 in Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina (eds.), *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Berry, Jeffrey M., and David F. Arons. 2003. *A Voice for Nonprofits*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Bimber, Bruce. 1998. "The Internet and Political Transformation: Populism, Community, and Accelerated Pluralism." *Polity* 31: 133–160.

Bingham, Lisa Blomgren, Tina Nabatchi, and Rosemary O'Leary. 2005. "The New Governance: Practices and Processes for Stakeholder and Citizen Participation in the Work of Government." *Public Administration Review* 65: 547–558.

Bodensteiner, Carol A. 1997. "Special Interest Group Coalitions: Ethical Standards for Broad-Based Support Efforts." *Public Relations Review* 23(1): 31–46.

Boltanski, Luc, and Eve Chiapello. 2005. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Verso.

Bosso, Christopher J. 2005. *Environment, Inc*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1979. "Public Opinion Does Not Exist." Pp. 124–130 in Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelaub (eds.), *Communication and Class Struggle*. New York: International General.

Bowler, Shaun, Todd Donovan, and Ken Fernandez. 1996. "The Growth of the Political Marketing Industry and the California Initiative Process." *European Journal of Marketing* 30: 166–178.

Bowler, Shaun, Todd Donovan, and Trudi Happ. 1992. "Ballot Propositions and Information Costs: Direct Democracy and the Fatigued Voter." *Western Political Quarterly* 45: 559–568.

Boyte, Harry. 1980. *The Backyard Revolution*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Brady, Henry E., Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Sidney Verba. 1999. "Prospecting for Participants: Rational Expectations and the Recruitment of Political Activists." *American Political Science Review* 93: 153–168.

Brint, Steven G. 1994. *In an Age of Experts*. Princeton University Press.

Briscoe, Forrest, and Sean Safford. 2008. "The Nixon-In-China Effect: Activism, Imitation, and the Institutionalization of Contentious Practices." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 53: 460–491.

Broder, David. 2000. *Democracy Derailed*. New York: Harcourt.

Browne, William P. 1995. "Organized Interests, Grassroots Confidants, and Congress." Pp. 281–297 in Allan J. Cigler and Burdett A. Loomis (eds.), *Interest Group Politics*, 4th edn. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Brulle, Robert J., Jason Carmichael, and J. Craig Jenkins. 2012. "Shifting Public Opinion on Climate Change: An Empirical Assessment of Factors Influencing Concern over Climate Change in the US, 2002–2010." *Climatic Change* 114(2): 169–188.

Burns, Nancy, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Sidney Verba. 2001. *The Private Roots of Public Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Burstein, Paul. 1998. "Interest Organizations, Political Parties, and the Study of Democratic Politics." Pp. 39–56 in Anne Costain and Andrew McFarland (eds.), *Social Movements and American Political Institutions*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Caldeira, Gregory A., and John R. Wright. 1998. "Lobbying for Justice: Organized Interests, Supreme Court Nominations, and United States Senate." *American Journal of Political Science* 42: 499–523.

Calhoun, Craig. 1992. "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere." Pp. 1–48 in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Carpenter, Daniel P., Kevin M. Esterling, and David M. J. Lazer. 1998. "The Strength of Weak Ties in Lobbying Networks." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 10: 417–444.

Carpenter, Daniel P., Jacqueline Chattopadhyay, Susan Moffitt, and Clayton Nall. 2012. "The Complications of Controlling Agency Time Discretion: FDA Review Deadlines and Postmarket Drug Safety." *American Journal of Political Science* 56: 98–114.

Carroll, Glenn R., and Dennis Ray Wheaton. 2009. "The Organizational Construction of Authenticity: An Examination of Contemporary Food and Dining in the US." *Research in Organizational Behavior* 29: 255–282.

Cater, Douglas. 1964. *Power in Washington*. New York: Random House.

Chicago Tribune. 2012. *Playing with Fire*. Evanston, IL: Agate Digital.

Cidell, Julie. 2012. "Fear of a Foreign Railroad: Transnationalism, Trainspace, and (Im)mobility in the Chicago Suburbs." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37: 593–608.

Cigler, Allan J., and Burdett A. Loomis. 1995. "Contemporary Interest Group Politics: More than 'More of the Same.'" Pp. 393–406 in Allan J. Cigler and Burdett A. Loomis (eds.), *Interest Group Politics*, 4th edn. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Clark, Peter B., and James Q. Wilson. 1961. "Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 6(2): 129–166.

Clawson, Dan, and Mary Ann Clawson. 1999. "What Has Happened to the US Labor Movement? Union Decline and Renewal." *Annual Review of Sociology* 25: 95–119.

Clawson, Dan, and Alan Neustadtl. 1989. "Interlocks, PACs, and Corporate Conservatism." *American Journal of Sociology* 94(4): 749–773.

Clemens, Elisabeth S. 1993. "Organizational Repertoires and Institutional Change: Women's Groups and the Transformation of US Politics, 1890–1920." *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 755–798.

   1997. *The People's Lobby*. University of Chicago Press.

Crenson, Matthew A., and Benjamin Ginsberg. 2004. *Downsizing Democracy*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Culpepper, Pepper D. 2011. *Quiet Politics and Business Power*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Cummins, Steven, and Sally Macintyre. 2002. "'Food Deserts' – Evidence and Assumption in Health Policy Making." *BMJ* 325: 436–438.

Davis, Gerald F., and Suzanne Stout. 1992. "Organization Theory and the Market for Corporate Control: A Dynamic Analysis of the Characteristics of Large Takeover Targets, 1980–90." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 37: 605–608.

Deegan, Denise. 2001. *Managing Activists: A Guide to Dealing with Activists and Pressure Groups*. London: Kogan Page.

Denison, Daniel R., and Aneil K. Mishra. 1995. "Toward a Theory of Organizational Culture and Effectiveness." *Organization Science* 6: 204–223.

Dewey, John. 1922. "Public Opinion." *The New Republic* 30 (May 3): 286–288.

DiMaggio, Paul J., and Walter W. Powell. 1983. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields." *American Sociological Review* 48(2): 147–160.

Dobbin, Frank, and Erin L. Kelly. 2007. "How to Stop Harassment: Professional Construction of Legal Compliance in Organizations." *American Journal of Sociology* 112(4): 1203–1243.

Donato, Katharine M. 1990. "Keepers of the Corporate Image: Women in Public Relations." Pp. 129–144 in Barbara F. Reskin and Patricia A. Roos (eds.), *Job Queues, Gender Queues*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Douglas, Mary. 1986. *How Institutions Think*. Syracuse University Press.

Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper.

Dulio, David. 2003. "Inside the War Room: Political Consultants in Modern Campaigns." Pp. 17–30 in Robert Watson and Colton Campbell (eds.), *Campaigns and Elections*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Dyer, Jeffrey H., and Harbir Singh. 1998. "The Relational View: Cooperative Strategy and Sources of Interorganizational Competitive Advantage." *Academy of Management Review* 23: 660–679.

Earl, Jennifer, Andrew Martin, John D. McCarthy, and Sarah A. Soule. 2004. "The Use of Newspaper Data in the Study of Collective Action." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 65–80.

Edelman, Lauren, Christopher Uggen, and Howard S. Erlanger. 1999. "The Endogeneity of Legal Regulation: Grievance Procedures as Rational Myth." *American Journal of Sociology* 105(2): 406–454.

Evans, Trish. 2010. "We Are All in PR Now." *British Journalism Review* 21 (2): 31–36.

Ewen, Stuart. 1996. *PR!* New York: Basic Books.

Farrell, David M., Robin Kolodny, and Stephen Medvic. 2001. "Parties and Campaign Professionals in a Digital Age: Political Consultants in the United States and Their Counterparts Overseas." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 6(4): 11–30.

Fisher, Dana. 2006. *Activism, Inc*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Fisher, William F. 1997. "Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26: 439–464.

Fishkin, James S. 1992. *The Dialogue of Justice*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Fishman, Charles. 2006. *The Wal-Mart Effect*. New York: Penguin.

Fitch, Brad, and Kathy Goldschmidt. 2005. *Communicating with Congress*. Washington, DC: Congressional Management Foundation.

Fitzpatrick, Kathy R., and Michael J. Palenchar. 2006. "Disclosing Special Interests: Constitutional Restrictions on Front Groups." *Journal of Public Relations Research* 18: 203–224.

Fleisher, Craig S. 2002. "Analysis and Analytical Tools for Managing Corporate Public Affairs." *Journal of Public Affairs* 2: 167–172.

Friedenberg, Robert V. 1997. *Communication Consultants in Political Campaigns*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Friedland, Roger, and Robert Alford. 1991. "Bringing Society Back In: Symbols, Practices, and Institutional Contradictions." Pp. 232–263 in Walter W. Powell and Paul DiMaggio (eds.), *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. University of Chicago Press.

Frumkin, Peter. 2002. *On Being Nonprofit*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Fryxell, Gerald E., and Jia Wang. 1994. "The *Fortune* Corporate 'Reputation' Index: Reputation for What?" *Journal of Management* 20: 1–14.

Fung, Archon, Mary Graham, and David Weil. 2007. *Full Disclosure*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Galaskiewicz, Joseph, and Michelle Sinclair Colman. 2006. "Collaboration Between Corporations and Nonprofit Organizations." Pp. 180–204 in Walter W. Powell and Richard Steinberg (eds.), *The Nonprofit Sector*, 2nd edn. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Gamson, William A. 1990. *The Strategy of Social Protest*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Ganz, Marshall. 2000. "Resources and Resourcefulness: Strategic Capacity in the Unionization of California Agriculture, 1959–1966." *American Journal of Sociology* 105: 1003–1062.

Getz, Kathleen. 2002. "Public Affairs and Political Strategy: Theoretical Foundations." *Journal of Public Affairs* 1: 305–329.

Ginsberg, Benjamin. 1984. "Money and Power: The New Political Economy of American Elections." Pp. 163–179 in Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers (eds.), *The Political Economy*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Givel, Michael. 2007. "Consent and Counter-Mobilization: The Case of the National Smokers Alliance." *Journal of Health Communication* 12: 339–357.

Gladwell, Malcolm. 2000. *The Tipping Point*. New York: Little, Brown.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Goldschmidt, Kathy, and Leslie Ochreiter. 2008. *Communicating with Congress*. Washington, DC: Congressional Management Foundation.

Goldstein, Kenneth M. 1999. *Interest Groups, Lobbying, and Participation in America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gramsci, Antonio. 1959. *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*. New York: International Publishers.

   1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Greenwood, Royston. 2008. "Focusing the Asteroid Belt of Organizations." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 17: 152–156.

Greenwood, Royston, Roy Suddaby, and Megan McDougald. 2006. "Introduction." *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 24: 1–16.

Grefe, Edward. 2000. "Global Grassroots Is a Reality." Pp. 265–275 in Tony Kramer (ed.), *Winning at the Grassroots*. Washington, DC: Public Affairs Council.

Grefe, Edward, and Marty Linsky. 1995. *The New Corporate Activism*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Greider, William. 1992. *Who Will Tell the People*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Grier, Kevin B., Michael C. Munger, and Brian E. Roberts. 1994. "The Determinants of Industry Political Activity, 1978–1986." *American Political Science Review* 88: 911–926.

Griffin, Jennifer J., and Paul Dunn. 2004. "Corporate Public Affairs: Commitment, Resources, and Structure." *Business and Society* 43: 196–220.

Grossmann, Matt. 2009. "Going Pro? Political Campaign Consulting and the Professional Model." *Journal of Political Marketing* 8: 81–104.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1987. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. 2 vols. Volume II: *The Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Cambridge: Polity.

   1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

   1996. *Between Facts and Norms*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Han, Hahrie. 2009. "Does the Content of Political Appeals Matter in Motivating Participation? A Field Experiment on Self-Disclosure in Political Appeals." *Political Behavior* 31: 103–116.

Harrison, E. Bruce. 1993. *Going Green*. Homewood, IL: Business One Irwin.

Hart, David M. 2004. "'Business' is Not an Interest Group: On the Study of Companies in American National Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 7: 47–69.

Harvey, Richard B. 1970. *The Dynamics of California Government and Politics*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Haydu, Jeffrey. 1999. "Counter Action Frames: Employer Repertoires and the Union Menace in the Late Nineteenth Century." *Social Problems* 46: 313–331.

Heath, Robert L., William Douglas, and Michael Russell. 1995. "Constituency Building: Determining Employees' Willingness To Participate in Corporate Political Activities." *Journal of Public Relations Research* 7: 273–288.

Heitshusen, Valerie. 2000. "Interest Group Lobbying and US House Decentralization: Linking Informational Focus to Committee Hearing Appearances." *Political Research Quarterly* 53: 151–176.

Hillman, Amy J., and Michael A. Hitt. 1999. "Corporate Political Strategy Formulation: A Model of Approach, Participation, and Strategy Decisions." *Academy of Management Review* 24: 825–842.

Hillman, Amy J., Gerald D. Keim, and Douglas Schuler. 2004. "Corporate Political Activity: A Review and Research Agenda." *Journal of Management* 30: 837–857.

Hojnacki, Marie, David C. Kimball, Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, and Beth L. Leech. 2012. "Studying Organizational Advocacy and Influence: Reexamining Interest Group Research." *Annual Review of Political Science* 15(1): 379–399.

Howard, Philip. 2006. *New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Igo, Sarah E. 2007. *The Averaged American*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Imig, Douglas R. 1996. *Poverty and Power*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Ingram, Paul, Lori Qingyuan Yue, and Hayagreeva Rao. 2010. "Trouble in Store: Probes, Protests, and Store Openings by Wal-Mart, 1998–2007." *American Journal of Sociology* 116: 53–92.

Issenberg, Sasha. 2012. *The Victory Lab*. New York: Crown.

Jasper, James M. 2006. *Getting Your Way*. University of Chicago Press.

Jenkins, J. Craig. 2006. "Nonprofit Organizations and Political Advocacy." Pp. 307–332 in Walter W. Powell and Richard Steinberg (eds.), *The Nonprofit Sector*, 2nd edn. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Jenkins, J. Craig, and Craig M. Eckert. 1986. "Channeling Black Insurgency: Elite Patronage and Professional Social Movement Organizations in the Development of the Black Movement." *American Sociological Review* 51(6): 812–829.

Jenkins, J. Craig, and Abigail Halcli. 1999. "Grassrooting the System? Recent Trends in Social Movement Philanthropy, 1953–1990." Pp. 277–299 in

Ellen Condliffe-Lageman (ed.), *Studying Philanthropic Foundations*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.

Johnson, Dennis W. 2002. "Perspectives on Political Consulting." *Journal of Political Marketing* 1: 7–21.

Jordan, Grant, and William A. Maloney. 1997. *The Protest Business? Mobilizing Campaign Groups*. Manchester University Press.

Katz, Elihu, and Paul Lazarsfeld. 1955. *Personal Influence*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Keim, Gerry. 2005. "Managing Business Political Advocacy in the United States." Pp. 418–433 in Phil Harris and Craig Fleisher (eds.), *Handbook of Public Affairs*. London: Sage.

Keim, Gerry, and Barry Baysinger. 1988. "The Efficacy of Business Political Activity." *Journal of Management* 14: 163–180.

Kelley, Stanley. 1956. *Professional Public Relations and Political Power*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press.

Khan, Shamus R. 2012. "The Sociology of Elites." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38: 361–377.

King, Brayden G. 2008. "A Political Mediation Model of Corporate Response to Social Movement Activism." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 53: 395–421.

King, Brayden G., and Mary-Hunter McDonnell. 2012. "Good Firms, Good Targets: The Relationship Between Corporate Social Responsibility, Reputation, and Activist Targeting." Unpublished manuscript, Northwestern University.

King, Brayden G., and Sarah A. Soule. 2007. "Social Movements as Extra-Institutional Entrepreneurs: The Effect of Protests on Stock Price Returns." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 52: 413–442.

King, Brayden G., and David A Whetten. 2008. "Rethinking the Relationship Between Reputation and Legitimacy: A Social Actor Conceptualization." *Corporate Reputation Review* 11(3): 192–207.

King, Gary, and Langche Zeng. 2001. "Logistic Regression in Rare Events Data." *Political Analysis* 9(2): 137–163.

Kingdon, John W. 1984. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.

Klandermans, Bert. 1984. "Mobilization and Participation: Social-Psychological Expansions of Resource Mobilization Theory." *American Sociological Review* 49(5): 583–600.

Knoke, David. 1988. "Incentives in Collective Action Organizations." *American Sociological Review* 53: 311–329.

Kollman, Ken. 1998. *Outside Lobbying*. Princeton University Press.

Kolodny, Robin. 2000. "Electoral Partnerships: Political Consultants and Political Parties." Pp. 110–132 in James Thurber and Candice Nelson

(eds.), *Campaign Warriors*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Kreiss, Daniel. 2012. *Taking Our Country Back*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Larson, Magali S. 1977. *The Rise of Professionalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lathrop, Douglas A. 2003. *The Campaign Continues*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Lazarus, Simon. 1974. *The Genteel Populists*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Leighley, Jan. 1996. "Group Membership and the Mobilization of Political Participation." *Journal of Politics* 58: 447–463.

Lerbinger, Otto. 2006. *Corporate Public Affairs*. Mahwah, NJ: LEA.

Lessig, Lawrence. 2011. *Republic, Lost*. New York: Twelve.

Lichterman, Paul. 2006. "Social Capital or Group Style? Rescuing Tocqueville's Insights on Civic Engagement." *Theory and Society* 35: 529–563.

Lincoln, James R., and Arne L. Kalleberg. 1985. "Work Organization and Workforce Commitment: A Study of Plants and Employees in the US and Japan." *American Sociological Review* 50(6): 738–760.

Lippman, Walter. 1922. *Public Opinion*. New York: Classic Books America.

Liston-Heyes, Catherine, and Gwen C. Ceton. 2007. "Corporate Social Performance and Politics." *Journal of Corporate Citizenship* 25: 95–108.

Lord, Michael D. 2000a. "Constituency-Based Lobbying as Corporate Political Strategy: Testing an Agency Theory Perspective." *Business and Politics* 2: 289–308.

  2000b. "Corporate Political Strategy and Legislative Decision Making." *Business and Society* 39: 76–93.

  2001. *Growing Broad and Deep Grassroots*. Washington, DC: Public Affairs Council.

  2003. "Constituency Building as the Foundation for Corporate Political Strategy." *Academy of Management Executive* 17: 112–124.

Love, E. Geoffrey, and Matthew Kraatz. 2009. "Character, Conformity, or the Bottom Line? How and Why Downsizing Affected Corporate Reputation." *Academy of Management Journal* 52(2): 314–335.

Luneburg, William, Thomas Susman, and Rebecca Gordon (eds.). 2009. *The Lobbying Manual*, 4th edn. Chicago: American Bar Association.

Lyon, Thomas P., and John W. Maxwell. 2004. "Astroturf: Interest Group Lobbying and Corporate Strategy." *Journal of Economics and Management Strategy* 13: 561–597.

Magleby, David B., and Kelly D. Patterson. 1998. "Consultants and Direct Democracy." *PS* 31(2): 160–169.

Malhotra, Namrata, Timothy Morris, and C. R. Hinings. 2006. "Variation in Organizational Form among Professional Service Organizations." *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 24: 171–202.

Manheim, Jarol B. 2000. *The Death of a Thousand Cuts*. Mahwah, NJ: LEA.

Mansbridge, Jane. 2012. "Conflict and Commonality in Habermas's Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere." *Political Theory* 40 (6): 789–801.

Marcus, Alfred A., and Mark S. Irion. 1987. "The Continued Growth of the Corporate Public Affairs Function." *Academy of Management Executive* 1: 247–250.

Markoff, John. 1997. "Peasants Help Destroy an Old Regime and Defy a New One: Some Lessons from (and for) the Study of Social Movements." *American Journal of Sociology* 102(4): 1113–1142.

Marquis, Christopher, Mary Ann Glynn, and Gerald F. Davis. 2007. "Community Isomorphism and Corporate Social Action." *Academy of Management Review* 32: 925–945.

Martin, Andrew W. 2008. "The Institutional Logic of Union Organizing and the Effectiveness of Social Movement Repertoires." *American Journal of Sociology* 113(4): 1067–1103.

Martin, Isaac. 2013. *Rich People's Movements*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Marwell, Nicole P. 2004. "Privatizing the Welfare State: Nonprofit Community-Based Organizations as Political Actors." *American Sociological Review* 69(2): 265–291.

McAdam, Doug. 1983. "Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency." *American Sociological Review* 48: 735–754.

McAdam, Doug, and Hilary Boudet. 2012. *Putting Social Movements in Their Place*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

McAdam, Doug, John D. McCarthy, Susan Olzak, and Sarah Soule. 2009. "Dynamics of Collective Protest in the US, 1960–1995: Manual for Microfilm Copying and Event Coding." Unpublished manuscript, Stanford University.

McCarthy, John D. 2005a. "Velcro Triangles: Elite Mobilization of Local Antidrug Issue Coalitions." Pp. 87–115 in David S. Meyer, Valerie Jenness, and Helen Ingram (eds.), *Routing the Opposition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

2005b. "Persistence and Change among Nationally Federated Social Movements." Pp. 193–225 in Gerald F. Davis, Doug McAdam, W. Richard Scott, and Mayer N. Zald (eds.), *Social Movements and Organization Theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

McCarthy, John D., and Mayer N. Zald. 1973. *The Trend of Social Movements in America*. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.

1977. "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 82: 1212–1241.

McFarland, Andrew S. 2007. "Neopluralism." *Annual Review of Political Science* 10: 45–66.

McNutt, John, and Katherine Boland. 2007. "AstroTurf, Technology and the Future of Community Mobilization: Implications for Nonprofit Theory." *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 34: 165.

Medvetz, Thomas. 2012. *Think Tanks in America*. University of Chicago Press.

Medvic, Stephen. 2003. "Campaign Pollsters and Polling: Manipulating the Voter or Taking the Electorate's Pulse." Pp. 31–46 in Robert Watson and Colton Campbell (eds.), *Campaigns and Elections*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Meyer, David S. 2004. "Protest and Political Opportunities." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 125–145.

Meyer, David S., and Suzanne Staggenborg. 1996. "Movements, Countermovements, and the Structure of Political Opportunity." *American Journal of Sociology* 101: 1628–1660.

Meyer, David S., and Sidney Tarrow. 1998. "A Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century." Pp. 1–28 in David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow (eds.), *The Social Movement Society*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Meyer, John W., and Brian Rowan. 1977. "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony." *American Journal of Sociology* 83: 340–363.

Meznar, Martin B., and Douglas Nigh. 1995. "Buffer or Bridge? Environmental and Organizational Determinants of Public Affairs Activities in American Firms." *Academy of Management Journal* 38: 975–996.

Mills, C. Wright. 1956. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Minkoff, Debra C. 1995. *Organizing for Equality*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

1997. "Producing Social Capital: National Social Movements and Civil Society." *American Behavioral Scientist* 40(5): 606–619.

Minkoff, Debra C., and Walter W. Powell. 2006. "Nonprofit Mission: Constancy, Responsiveness, or Deflection." Pp. 591–611 in Walter W. Powell and Richard Steinberg (eds.), *The Nonprofit Sector*, 2nd edn. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Minkoff, Debra C., Silke Aisenbrey, and Jon Agnone. 2008. "Organizational Diversity in the US Advocacy Sector." *Social Problems* 55(4): 525–548.

Morone, James A. 2011. "Big Ideas, Broken Institutions, and the Wrath at the Grass Roots." *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 36(3): 375–385.

Myers, Daniel J., and Beth Schaefer Caniglia. 2004. "All the Rioting That's Fit to Print: Selection Effects in National Newspaper Coverage of Civil Disorders, 1968–1969." *American Sociological Review* 69: 519–543.

Nielsen, Rasmus. 2012. *Ground Wars*. Princeton University Press.

Oberschall, Anthony. 1973. *Social Conflict and Social Movements*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Oliver, Christine. 1991. "Strategic Responses to Institutional Processes." *Academy of Management Review* 16: 145–179.

Olson, Mancur. 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Oppenheimer, Bruce I. 1980. "Policy Effects of U.S. House Reform: Decentralization and the Capacity to Resolve Energy Issues." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 5: 5–30.

Ortiz, David G., Daniel J. Myers, Eugene N. Walls, and Maria-Elena D. Diaz. 2005. "Where Do We Stand with Newspaper Data?" *Mobilization* 10: 397–419.

Perrin, Andrew J. 2006. *Citizen Speak*. University of Chicago Press.

Pertschuk, Michael. 1982. *Revolt against Regulation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Peschek, Joseph G. 1987. *Policy-Planning Organizations*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Peterson, Mark A. 1992. "The Presidency and Organized Interests: White House Patterns of Interest Group Liaison." *American Political Science Review* 86: 612–625.

Pieczka, Magda. 2002. "Public Relations Expertise Deconstructed." *Media, Culture and Society* 24: 301–323.

Pitchell, Robert J. 1958. "The Influence of Professional Campaign Management Firms in Partisan Elections in California." *Western Political Quarterly* 11(2): 278–300.

Pittman, Russell. 1977. "Market Structure and Campaign Contributions." *Public Choice* 31(1): 37–52.

Plotke, David. 1992. "The Political Mobilization of Business." Pp. 175–198 in Mark P. Petracca (ed.), *The Politics of Interests*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Prakash, Aseem, and Mary Kay Gugerty. 2010. *Advocacy Organizations and Collective Action*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Pring, George W., and Penelope Canan. 1996. *SLAPPs*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Putnam, Robert D. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* 6: 65–78.

  2000. *Bowling Alone*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Quadagno, Jill. 2005. *One Nation, Uninsured*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rao, Hayagreeva. 1998. "Caveat Emptor: The Construction of Nonprofit Consumer Watchdog Organizations." *American Journal of Sociology* 103: 912–961.

  2008. *Market Rebels*. Princeton University Press.

Rao, Hayagreeva, Calvin Morrill, and Mayer N. Zald. 2000. "Power Plays: How Social Movements and Collective Action Create New Organizational Forms." *Research in Organizational Behavior* 22: 237–282.

Rao, Hayagreeva, Lori Qingyuan Yue, and Paul Ingram. 2011. "Laws of Attraction: Regulatory Arbitrage in the Face of Activism in Right-to-Work States." *American Sociological Review* 76: 365–385.

Ratkiewicz, Jacob et al. 2011. "Truthy: Mapping the Spread of Astroturf in Microblog Streams." Pp. 249–252 in *Proceedings of the 20th International Conference Companion on World Wide Web*. New York: ACM.

Reed, Michael I. 2012. "Masters of the Universe: Power and Elites in Organization Studies." *Organization Studies* 33(2): 203–221.

Riesman, David, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney. 1950. *The Lonely Crowd*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Roscigno, Vincent J. 2011. "Power, Revisited." *Social Forces* 90(2): 349–374.

Rosenstone, Steven J., and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan.

Rossman, Gabriel. 2012. *Climbing the Charts*. Princeton University Press.

Rothman, Sheila M., Victoria H. Raveis, Anne Friedman, and David J. Rothman. 2011. "Health Advocacy Organizations and the Pharmaceutical Industry: An Analysis of Disclosure Practices." *American Journal of Public Health* 101(4): 602–609.

Ryan, Charlotte, and William A. Gamson. 2006. "The Art of Reframing Political Debates." *Contexts* 5(1): 13–18.

Sabato, Larry. 1981. *The Rise of Political Consultants*. New York: Basic Books.

Safire, William. 1978. *Safire's Political Dictionary*. New York: Random House.

Salisbury, Robert H., Paul Johnson, John P. Heinz, Edward O. Laumann, and Robert L. Nelson. 1989. "Who You Know versus What You Know: The Uses of Government Experience for Washington Lobbyists." *American Journal of Political Science* 33(1): 175–195.

Scammell, Margaret. 1998. "The Wisdom of the War Room: US Campaigning and Americanization." *Media, Culture and Society* 20: 251–275.

Schattschneider, E. E. 1960. *The Semisovereign People*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Schier, Steven E. 2000. *By Invitation Only*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Schlozman, Key Lehman, and John T. Tierney. 1986. *Organized Interests and American Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row.

Schlozman, Key Lehman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady. 2012. *The Unheavenly Chorus*. Princeton University Press.

Schudson, Michael. 1998. *The Good Citizen*. New York: Martin Kessler Books.

Schuler, Doug A. 2002. "Public Affairs, Issues Management and Political Strategy: Methodological Approaches that Count." *Journal of Public Affairs* 1: 336–355.

Schumpeter, Joseph A. 1942. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. London: George Allen & Unwin.

Schussman, Alan, and Sarah Soule. 2005. "Protest and Process: Accounting for Individual Protest Participation." *Social Forces* 84: 1083–1108.

Sennett, Richard. 1977. *The Fall of Public Man*. New York: Knopf.

Shaiko, Ronald G. 1999. *Voices and Echoes for the Environment*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Shipan, Charles R. 2004. "Regulatory Regimes, Agency Actions, and the Conditional Nature of Congressional Influence." *American Political Science Review* 98: 467–480.

Shulman, Stuart. 2006. "Whither Deliberation? Mass E-mail Campaigns and US Regulatory Rulemaking." *Journal of E-Government* 3: 41–64.

2009. "The Case against Mass E-mails: Perverse Incentives and Low Quality Public Participation in US Federal Rulemaking." *Policy and Internet* 1: 23–53.

Silverstein, Ken. 1998. *Washington on $10 Million a Day*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press.

Skocpol, Theda. 1997. *Boomerang*. New York: W.W. Norton.

1999. "Advocates Without Members: The Recent Transformation of American Civic Life." Pp. 461–509 in Theda Skopol and Morris Fiorina (eds.), *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

2003. *Diminished Democracy*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

2007. "Government Activism and the Reorganization of American Civic Democracy." Pp. 39–67 in Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol (eds.), *The Transformation of American Politics*. Princeton University Press.

Skocpol, Theda, and Vanessa Williamson. 2011. *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Skocpol, Theda, Marshall Ganz, and Ziad Munson. 2000. "A Nation of Organizers: The Institutional Origins of Civic Voluntarism in the United States." *American Political Science Review* 94: 527–546.

Smith, David H. 1997. "The Rest of the Nonprofit Sector: Grassroots Associations as the Dark Matter Ignored in Prevailing 'Flat Earth' Maps of the Sector." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 26: 114–131.

Smith, Mark A. 2000. *American Business and Political Power*. University of Chicago Press.

Snow, David A., and Robert D. Benford. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization." *International Social Movement Research* 1: 197–217.

Snow, David A., and Sarah A. Soule. 2010. *A Primer on Social Movements*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Snow, David A., E. Burke Rochford, Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford. 1986. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 51(4): 464–481.

Sobieraj, Sarah. 2006. "The Implications of Transitions in the Voluntary Sector for Civic Engagement: A Case Study of Association Mobilization around the 2000 Presidential Campaign." *Sociological Inquiry* 76: 52–80.

Soule, Sarah. 2009. *Contention and Corporate Social Responsibility*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Soule, Sarah, and Brayden G. King. 2008. "Competition and Resource Partitioning in Three Social Movement Industries." *American Journal of Sociology* 113(6): 1568–1610.

Staber, Udo, and Howard Aldrich. 1982. "Trade Association Stability and Public Policy." Pp. 163–178 in Richard H. Hall and Robert E. Quinn (eds.), *Organizational Theory and Public Policy*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Starr, Paul. 1982. *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*. New York: Basic Books.

Stauber, John C., and Sheldon Rampton. 1995. *Toxic Sludge is Good for You*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press.

Stinchcombe, Arthur. 1965. "Social Structure and Organizations." Pp.153–193 in James March (ed.), *Handbook of Organizations*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51: 273–286.

Tarrow, Sidney. 1993. "Modular Collective Action and the Rise of the Social Movement: Why the French Revolution Was Not Enough." *Politics and Society* 21: 69–90.

Teles, Steven M. 2010. *The Rise of the Conservative Legal Movement*. Princeton University Press.

Thurber, James A. 1998. "The Study of Campaign Consultants: A Subfield in Search of Theory." *PS* 31: 145–149.

Tilly, Charles. 1995. *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

de Tocqueville, Alexis. 1839. *Democracy in America*. New York: George Adlard.

Tolbert, Pamela S., and Lynne G. Zucker. 1983. "Institutional Sources of Change in the Formal Structure of Organizations: The Diffusion of Civil Service Reform, 1880–1935." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28: 22–39.

Tomaskovic-Devey, Donald, Jeffrey Leiter, and Shealy Thompson. 1994. "Organizational Survey Nonresponse." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 39(3): 439–457.

Useem, Bert, and Mayer N. Zald. 1982. "From Pressure Group to Social Movement: Organizational Dilemmas of the Effort to Promote Nuclear Power." *Social Problems* 30: 144–156.

Vallas, Steven P. 2003. "The Adventures of Managerial Hegemony: Teamwork, Ideology, and Worker Resistance." *Social Problems* 50: 204–225.

Van Dyke, Nella, and Holly J. McCammon. 2010. *Strategic Alliances*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Verba, Sidney. 2003. "Would the Dream of Political Equality Turn out to Be a Nightmare?" *Perspectives on Politics* 1(04): 663–679.

Verba, Sidney, and Norman H. Nie. 1972. *Participation in America*. New York: Harper & Row.

Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vernick, Jon S. 1999. "Lobbying and Advocacy for the Public's Health: What Are the Limits for Nonprofit Organizations?" *American Journal of Public Health* 89: 1425–1429.

Viguerie, Richard A. 1981. *The New Right*. Falls Church, VA: Viguerie Co.

Vladeck, David. 2009. "Special Consideration for Lobbying by Nonprofit Organizations." Pp. 401–424 in William Luneburg, Thomas Susman, and Rebecca Gordon (eds.), *The Lobbying Manual*, 4th edn. Chicago: American Bar Association.

Vogel, David. 1975. "The Corporation as Government." *Polity* 8: 5–37.
   1989. *Fluctuating Fortunes*. New York: Basic Books.
   2005. *The Market for Virtue*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
Volokh, E. 2012. "Private Employees' Speech and Political Activity: Statutory Protection against Employer Retaliation." *Texas Review of Law and Politics* 16: 295–367.
Wal-Mart. 2005. *Vested Interest: 2005 Annual Report*. Bentonville, AR: Wal-Mart.
   2006. *Building Smiles: 2006 Annual Report*. Bentonville, AR: Wal-Mart.
Walder, Andrew. 2009. "Political Sociology and Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 35: 393–412.
Walker, Edward T. 2008. "Contingent Pathways from Joiner to Activist: The Indirect Effect of Participation in Voluntary Associations on Civic Engagement." *Sociological Forum* 23: 116–143.
   2009. "Privatizing Participation: Civic Change and the Organizational Dynamics of Grassroots Lobbying Firms." *American Sociological Review* 74: 83–105.
   2010. "Industry-Driven Activism." *Contexts* 9(2): 44–49.
   2012a. "Putting a Face on the Issue: Corporate Stakeholder Mobilization in Professional Grassroots Lobbying Campaigns." *Business and Society* 51(4): 619–659.
   2012b. "Social Movements, Organizations, and Fields: A Decade of Theoretical Integration." *Contemporary Sociology* 41(5): 576–587.
   2012c. "Grass-roots Mobilization, by Corporate America." *New York Times*, August 11.
   Forthcoming. "Global Corporate Resistance to Public Pressures: Corporate Stakeholder Mobilization in the US, Norway, Germany, and France." In Kiyoteru Tsutsui and Alwyn Lim (eds.), *Corporate Social Responsibility in a Globalizing World*.
Walker, Edward T., and John D. McCarthy. 2010. "Legitimacy, Strategy, and Resources in the Survival of Community-Based Organizations." *Social Problems* 57(3): 315–340.
Walker, Edward T., Andrew W. Martin, and John D. McCarthy. 2008. "Confronting the State, the Corporation, and the Academy: The Influence of Institutional Targets on Social Movement Repertoires." *American Journal of Sociology* 114: 35–76.
Walker, Edward T., John D. McCarthy, and Frank R. Baumgartner. 2011. "Replacing Members with Managers? Mutualism among Membership and Non-Membership Advocacy Organizations in the US." *American Journal of Sociology* 116(4): 1284–1337.
Walker, Jack L. 1991. *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Watts, Duncan J., and Peter Sheridan Dodds. 2007. "Influentials, Networks, and Public Opinion Formation." *Journal of Consumer Research* 34: 441–458.

Weber, Klaus, Hayagreeva Rao, and L. G. Thomas. 2009. "From Streets to Suites: How the Anti-Biotech Movement Affected German Pharmaceutical Firms." *American Sociological Review* 74(1): 106–127.

Weber, Max. 1946. "Politics as a Vocation." Pp. 77–128 in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Weir, Margaret, and Marshall Ganz. 1997. "Reconnecting People and Politics." Pp. 149–171 in Stanley Greenberg and Theda Skocpol (eds.), *The New Majority*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Whipple, Mark. 2005. "The Dewey–Lippmann Debate Today: Communication Distortions, Reflective Agency, and Participatory Democracy." *Sociological Theory* 23(2): 156–178.

Winik, Daniel. 2010. "Citizens Informed: Broader Disclosure and Disclaimer for Corporate Electoral Advocacy in the Wake of Citizens United." *Yale Law Journal* 120: 622–666.

Wittenberg, Ernest, and Elisabeth Wittenberg. 1989. *How to Win in Washington*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Wuthnow, Robert. 2002. *Loose Connections*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Yandle, Bruce. 1983. "Bootleggers and Baptists: The Education of a Regulatory Economist." *Regulation* 7: 12.

Yaziji, Michael, and Jonathan Doh. 2009. *NGOs and Corporations*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Zald, Mayer N., and Roberta Ash. 1966. "Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay and Change." *Social Forces* 44(3): 327–341.

Zald, Mayer N., and Michael A. Berger. 1978. "Social Movements in Organizations: Coup d'Etat, Insurgency, and Mass Movements." *American Journal of Sociology* 83(4): 823–861.

Zald, Mayer N., and Michael Lounsbury. 2010. "The Wizards of Oz: Towards an Institutional Approach to Elites, Expertise and Command Posts." *Organization Studies* 31(7): 963–996.

Zavestoski, Stephen, Stuart Shulman, and David Schlosberg. 2006. "Democracy and the Environment on the Internet: Electronic Citizen Participation in Regulatory Rulemaking." *Science, Technology and Human Values* 31: 383–408.

Zellner, Jonathan C. 2010. "Artificial Grassroots Advocacy and the Constitutionality of Legislative Identification and Control Measures." *Connecticut Law Review* 43: 357–400.

Public documents referenced

AFX International Focus. 2006a. "Wal-Mart, Critics Slam Each Other on the Web." *AFX International Focus*, July 18.

    2006b. "Filmmaker Quits Wal-Mart Boosters." *AFX International Focus*, October 11.

    2007a. "2 Wal-Mart Critics Leave Group." *AFX International Focus*, July 6.

    2007b. "Wal-Mart-Funded Group Suspends Web Site." *AFX International Focus*, March 31.

Allen, Mike. 2008. "Should MyPoints Award Points for Political Action?" *ReveNews*, June 13.

Arellano, Kristi. 2006. "Wal-Mart Boosters Rev Up Lobbying Campaign." *Knight-Ridder Tribune Business*, March 1.

Armour, Stephanie. 2005. "Growing Opposition Frowns on Wal-Mart." *USA Today*, December 5.

Associated Press. 2005. "New Pro-Wal-Mart Group Has Help from Former White House Spokesman." *Associated Press*, December 22.

    2007. "Canadian National to Acquire a Majority of Elgin, Joliet, and Eastern Railway Co. for $300M." *Associated Press*, September 26.

    2008a. "Some Indiana Officials Are Worried Canadian National Railway's Purchase May Cause Problems." *Associated Press*, January 17.

    2008b. "Fed Court Denies Expedited Ruling on CN Request." *Associated Press*, November 11.

Associated Press State & Local Wire. 2008a. "Canadian National Wants to Divert Freight Traffic around Chicago." *Associated Press State & Local Wire*, February 29.

Avery Dennison Corp. 2010. *Sustainability Report*. Pasadena, CA: Avery Dennison.

Barbaro, Michael. 2005. "Coughlin Says Cash Helped Wal-Mart." *Washington Post*, April 8.

    2006a. "Wal-Mart Vendors Feeling Pressured." *New York Times*, May 12.

    2006b. "Public Relations Consultant Joins Wal-Mart." *New York Times*, July 25.

2008. "Citing Progress, Wal-Mart Critics Lower the Heat." *New York Times*, June 5.

Boyd, John. 2008. "CN Acquisition Meets Resistance." *Journal of Commerce*, March 31.

Boyle, Christina. 2011. "Wal-Mart's Not All That Bad: Poll of New Yorkers." *New York Daily News*, March 19, p. 18.

Brooks, Chad. 2007a. "Residents Can Have Say on the Sale of Railway." *Chicago Daily Herald*, December 28.

2007b. "Barrington Leaders Keep Eye on Rail Sale." *Chicago Daily Herald*, November 13.

2008a. "Pains, Trains, & Complaints." *Chicago Daily Herald*, January 10.

2008b. "Railway Deal Slowed by Environmental Study." *Chicago Daily Herald*, April 30.

2008c. "Suburban Leaders Try to Deliver EJ&E Views." *Chicago Daily Herald*, April 23.

2008d. "CN Heads to Court for EJ&E Sale." *Chicago Daily Herald*, August 7.

Brown, DeNeen. 2004. "In the Boreal Forest, a Developing Storm." *Washington Post*, December 12, p. D01.

Bueno de Mesquita, Ethan. 2008 "EJ&E Debate Ignores Benefits to City Neighborhoods." *Crain's Chicago Business*, August 25.

Carpenter, Amanda. 2009. "Tea Party Bias." *Washington Times*, April 17.

Caruso, Lisa. 2007. "Turf Battle." *National Journal*, March 31.

Census Bureau. 2007. "Industry Statistics: NAICS 541820 (Public Relations Agencies)." Available: www.census.gov/econ/industry/hierarchy/ i541820.htm.

Cochran, John. 2006. "Grassroots Advocacy: A New Medium for the Message." *CQ Weekly*, March 13, p. 652.

Collins, Lauren. 2010. "King Kong vs Godzilla." *New Yorker*, January 11, p. 24.

Connolly, Daniel. 2006. "Poll Says Most Americans Like Wal-Mart, Union Group Claims Bias." *Associated Press*, January 4.

Crossroads Campaign Solutions. 2012. "Clients." Available: www.cross roadscampaigns.com/clients.

Democracy Partners. 2012. "Partners." Available: www.democracypartners .com/partners.cfm.

Deveau, Scott. 2007. "CNR Touts Benefits of Railway Acquisition." *Financial Post*, December 21.

2008a. "CN Rail Says EJ&E Controversy Overblown." *Financial Post*, March 18.

2008b. "CN Rail Urges US Board to Set Deadline on Railroad's Planned $300M Purchase." *Financial Post*, May 15.

2008c. "Obama Opposes CN Acquisition in US." *Canwest News Service*, May 19.

Eckholm, Erik. 2012. "Frank Schubert and the Fight against Gay Marriage." *New York Times*, October 9.

Elk, Mike. 2010. "Why Are Progressives Fighting Student Loan Reform?" *American Prospect*, October 5.

Engelberg, Stephen. 1993. "A New Breed of Hired Hands Cultivates Grassroots Anger." *New York Times*, March 17, p. A1.

Esparza, Christina. 2006. "Wal-Mart Gains in Recall Defeat." *Whittier Daily News*, September 20.

Faucheux, Ron. 1995. "The Grassroots Explosion." *Campaigns and Elections*, December/January, pp. 20ff.

Ferrar, Rebecca. 2006. "Greenpeace Protests at Kimberly-Clark." *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, March 1.

Field, Kelly. 2010. "For-Profits Spend Heavily to Fend off New Rule." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 5.

Foley, Stephen. 2008a. "From Zero to Hero?" *The Independent*, June 6.
2008b. "Public Relations Gains Boost Wal-Mart's Bottom Line." *Canberra Times*, June 9.

Frank, John N. 2005. "Wal-Mart Seeks to Improve Its Image in NY." *PR Week*, July 25, p. 3.

Geewax, Marilyn. 2006a. "The Three Faces of Andy." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 30.
2006b. "Shoppers Become Unwitting Warriors in PR Battle." *Cox News Service*, April 3.
2006c. "Critics Say Wal-Mart Has 'Moral Responsibilities.'" *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 24.
2006d. "GOP Consultant Behind Attack Ad Resigns from Wal-Mart Post." *Cox News Service*, October 27.
2006e. "Dueling PR Groups Wrestle Over Wal-Mart Policies." *Cox News Service*, November 20.

Giasone, Barbara. 2008. "Police Cite Four Protestors; Greenpeace Members Demonstrate at Kimberly-Clark's Fullerton Office." *Orange County Register*, July 28, p. BB.

Gill Report. 2012. "The Sure Thing with Craig Shirley." Available: http://gillreport.com/the-sure-thing-with-craig-shirley/.

Gittlitz, A. M. 2013. "I Was a Political Astroturfer." *Salon*, April 14.

Globe & Mail. 2007. "CN Pitches Chicagoans on Merits of Rail Plans." *Globe & Mail*, December 21.
2008. "CN Will Have to Wait for US Ruling on EJ&E." *Globe & Mail*, July 26.

Gogoi, Pallavi. 2006. "Wal-Mart's Jim and Laura: The Real Story." *Business Week*, October 9.

Goh, Leslie. 2007. "The Business of Getting Others to Praise Yours." *Straits Times*, August 7.

Goldberg, Jeffrey. 2007. "Selling Wal-Mart: Can the Company Co-Opt Liberals?" *New Yorker*, April 2.

Gorski, Eric. 2010. "Lobbyists Aid For-Profit College Student Group." *Huffington Post*, June 14.

Greenhouse, Steven. 2005a. "Developer Drops Plan for City's First Wal-Mart." *New York Times*, February 24.

   2005b. "Foiled Once in City, Wal-Mart Turns on the Charm for S.I." *New York Times*, August 22.

   2006. "Proposal to Build a Wal-Mart in Southern S.I. is Scrapped." *New York Times*, August 25.

Greenhouse, Steven, and Michael Barbaro. 2005. "Wal-Mart Memo Suggests Ways to Cut Employee Benefit Costs." *New York Times*, October 26.

Greenpeace. 2008. *Kleercut Action Pack*. Amsterdam: Greenpeace.

   2011. "Kleercut.Net: The Archive of the Greenpeace Kleercut Campaign 2004–2009." Available: www.kleercut.net/en/.

GSPM. 2012. "The Ethics of Grassroots Advocacy." Available: www.gspm .org/ethics.

Hallman, Mark. 1995. "Shares of Privatized CN Could Be on Track for a Big Spike." *Financial Post*, September 9.

Hansell, Saul. 2005. "Wal-Mart Ends Online Video Rentals and Promotes Netflix." *New York Times*, May 20.

Harrah's Entertainment. 2006. "You Have the Power." Available: www .harrahswinningtogether.com/images/wtinsider/1170702115-wti_final_8 _10_06%20(2).pdf. Accessed July 22, 2010.

Harris, Elizabeth A. 2011. "Wal-Mart Tries a Refined Path into New York." *New York Times*, March 26, p. A1.

Heilemann, John. 2005. "Unstoppable: Think Wal-Mart is Just Going to Pack Up Its Box and Go Home? Think Again." *New York Magazine*, August 15.

Heller, Laura. 2010. "Wal-Mart Winning Over Chicago." *Newstex*, June 22.

Hernandez, Javier. 2011. "As it Seeks Store, Wal-Mart Gives $4 Million for Youths." *New York Times*, July 6, p. A17.

Herszenhorn, David M., and Jackie Calmes. 2010. "Tax Deal Suggests New Path for Obama." *New York Times*, December 6.

Higgins, Sean. 2005. "Wal-Mart Goes to Washington to Win Friends on Capitol Hill." *Investor's Business Daily*, May 24.

Hopey, Don. 2004. "Boreal Forest." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 24, p. A-8.

Hudson, Kris. 2006. "Behind the Scenes, PR Firm Remakes Wal-Mart's Image." *Wall Street Journal*, December 7.

Internet Archive. 2011. "Wal-Mart Community Action Network." Available: http://web.archive.org/web/20090404103915/http://www.walmartcommunity.com/.

Jalonick, Mary C. 2003. "Consultant Q&A: Grassroots Lobbying." *Campaigns and Elections* 24: 45–52.

Jang, Brent. 2007. "CN Deal Sidetracked by US Regulators." *Globe & Mail*, November 28.

  2008a. "CN Confident Despite Economic Turmoil." *Globe & Mail*, January 23.

  2008b. "US Railway Heavyweights Back CN Plan." *Globe & Mail*, April 21.

Kabel, Marcus. 2005. "Pro-Wal-Mart Group Forms to Tout Company's Benefits." *AP Worldstream*, December 19.

  2006a. "Andrew Young to Head Pro-Wal-Mart Group." *Associated Press Financial Wire*, February 26.

  2006b. "Wal-Mart Adopts Tougher Defense with New Communications Exec." *Associated Press*, July 25.

  2007. "Wal-Mart Revamps Advocacy Group in Public Relations Battle with Unions." *Associated Press*, December 20.

Karkaria, Urvaksh. 2005. "Representative Calls Wal-Mart a Good Neighbor." *Florida Times-Union*, December 28.

KLD Analytics. 2006. KLD Stats [Data File]. Boston, MA: KLD Research & Analytics.

  2010. "Methodology." Available: www.kld.com/research/methodology.html.

Kmitch, Justin. 2008. "Residents Rise for CN Fight." *Chicago Daily Herald*, July 24.

Koenig, Sarah. 2009. "Who Would Win in a Fight Between a Polar Bear and an Insurance Company?" *This American Life* (radio broadcast), October 10.

Komperda, Jack. 2008. "DuPage Crowd Speaks out against Rail Sale." *Chicago Daily Herald*, January 18.

Krishnamurthy, Madhu. 2008. "Lake Zurich Opposes EJ&E Sale." *Chicago Daily Herald*, January 22.

Kurtz, Howard. 2006. "Post Photographer Repays Group for Trip Expenses." *Washington Post*, October 12.

LaFollette, Robert, Jr. 1948. "Some Lobbies Are Good." *New York Times*, May 16, p. SM15.

Lefkowitz, Melanie. 2011. "The Wal-Mart War." *Newsday*, April 25, p. A34.

Lepore, Jill. 2012. "The Lie Factory." *New Yorker*, September 24.

Lewin, Tamar. 2012. "Judge Strikes Main Element of For-Profit College Rules." *New York Times*, July 2.

Lichtblau, Eric. 2011. "With Lobbying Blitz, For-Profit Colleges Diluted New Rules." *New York Times*, December 9.

Malloy, Daniel. 2012. "For-Profit Schools Are at Center of Disputes." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 29.

Market News Publishing. 2005. "CN Celebrates 10th Anniversary of Privatization and IPO." *Market News Publishing*, November 17.

Miller, Leslie. 2006. "Washington Post Photographer Anonymously Promoted Wal-Mart." *Associated Press*, October 11.

Milyo, Jeffrey. 2010. *Mowing Down the Grassroots*. Arlington, VA: Institute for Justice.

Mitchell, Alison. 1998. "A New Form of Lobbying Puts Public Face on Private Interest." *New York Times*, September 30, p. A1.

Mohr, Charles. 1978. "Business Using Grass-Roots Lobby." *New York Times*, April 17, p. A1.

Monterey County Herald. 2011. "Editorial: Marina Coast Will Need Good PR to Justify PR Firm." *Monterey County Herald*, August 11.

Mui, Ylan Q. 2007. "Wal-Mart Antagonists Set to Join Edwards." *Washington Post*, July 7.

Naziri, Jessica. 2011. "Wal-Mart, Unions Reach Tentative Deal for Possible NYC Stores." *Cnn.com*, February 3.

NCSL. 2013. "50 State Chart: Contingency Fees." Available: www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/ethicshome/50-state-chart-contingency-fees.aspx.

Network Solutions. 2012. "Domain Registration for MyEducationChoice.org." Available: www.networksolutions.com/whois-search/myeducationchoice.org.

New York Times. 2009. "Greenpeace and Kimberly-Clark Settle Feud." *New York Times* Green Blog, August 5.

Newmyer, Tory. 2007. "Efforts Intensify on House Lobby Bill." *Roll Call*, February 28.

Olivo, Antonio. 2004. "Wal-Mart Wages Grass-Roots Campaign to Crack Chicago." *Chicago Tribune*, May 23.

Otis, Ginger Adams, and Susannah Cahalan. 2010. "Who's Afraid of Wal-Mart? Brooklyn Residents Can't Understand Why Politicians Are 'Protecting' Them from Jobs." *New York Post*, June 27, p. 23.

Painter, Steve. 2009. "Wal-Mart Expands where it Once Wasn't Wanted." *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, February 23.

Parks, Jessica. 2012. "'Fracktivists' Protest at Shale-Gas Conference in Philadelphia." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 21.

Poole, Shelia 2006. "Wal-Mart Defender Lashes Out." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 24.

PR Newswire. 2006a. "Hypocrisy? Yes: Union Groups Stepped up Campaign Contributions to Maryland Legislators in Advance of Vote on Anti-Wal-Mart Legislation, Says Working Families for Wal-Mart." *PR Newswire*, February 14.

2006b. "Working Families for Wal-Mart Announces Michigan Steering Committee." *PR Newswire*, July 7.

2006c. "Community Leaders Form California Steering Committee of Working Families for Wal-Mart." *PR Newswire*, August 10.

2006d. "Community Leaders in Ohio Form Local Working Families for Wal-Mart Steering Committee." *PR Newswire*, September 29.

2006e. "Community Leaders in Indiana Form Local Working Families for Wal-Mart Steering Committee." *PR Newswire*, November 1.

2006f. "Wal-Mart Begins Voter Education to Its 18,000 Iowa Associates." *PR Newswire*, August 15.

2006g. "WakeUpWalMart.com Statement on the Resignation of Ambassador Andrew Young." *PR Newswire*, August 18.

2006h. "Sen. John Kerry and Congresswoman DeLaura Respond to Wal-Mart Front Group's Attacks Referring to Democrats as Hezbollah." *PR Newswire*, August 23.

2006i. "Working Families for Wal-Mart Launches Wal-Marting Across America RV Tour." *PR Newswire*, September 29.

2009. "Wal-Mart Watch Joins WakeUpWalmart.com to Hold America's Largest Private Employer Accountable for Promises Made." *PR Newswire*, July 31.

2011. "Gotham Government Relations Continues to Fight NYC Wal-Mart Invasion; Forms Anti-Wal-Mart Group: New York Neighborhood Alliance." *PR Newswire*, February 2.

PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2009. *Global Forest, Paper & Packaging Industry Survey: 2009 Edition – Survey of 2008 Results*. New York: PriceWaterhouseCoopers.

Public Affairs Council. 1998. "Public Affairs: Its Origin, Its Present, and Its Trends." Available: http://web.archive.org/web/19980111071443/pac.org/whatis/index.htm. Accessed July 22, 2010.

2008. *Grassroots Benchmarking Report*. Washington, DC: Public Affairs Council.

2010a. "Frequently Asked Questions." Available http://pac.org/faq. Accessed January 10, 2010.

2010b. "2010 Grassroots Innovation Award Winners." Available: http://pac.org/content/2010-grassroots-innovation-award-winners-0.

2012. *O Momento Mágico: Managing Public Affairs in Brazil*. Washington, DC: Public Affairs Council.

Pyke, Marni. 2008a. "Forums Begin on Railway Purchase." *Chicago Daily Herald*, January 9.

2008b. "Transportation Department Wants CN Merger Decision." *Chicago Daily Herald*, October 31.

2008c. "CN Gets Positive Report." *Chicago Daily Herald*, December 6.

Rubin, Daniel. 2006. "Marketing Ploy for Wal-Mart Gets Egg on PR Firm's Smiley Face." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 21.

Sager, Ryan. 2009. "Keep off the Astroturf." *New York Times*, August 18.

Sanchez, Samantha. 2001. "How the West is Won: Astroturf Lobbying and the Wise Use Movement." *American Prospect*, November 19.

Saporta, Maria. 2006. "Young Goes to Bat for Embattled Wal-Mart." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 26.

SBPA. 2010. "No Tax Deal with Obama." Available: http://sbpublicaffairs .com/media.php?id=114.

2011a. "'Reset Act' Gains Steam on Capitol Hill as Anniversary Draws Near." Available: www.sbpublicaffairs.com/press_releases.php?id=79.

2011b. "Let Freedom Ring." Available: www.sbpublicaffairs.com/pdf/ LetFreedomRing.pdf.

2011c. "Club for Growth." Available: www.sbpublicaffairs.com/pdf/ ClubForGrowth.pdf.

Selvam, Ashok. 2008. "EJ&E Plan a Tough Sell for This Crowd." *Chicago Daily Herald*, January 29.

Showalter, Amy, and Kelton Rhoads. 2010. "Mistrust Unavoidable in Grassroots Efforts." *Roll Call*, May 11.

Silvestri, Peter. 2008. "Letter to the Editor: We Are All in This Together." *Edison-Norwood Times Review*, July 10.

Snyder, Jim. 2009. "Firm Knew Its Climate Letters Were Fakes." *The Hill*, October 30.

Snyder, Jim, and Silla Brush. 2009. "Employees Become Lobbyists." *The Hill*, October 28.

Spence, Timothy. 2005. "Wal-Mart Foes Take Union Fight Online." *The Gazette*, April 24.

States News Service. 2008a. "Durbin Asks STB to Take a Close Look at Impact of Pending EJ&E Sale on Rail Service." *States News Service*, February 15.

2008b. "Biggert Urges Caution on EJ&E Merger." *States News Service*, February 18.

2008c. "Forest District Comes Out Swinging against Railway Purchase." *States News Service*, March 4.

2008d. "Durbin, Bean: STB Should Reject CN Fast-Track." *States News Service*, May 16.

2008e. "Durbin Statement on Proposed Canadian National Acquisition Draft Environmental Report." *States News Service*, July 25.

2008f. "US Rep. Judy Biggert Reacts to House Vote on Bill to Restrict Rail Mergers Like CN–EJ&E." *States News Service*, September 27.

2008g. "US Rep. Judy Biggert Reacts to STB Decision on CN–EJ&E Rail Merger." *States News Service*, December 24.

2010. "Students Rally for Their Education Rights." *States News Service*, September 29.

Stone, Peter H. 1994. "Learning from Nader." *National Journal*, June 11, pp. 1342–1344.

Students for Academic Choice. 2011. "Student Statement of Support." Available: http://web.archive.org/web/20101231033435/http://www.studentsforacademicchoices.org/.

2012. "Mission Statement." Available: http://web.archive.org/web/20101231033435/http://www.studentsforacademicchoices.org/.

Surface Transportation Board. 2008. "Decision: STB Finance Docket No. 350817. Canadian National Railway Company and Grand Trunk Corporation – Control – EJ&E West Company." Available: www.stbfinancedocket35087.com/.

Thompson, Ginger, and Eric Lipton. 2010. "Lobbyist's Client List Puts Him on the Defensive." *New York Times*, December 30.

Tita, Bob. 2007. "Rail Deal Offers City a Remedy." *Crain's Chicago Business*, September 10.

Wal-Mart. 2011a. "Community Action Network." Available: http://walmartcommunity.com/.

2011b. "New York Walmart – New Yorkers Comment in Favor of Walmart." Available: www.walmartnyc.com/newyorkersspeakout/.

2011c. "Rally at City Hall." Available: www.youtube.com/WalmartNYC#p/u/33/APj2SChDMag.

Woodberry, Warren. 2005. "Wal-Mart Opens Doors on PR Blitz." *New York Daily News*, August 3, p. 4.

Zimmerman, Ann. 2006. "Wal-Mart's Enemies Bicker with Each Other." *Wall Street Journal*, January 11.

Index