

**John Gardner's Interest Group Design:
The Foundation and Evolution of a Lobbying Organization**

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THESIS

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This dissertation is dedicated to Kaleigh, Jonathan, and David.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

In 1970 John W. Gardner organized the public interest group Common Cause, the first national government reform lobby. Conditions were ripe for the creation of a general-purpose public interest lobby such as Common Cause.¹ But to successfully launch such a group required a rare person who could mobilize a diffuse—and mostly politically moderate—constituency. By 1970 John W. Gardner was a national figure due to serving as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare during the Johnson administration (engineering many Great Society programs) and as president of the Carnegie Corporation. Also he was a well-received author and speaker. Gardner was “a sincere, intelligent idealist and he knew something about the workings of Washington” (McFarland, 1984, p.196-197).

Gardner hand-picked his early leadership team including, among others, Lowell Beck (a former American Bar Association lobbyist), Jack Conway (UAW President Walter Reuther's principal advisor), David Cohen (a UAW labor lobbyist who worked with Conway), and Tom Mathews (a public relations consultant). Political historian Julian E. Zelizer (2006, p.100) described Common Cause leaders in the 1970s as usually “Democratic or independent, financially well-off, and in possession of undergraduate and graduate degrees. . . . Most of the leadership was politically well connected and able to reach powerful positions with relative ease” (see APPENDIX A for a list of all Common Cause Chairs of the National Governing Board and Presidents).²

Common Cause arose during the social movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, a time of mounting alarm with domestic and foreign events (e.g. Kent State University shooting, bombing of Cambodia). Early membership appeals framed the organization’s mission as promoting governance

¹ Public interests are defined as widely shared interests of almost everyone, or even everyone, as opposed to the interests of the few.

² For this project, leaders include Common Cause National Governing Board members, the president, and upper-level staff in the national and state offices (Common Cause National Governing Board Chairs and Presidents are listed in APPENDIX A).

integrity, or the idea that government should be accountable to the people instead of special (i.e. business or economic) interests. McFarland (1984) notes at its founding Common Cause was “the incipient organizational expression of widespread enthusiasm and hope” (p.6). Membership numbers soon swelled to over 300,000 and forty-eight state offices opened to lobby for state government reforms under the Common Cause brand.³

After successfully advocating for an end to the Vietnam War and passage of the Federal Election Campaign Amendment of 1974, Gardner and his leadership team decided to focus on structure and process issues (e.g. campaign finance, lobbying regulation, and ethics reforms). Together they established organizational rules that helped build a prestigious identity, political influence, and an organizational culture (Wilson, 1995 [1974]; 1989). “Gardner’s Rules” (see FIGURE 1; discussed *infra*) is this project’s term for the basic action principles set forth and implemented by John Gardner and early leaders. The rules established pathways to significant reform but within a few decades led to existential crises.

FIGURE 1 **GARDNER’S RULES**

Issues—focus on government structure and process

Strategic Focus—heavy priority on lobbying Congress; not states, not courts

Lobbying—insider-outsider

Professional Advocacy (insider)—professional and expert lobbyists on national staff; low priority given to development of civic virtues or debating issues

Members’ Roles (outsider)—members are mainly contributors but five percent more active; Common Cause helps them do their homework and find political leverage points

Pragmatic—willing to compromise; “no permanent friends and no permanent enemies,” but this does not rule out working with longtime congressional allies

³ Organization of a state level committee, or advisory board, is the minimum requirement for a Common Cause state office.

Environmental changes threatened the efficacy of Gardner’s Rules. Indeed, action principles that once promoted success proved insufficient to address existential crises arising in the 1990s and early 2000s. In the 1990s Common Cause began to disintegrate and by 2000 was nearly insolvent. Dependent on the membership for revenue, the organization struggled to balance their budget as the number of dues-paying members steadily declined. Fiscal troubles continued into the early 2000s and led to another financial crisis in 2004.

Until the late 1990s Common Cause leaders remained loyal to Gardner’s Rules. Significant change was instituted only after leaders who had not worked with or for John W. Gardner took the helm. Beginning around 2000, a new generation of Common Cause leaders revised the rules and in 2015 there is evidence of revitalization.

B. Purpose of the Study

By 2000, Common Cause almost vanished but in 2017 there is evidence of revival. The arc of Common Cause’s narrative calls forth questions such as: What is the tipping point at which incremental adaptations alone are no longer tenable? How do adaptations—whether incremental or major shifts—change an organization? And what can a public interest lobby tell us about citizen participation and representation? These questions may be answered by testing two hypotheses (FIGURE 2):

FIGURE 2 TWO HYPOTHESES

H1: Large public interest groups tend to follow the rules and norms set up under the founding leadership and first years of success.

H2: Large, long-term public interest groups change their founding rules and norms only when there are changes to the external environment and under threats to the interest group’s survival.

The hypotheses focus analysis on endogenous and exogenous dynamics shaping Common Cause's career since the early 1990s. They also speak to general theories of interest groups, collective action, lobbying,⁴ and representation in the U.S. political system.

C. **Significance of the Study**

Common Cause is politically influential. Significant legislation has been passed within the organization's "Open Up The System" (OUTS) program for reform (see McFarland, 1984, Ch. 7-8). Common Cause Colorado was the originator of "sunset" laws which were enacted in thirty-two other states and later at the national level. Coalitional efforts led by Common Cause affected congressional votes regarding MX missile production and deployment (Rothenberg, 1992, 213-215). After the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act passed in 2002, Senators John McCain and Russ Feingold gave credit to Common Cause for its advocacy efforts⁵ (U.S. Congressional Record Volume 148, Issue 33, March 20, 2002).

More recently Common Cause state offices successfully advocated for redistricting reform, same-day voter registration, and voluntary public financing of local and statewide campaigns. Successful redistricting reform efforts include California's initiative to create an independent citizens redistricting commission and Florida's initiative to amend the state constitution to ban partisan gerrymandering. Initiative campaigns are ongoing in Ohio and Illinois. Other campaigns and legislative efforts are taking place in Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. Same-day (or Election Day) voter registration successfully passed in Illinois. Similar efforts are underway in North Carolina, California, and Massachusetts. Voluntary public financing of

⁴ This project relies on a broad definition of lobbying, based on James Q. Wilson's (1995, p. 306) perspective that "performing a representational function" before public officials is lobbying (e.g. helping draft legislation, submitting amicus briefs to courts, and appearing before regulatory commissions).

⁵ Advocacy is a general term that may be used to describe actions taken by groups and individuals to promote certain issues up the political agenda and throughout the policymaking process. It suggests a field of action (see Fligstein and McAdam, 2012; Baumgartner et al., 2009; and Schlozman and Tierney, 1986) and processes including lobbying and efforts made in support of lobbying, such research, education, and community organizing.

local and statewide campaigns (or “clean elections”) have been enacted in Arizona, Connecticut, California, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, and North Carolina.

Common Cause is distinctive for its standing as the first national government reform lobby and for Gardner’s imprint. Before Common Cause, collective efforts to reform government focused on municipalities and states; in 2015 several such groups are active at the national level. Gardner created a public interest lobby, organized under the I.R.S. tax code as a 501c4 group.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) uses 501c4, a tax code designation, for tax-exempt non-profit groups that are primarily lobby groups. Contributions to 501c4 groups are not tax-deductible. Examples of 501c4 government reform lobbying groups are Public Citizen Inc., formed in 1971 by Ralph Nader and the Tea Party Patriots, Inc. organized in 2009. Internet-based 501c4 groups include MoveOn.org, created in 1998, and Coffee Party USA which started on Facebook in 2010.

Tax code subsection 501c3 groups are research and education oriented with restrictions on political and lobbying activities. Contributions to 501c3 groups are tax-deductible. Examples of 501c3 government reform groups and their dates of organization are: Government Accountability Project (1977); Center for Responsive Politics (1983); Citizens Against Government Waste (1984); Public Campaign (1997); Democracy 21 (1997; founded by Fred Wertheimer, President of Common Cause from 1981 to 1995); and Common Cause Education Fund (2000).

Gardner’s reputation was key to Common Cause’s successful launch, mobilization of members, and approach to advocacy. In a 2015 interview an early activist stated “the reputation of Gardner flowed through the organization.” Also, it was Gardner’s motivation for the common good, not necessarily the man, which gave the organization integrity and inspired activists.⁶

⁶ For this project, an activist is a member who contributes time and efforts to the organization, often serving as a volunteer leader of local efforts. About five percent of the members are committed activists and are an integral component of Common Cause’s advocacy infrastructure.

The formation of a national government reform lobby group was announced in the summer of 1970 (Gardner was interviewed for a *Washington Post* article and on television programs such as the *Today Show* with David Frost and on *Face the Nation*). In response, hundreds of people across the nation mailed letters of support. In many letters, support was extended due to Gardner's reputation. A few excerpts (with the writer's state in parentheses) address the esteem in which Gardner was held across the country: "You are probably better equipped than any other individual to lead the type of constructive effort we need" (California); "Thank God for someone who has the 'know-how' and 'can and will do'" (Texas); "I am very grateful that a person of your stature has begun an organization which must succeed if we are to survive as a democracy" (Minnesota); "Your values and record of effort will create a force that citizens of this time can wholeheartedly support, a power that works with this age and its need" (New York).⁷

Implicit in Gardner's charisma—and subsequently his rules—is a balanced tension between idealism and pragmatism. Common Cause was founded to improve representation of citizens' interests before government officials (from one perspective). At bottom its mission is to move from "what is" to "what ought to be" according to David Cohen (1999, p.82), expert lobbyist and second president of Common Cause (1975-1981). To get there the organization focuses on pragmatic problem-solving, as opposed to ideology which can be rigid. The organization works with interest groups and political officials who support their policy preferences regardless of partisan affiliation. Yet over the course of its history, the pragmatic way is becoming less satisfactory, upsetting the balance.

Gardner and his leadership team created a new form of participation, combining the broad-based appeal of a political party with professionalized advocacy of a special interest lobby. Common Cause's early popularity resulted in an uneasy relationship between centralized, top-down decision making and

⁷ Early response letters are archived in the Common Cause Records, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

state offices. Yet this infrastructure became essential for its revitalization. Although other public interest groups adopted a professionalized advocacy form (e.g. NAACP, Sierra Club) Common Cause is unique because it is the first national government reform lobby and due to the long-reaching impact of its founder and his rules.⁸

At present there is a dearth of case studies exploring how a public interest lobby adapts to changing environments (the few exceptions include Cashin, 2013; Bosso, 2005; Barakso, 2004; Shaiko, 1999). Historical analysis of Common Cause since the early-1990s addresses this lack. Also it provides insight into how an organization adjusts its structure to survive, utilizes traditional and technology-driven advocacy strategies, and substantiates its claim to represent a public interest. When combined with prior case studies by Andrew S. McFarland (1984) and Lawrence S. Rothenberg (1992) this project creates a sequence of analytical research about one interest group spanning forty-five years, a unique contribution to political science.

Common Cause was formed as a national public interest group. In other words, it was created to represent certain interests shared by citizens across the nation, and to strategically focus on lobbying Congress. A public interest group “seeks a collective good, the achievement of which will not selectively and materially benefit the membership or activists of the organization” (Berry, 1997, p.7). Early leaders decided to promote governance integrity (a collective good) by focusing on structure and process issues.

Soon after its founding, activists across the country organized to press for similar issues at the state level under the Common Cause name. On one hand, state activists’ efforts helped promote changes to the political agenda. In addition, their work enhanced Common Cause’s legitimacy. On the other

⁸ The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) formed in 1909 in order to end segregation, enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, and ensure equal education for black and white children. Since its founding, the national organization engages in lobbying attempts to reform government. Yet Common Cause is distinctive because it focuses on structure and process inputs whereas NAACP issues pertain more to policy outputs. There is some overlap, for example both organizations work to protect voting rights.

hand, it helped create a level of tension between national and state leaders. Often tensions arose due to national restrictions on state resources and issue selection. National leaders wanted state activists to focus on national issues, yet the activists wanted to pursue issues at the state and local levels.

Dynamics between Common Cause's national and state offices is reflective of federalism. Gardner envisioned Common Cause as a national organization, concentrating on lobbying the U.S. Congress. Adding state offices introduced pressures to widen strategic focus as state governments make policies on their own. Yet, a wider focus eventually became critical to Common Cause's survival.

Common Cause embodies John Gardner's brand of charisma—a balanced view of idealism and pragmatism. A general acceptance of ideals, such as governance integrity, informs U.S. political culture and indirectly supports government institutions. For example, Common Cause promotes governance integrity by working within institutions instead of working to overthrow the government. Yet a pragmatic view understands governance integrity is an ongoing struggle throughout the policymaking process. Compromises may be necessary to achieve a higher level of government reform under current conditions. Also, it is essential for some entity to perform a watchdog function once policies are passed. The balanced view fits within the neopluralist perspective of policymaking—although some, usually economic, groups wield a significant amount of power, other groups and individuals may present countervailing power to limit their influence in policymaking and policy implementation processes.

A case study of Common Cause, with a focus on John Gardner's interest group design, advances two theoretical fields. The major theoretical contribution is an analysis of the role of a political entrepreneur in a public interest group. A secondary observation is a more expansive view of representation than is depicted in Hanna Pitkin's (1967) well-known category of descriptive representation.

Political entrepreneurs are individuals—or organizational representatives—that conjoin problems, policy alternatives, and politics (Kingdon, 2003). Many public interest groups are formed by

entrepreneurs (Berry, 1997; Clemens, 1997; Wilson, 1995; Walker, Jr., 1991; and Salisbury, 1969).

Indeed, Anthony J. Nownes and Grant Neeley (1996) surveyed sixty founders of nationally active public interest groups and found most were formed by entrepreneurs.

John W. Gardner was a particularly effective political entrepreneur. His reputation and brand of charisma engendered widespread respect. His public announcements regarding the formation of a new “citizen’s lobby” inspired support and contributions from across the country. A focus on structure and process issues offered purposive incentives to supporters. Gardner not only mobilized but maintained an interest group based on his general action principles. He was a talented entrepreneur who affected the day-to-day running of Common Cause for an entire generation. In general, Gardner’s leadership traits and group benefits helped overcome the collective action problem and maintain Common Cause for many years.

A significant body of work by Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady (2012) summarizes the literature on the lack of descriptive representation in public interest groups (e.g. the principal and agent share similar demographic characteristics). However, representation may be regarded as more than descriptive. Sometimes the discussion about representation begins with what is represented, then who is making representative claims (Saward, 2006). An analysis of Common Cause adds to the ongoing scholarly discussion.

Representation is a process that goes beyond descriptive similarities between principal and agent. John Gardner made a representative claim that he and his rules represent governance integrity. His claim should not be dismissed too quickly. Yet Hanna Pitkin’s (1967) analysis of descriptive representation is not rejected. Instead this project advances the concept of dual representation, or “what” is represented before “who” is represented.

Dual representation should be part of the ongoing discussion about representation theory (Sultan Tepe and Andrew S. McFarland). Analyzing Common Cause from a dual representation perspective

manifests a different idea of representation that needs to be considered. In general, Common Cause provides a lens for studying how key aspects of the U.S. political system—interest groups, collective action, lobbying, and representation—work as the environment changes.

D. Academic Theories and Literature

Dynamics of Gardner's Rules and environmental changes speak to broader conceptualizations of interest groups' role in U.S. policymaking. Neopluralism theory considers actors, groups, and institutions operating within issue areas. Collective action theory addresses the challenges of creating and maintaining a broad-based membership group. Insider-outsider lobbying is a fluid, as well as multi-faceted, advocacy strategy. Representation theories explore the dynamic relationship between an agent and the principal constituents.

1. Neopluralism

Neopluralism theory situates public interest advocacy within a general political process framework employed by pluralist scholars in the 1960s (McFarland, 2004 and 2010). The political process approach is pragmatic, seeking to understand power in the actual workings of U.S. politics. It acknowledges the influence of actors and institutions (e.g. "the state," interest groups, parties, and elections) within a legal context and throughout the incremental development of policy. It also aggregates the policy process that occurs within a variety of separate issue areas. In sum, neopluralism is a general approach to understanding the U.S. political system as well as a basis for more specific questions regarding interest groups, collective action, lobbying, and representation.

The roots of neopluralism lie in group theory (Bentley, 1908; Truman, 1951) and issue-based pluralism (Dahl, 1961). But these roots are challenged by Theodore Lowi's (1979) multiple elite arrangements wherein self-serving interests exert control in specific issue areas, especially during the implementation phase. Because economic interests control resources and are routinely politically active

they are in a privileged position to influence policy (see Schattschneider, 1960; Lindblom, 1977; Walker, 1991; Smith, 2000).

In contrast Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones (1993) find multiple elite arrangements, or “policy monopolies,” are powerful but inherently unstable. Competing interests within an issue area contribute to incremental policy adjustments and occasional punctuations (see distribution of policy outputs in Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Interests challenging policy monopolies exert countervailing power within an issue area which enhances administrative agencies’ autonomy and the impact of legal norms (see Wilson, 1980).

Issue networks include a diversity of actors and interests competing within an issue area. They are composed of political and economic elite leaders and activist supporters competing for policy goals (Heclo, 1978; also see Heinz et al., 1993). Often ad hoc coalitions form within networks and comprise various sides of an issue. Some advocacy coalitions are more permanent, lasting over ten years (see Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Increased communications within a network limits formation of, and control by, multiple elite arrangements.

Within the network, actors compete to frame an issue. Frames are particular interpretations that use symbolic, emotionally charged, and/or easily understood themes. According to Donald Kinder and Thomas Nelson (2005, p.103) frames “live inside the mind, they are cognitive structures that help citizens make sense of politics . . . Frames provide order and meaning, making the world beyond direct experience seem natural.” The manipulation of frames is an expression of power and part of politics (McFarland, 2004, p.137; Stone, 2002; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Edelman, 1988). Actors fight for their interpretive frame to gain prominence because how a policy problem is defined is indicative of how it will be resolved (McFarland, 2004, p.136-143; Kingdon, 2003; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993, Ch. 2; Schattschneider, 1960). Competing sides in policy networks promote differing frames they hope get taken up by legislators and the higher federal courts (e.g., campaign finance regulation can be “limiting

the corrupting influence of money” or “limiting free speech”). Public interest group leaders often use frames to influence public opinion, expand the conflict, and mobilize resources.

Issue frames are components of leaders’ efforts to acquire a resource base, create a distinct niche, and build relationships with political officials. They form the basis of early definitions of issues and solutions, and may contribute to opening a policy window (Kingdon, 2003). Yet without a focusing event or policy punctuation, it may take years for an issue to gain salience and move from “routine” to “high politics” (Selznick, 1953; also see Baumgartner et al., 2009; McFarland, 2004, p.85; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993).

Within issue networks, public interest groups’ staying power is critical. Over the long-term groups may wield significant indirect influence by “softening up” a particular perspective (Kingdon, 2003). In other words, groups “[put] the needle on the record” (Strolovitch and Forrest, 2010, p.482); i.e. acquire a resource base, create a distinct niche, and build relationships with political officials.⁹ Positive feedback occurs as groups become stakeholders and develop a reputation for expertise in a particular issue area (see Grossman, 2012; Tarrow, 2011; Strolovitch and Forrest, 2010; Leech, 2010; Baumgartner et al., 2009).

Neopluralism also applies to interest groups in the U.S. historical context. Historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.’s (1986) cycles of reform and conservatism generally apply to political trends. Usually economic interests are predominant in the U.S. But during reform cycles the public perceives these interests as wielding an unacceptable amount of political power. Government reform issues gain salience, non-activist citizens are mobilized (“secondary activists” are about four percent of the adult population; see McFarland 2004, p.89), and countervailing power efforts are strengthened.

⁹ Niche theory, a derivation of multiple elite theory, has limited explanatory power for public interest group influence in the political process (McFarland, 2004, Ch.4). But it is useful when analyzing interest group resource mobilization and population ecology (Bosso, 2005; Haider-Markel, 1997; Browne, 1990; and Gray and Lowery, 1996).

As the reform cycle ends, public attention moves to other issues and non-activist citizens' participation decreases. Several theories explain why secondary activists' commitment declines after a few years: disappointment or boredom with politics (Hirschman, 1982); satisfaction with reform that may be more symbol than substance (Stone, 2002; Edelman, 1964); and politicians pass reform to enhance reelection chances (Walker, 1977; also see McFarland, 2004, p.89-90). Thus public interest group leaders are more likely to attend to the preferences of committed activists in order to maintain support (see Rothenberg, 1992).

Economic interests regained prominence as the social movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s ended. In some ways, these interests adapted tactics similar to successful reform efforts. For example, after the Federal Elections and Campaign Act Amendment of 1974 enforced campaign contribution limits, businesses interests mobilized. Since contributions to candidates were limited, large donations shifted to conservative, business-friendly lobbying groups, think tanks, and political action committees (see Rich, 2004). The current business cycle has been in place since the mid-1970s.

Another reform cycle would improve political opportunities for reform, but globalization and transnational organization trends (both private and public) mean that many policy systems are becoming more international. Subsequently policy areas are "less subject to fluctuations of domestic endogenous variables" (McFarland, 2004, p.100-102; McAdam, 1999, p.xix-xxi). Internationalism increasingly affects public interest groups' influence in the policy process and potential for another U.S. reform cycle.

Neopluralism takes into account the rich complexity and a long-range view of issue advocacy. It is an apt setting for situating public interest groups within changing circumstances. More particularly, it is a means to address how these groups use collective action, lobbying, and representation to further their objectives.

2. Collective Action

Collective action by public interest groups and lobbies is an essential element of neopluralism. But leaders who form and maintain a public interest group must overcome the collective action problem. In contrast to precepts of group theory and issue-based pluralism, rational choice scholar Mancur Olson (1971) argued that due to costs of time, effort, or money individuals tend to not join large public interest groups unless they have an incentive to do so (i.e. the free rider problem). Yet individuals will join when offered the incentive of special benefits.

Elite public interest group leaders offer an optimal mix of political and nonpolitical incentives to gain public attention and support (see material, solidary, and purposive incentives in Wilson, 1995; also see Moe 1981). James Wilson (1995) uses a department store analogy to illustrate the use of incentives: public interest groups must reflect the preferences of members as the goods displayed reflect customers' preferences. Yet Christopher Bosso (2005, p.64) argues that the increasingly narrow specialization of environmental group niches changes the department store into a boutique.

Several factors helped public interest groups overcome the collective action problem in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Middle class disposable income increased after World War II enabling greater political participation through contributions. Because survival was less of a concern, citizens were able to support purposive goals such as justice or fairness. Subsequently U.S. political culture shifted toward postmaterial goals (Berry, 1999; Inglehart, 1977).

Collective action is enhanced when social movements spin off new groups, as during the late 1960s and early 1970s' "advocacy explosion" (Berry, 1997). Similar to neopluralism, social movement theory shares a process-oriented approach which includes groups' ability to influence policy. Andrew S. McFarland (2004, p.67) states:

Social movements . . . provide a continuing counterweight to the formation of stable islands of oligarchy. Interest groups, originating in movements, are a bastion of neopluralism in the policy-making process.

Yet the collective action problem remains central to social movement organizations' ongoing efforts to mobilize resources.

Groups arising from a social movement tend to be oligarchic and are highly dependent on their leaders' strategic decisions regarding maintenance needs and political effectiveness (Zald and Garner, 2009; also see Michels, 1962 [1911]). Neopluralism emphasizes leaders' decision making within the political process, or a political opportunities approach (Bosso, 2005; McFarland, 2004 and 1984; Berry, 1997). Yet leaders' decisions are often biased toward the status quo.

Leaders' adaptive decisions are made in a context of uncertainty (Lowery and Gray, 2004). Also organizational pathways established by prior decisions create positive feedback dynamics and affect which events are attended to by leaders (or path dependency; see Pierson, 2004). Uncertainty and path dependency contribute to adaptations that are often incremental and protective of an organization's identity (Halpin and Nownes, 2012).

Significant research of the policy making process found a leptokurtic distribution of policy change. In other words most decisions cluster around incremental change, or policy "drift," but there are occasional lurches, or "fat tails," signifying major policy shifts (illustrative of punctuated equilibrium; see Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Baumgartner et al. 2009). In general, punctuated equilibrium also applies to policy making that occurs within a public interest group like Common Cause.

Leaders use disproportionate information processing to make policy decisions for their organization (Jones and Baumgartner 2005, Chapter 6). Cognitive architectures, such as sieves, constrain adaptive decisions. Sieves, a decision making model built on John F. Padgett's (1980 and 1981) analyses of federal budget decisions, are situated within a specific context. When problems are presented by the environment, policy makers sequentially look for incremental adaptations to satisfy the challenge.

During the advocacy explosion federated associations dedicated to civic development and deliberative decision making from the bottom-up lost ground to professional lobbying and top-down decision making that may or may not engage members (Skocpol and Fiorina, 1999; Clemens, 1997; Knoke and Prenskey, 1984; Wilson, 1973). On one hand the transition suggests diminishing social capital (Skocpol, 2003; Putnam, 2000; Clemens, 1997). On the other hand professionalized advocacy is a form of creative participation, aggregating and pressing citizens' interests within issue networks and as political watchdogs (McFarland, 2011).

The ubiquity of internet mobilization and advocacy adds connective action to collective action. Social media and networking platforms enable individuated activism (e.g. personal participation driven by specific issues instead of group membership).¹⁰ Individuated activism contributes to a range of collective action stretching from traditional organization-based networking to digital media-driven connective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). Technology improvements diminish the cost of obtaining information and supporting issues (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; Urbinati and Warren, 2008; Urbinati, 2000), but it is questionable if they translate to greater participation (see Bimber et al., 2012). Regardless, traditional groups working from centralized offices are forced to adapt and become hybrids or be left behind.

Newer public interest organizations use the internet as structure, strategy, and a representative process (Karpf, 2012 and 2016). Netroots groups, such as MoveOn.org or Change.org, operate with a more flexible organizational structure than groups formed prior to internet advocacy. Online communication diminishes the need for phone banks and other beneficial inefficiencies such as face-to-face conversations that build social capital and encourage movement up the ladder of engagement (Karpf, 2016, p.26).

¹⁰ For this project the definition of individuated activism relies on the mobilization of a single person usually through online platforms and social media. Defining individuated activism as a form of political participation contrasts with some theorists' account of individuated activism as rejection of the political sphere (see Chandler, 2006).

Internet strategies, such as signing online petitions and forwarding emails to politicians, enable broad but shallow mobilization. To an extent, the collective action problem is overcome with the ease of a mouse click. These “armchair” or secondary activists may not often progress up the ladder of engagement but their support enhances organizational legitimacy for a public interest group. Also it provides the group with base to develop issue-driven membership programs to advance their missions.

Internet platforms and websites are means to symbolically overcome the collective action problem. A spectrum of public interests may potentially mobilize large numbers of supporters. Yet influencing the policy process requires lobbying political officials.

3. Lobbying

Insider-outsider lobbying is the coordination of professional lobbyists with activists working in targeted congressional districts. After the advocacy explosion of the late 1960s and early 1970s, both public interest and special interest groups use insider lobbying and outsider grassroots mobilization tactics (Nownes and Freeman, 1998). More recent research suggests the insider-outsider lobbying dichotomy is less attainable for some public interest groups. For example, Anthony J. Nownes and Krissy Walker DeAlejandro (2009, p.448) find part-time lobbyists are more likely to be excluded from insider policy networks and must rely more on outsider techniques.

Since the return of the business cycle in the 1970s, public interest groups increasingly rely on grassroots mobilization (Nownes and Freeman, 1998; Kollman, 1998; Cigler and Loomis, 1995). Grassroots mobilization is a top-down process consisting of “the identification, recruitment, and mobilization of constituent-based political strength capable of influencing political decisions” (Goldstein, 1999, p.3). Grassroots mobilization in Common Cause most often originates with leaders’ strategic decision making. However, Lawrence Rothenberg (1992) found evidence of members’ experiential learning and successful efforts to influence organizational strategies.

Progressive and business-friendly interest groups use grassroots mobilization tactics. Groups challenging the policy status quo (i.e. countervailing power agents) use grassroots tactics more often than those defending the status quo (Baumgartner et al., 2009, p.151). Effective grassroots mobilization expands the scope of conflict (Schattschneider, 1960), often achieved by forming coalitions within issue networks. Actors defending the status quo may expand the conflict to protect their interests, too. For example, business-friendly groups seeking to derail Clinton's health care plan ran Harry and Louise commercials to influence public opinion and government officials.

Most public interest lobbies' members and supporters participate in passive forms of grassroots activism (with the exception of the one to five percent who become activists). Usually they contribute small amounts to campaigns and sign petitions, followed by attending staged public activities such as rallies and press briefings (see social movement organization typology in Tarrow, 2000, p.278-280). Yet grassroots efforts can be an influential form of outside lobbying when they reflect a group's ability to mobilize constituents during an election, signal officials about public opinion, and suggest the intensity of group preferences (Wright, 1996; Kollman, 1998).

Public advocacy organizations use three general tactics to gain political influence in the policymaking process (see Karpf 2016). Mobilizing (e.g. online petitions and forwarding emails) is a broad but shallow form of activism which may need media attention to enhance influence. Organizing is a means to develop skills of volunteers committed to the organization who advance the mission, often at the local level (e.g. within legislative districts). Campaigning means targeted lobbying efforts with those who hold power, with or without popular support. For example, interest group leaders may meet privately with political officials, a strategy sometimes called "grasstops" lobbying.

Public interest lobbies' state offices enhance lobbying opportunities and political influence (see Lowery and Gray, 2010). Often states serve as "laboratories of democracy" (U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, 1932) and are thus important venues for advancing issues to prominence on the

national agenda. Yet early settlers in different regions of the country created political institutions that subsequently affected the tradition of civic reform movements in their states (see McFarland, 1984, p.70). The institutions propitiate state political subcultures that contextualize interest group mobilization as well as the likelihood of policy influence (Elazar, 1972 [1966]; 1970; 1994).

4. Representation

A diverse population of groups and individuals within an issue network facilitates representation of public interests. Actors within an issue network take sides which may consist of elite and other public interests (Baumgartner et al., 2009). A diversity of actors suggests Truman's (1951) theory of activated citizens forming groups to pursue their interests. But neopluralism theory acknowledges the vast power of economic interests, elite bias in the policy process, and minimal representation for those of lower socio-economic standing.

Dual representation is an emerging research avenue which builds off of Hanna Fenichel Pitkin's (1967) seminal work on the concept of representation and is applicable to neopluralism theory. Pitkin portrays representation as mostly unidirectional (from principal to agent) and centered on electoral processes. Other scholars argue representation is based on symbolic imagery and persuasion put forth by the agent, tailored to and accepted by the principal, and not limited to electoral processes (Vike, 2013; Disch, 2011; Mansbridge, 2003 and 2011; Saward, 2006; Stone, 2002; Bourdieu, 1991; Edelman, 1964).

Pitkin's linguistic analysis explores several ordinary language uses for representation. The greatest impact is found in her discussions of descriptive representing and acting-for representation between a legislator (agent) and constituent (principal). Acting-for representation explores "trustee" versus "delegate" dimensions, studied by political science leader Heinz Eulau and his colleagues (1959).

Dual representation adjusts Pitkin's dyadic model (with influence flowing from principal to agent or "the who before the what") to consider "the what before the who." In Pitkin's terms, there is a

distinction between: “what” representation by agents “acting-for” the principal’s interests; and “who” representation by agents who “stand for” or descriptively represent the principal. Placing the what before the who informs the construct of elite leaders representing public interests.

A “what” of representation is elite leaders making a representative claim that they are acting for the public quality of governance integrity, a core aspect of the normative cohesion binding together the political system. Unlike Pitkin’s emphases on unidirectional (principal to agent) and electoral processes, Michael Saward (2006) argues representation is a two-way street, as agents (leaders and lobbyists) make claims accepted by the principal (members and supporters).

Membership surveys give expression to revealed preferences and metapreferences, or what supporters think the organization should be doing. Members want their preferences to be listened to, but as input or a guide. They also want organizational staffers using their own judgement (see Karpf, 2016, p.44). This finding offers empirical support for Michael Saward’s (2006) theory of two-way representative processes.

A public interest in governance integrity is an abstract goal with normative undertones that outlives its advocates (see Garsten and Nyqvist, 2014). It is a collective political quest unbounded by space or time, or even certain leaders’ interpretations. As such it is a public quality (based on recent work by Tepe and McFarland) with an appeal that stretches across geographies and generations of activists.

A “who” of representation is broader than descriptive “standing-for.” The elite leaders of public interest lobbies aggregate and identify interests of group supporters, and then act for them.¹¹ Many group leaders claim to represent citizens’ interests without much empirical substantiation.

¹¹ Work by Skocpol (2003), Putnam (2000), and Schlozman et al. (2012) add a third aspect of representation—the descriptive representation of elite leaders in the top ten percent of U.S. socioeconomic status.

Yet internet-driven individuated activism opens multiple avenues of influence between principal and agent. Public advocacy organizations with a large list of online supporters (e.g. five million) may use digital analytics to optimize mobilization tactics. Digital analytics are a form of listening to supporters to determine which issues and messages are more salient. Subsequent communication and mobilization is tailored to individual preferences. Organizational listening and response suggest supporters' revealed preferences are considered by leaders when setting the agenda, a form of passive democratic feedback (see Karpf, 2016).

In addition, there is a degree of accountability and restraint of oligarchic characteristics in mass membership-based groups like Common Cause. Although leaders determine specific issue areas, policy proposals, and strategies, their decisions are limited by supporters' ability to exit the organization (Hirschman 1970). The concept of followers controlling leaders by giving or withdrawing support is in line with the exchange model of democracy (Dahl 1956; 1961; also see discussion in McFarland, 1984, p.95-99).

Dual representation is facet of political participation within a neopluralist approach. Citizens accept elite leaders' representative claim to be acting for governance integrity—the “what.” Elite leaders aggregate and identify interests of constituents—the “who.”

Neopluralism assumes an expansive theory of citizen participation beyond elite-based islands of oligarchy or broad-based participatory democracy. Its investigative lens is a means to understand how key aspects of the U.S. political system—interest groups, modes of collective action, lobbying, and representation—work as the environment changes. A case study of Common Cause from the mid-1990s to 2015 adds empirical evidence to the theoretical approach. A variety of research methods are employed to get “inside the beast” and explore the Common Cause organization.

E. **Methods**

Primarily this project is a case study utilizing mixed methods to frame and analyze the history of Common Cause. Qualitative methods include archival research, fieldwork, content analysis, and interviews. Quantitative analysis is based on a 2015 survey administered to Common Cause members.

When combined with McFarland (1984) and Rothenberg's (1992) studies, archival research is a way to build a general historical framework, including dynamics between national and state offices. It enables the researcher to "study up" about organization leaders, their responsibilities, and connections with political officials (Wright 1994; Nader 1972) and "study down" regarding the relationship between leaders and members.

Common Cause's archives are stored at Princeton University Archive's Mudd Manuscript Library. The Common Cause Records extend from "Series 1: Predecessor Organization and Founding of Common Cause" to "Series 19: National Governing Board Records, 1971-2002" (and included documents through 2003). Archival research was conducted twice—for two weeks before I commenced fieldwork and for one week the following year. Initial research at the Mudd Manuscript Library occurred in May 2014 and was funded by the University of Illinois at Chicago's Milton Rakove Memorial Prize for Political Science Graduate Research in 2014. I returned to the Princeton Archives in December 2015, and was funded by a Friends of the Princeton University Library Research Grant.

Common Cause records after 2003 were collected at the national headquarters during 2014 fieldwork. The Common Cause staff allowed me to peruse their collection of National Governing Board Meeting notes and documents from 2003 to 2014. Also, they graciously offered me extra copies of the Common Cause magazine that were stored in their offices.

My fieldwork was a means of gaining access to an organization from within (Vike, 2013); it was also a means to engage—approach, research, and analyze—an organization (Garsten and Nyqvist, 2013). My fieldwork was comprised of participant observation at Common Cause offices in

Washington, D.C. for eight weeks during the summer of 2014 and during the National Governing Board meeting October 10-11, 2014.

Fieldwork in the national office included daily observation of the morning “huddles” where issues and activities were discussed as well as attending weekly staff meetings. During the rest of the day I studied historical records stored at the national office, a necessity since the Mudd Manuscript Library’s archives end at 2003. After two weeks I asked to participate in the organization and was given several tasks to complete and invitations to attend events such as Senate hearings, a voting rights rally, and a panel discussion at the National Press Club. The last month or so I continued as a participant observer but also started interviewing subjects.

I also conducted in-person interviews to uncover insider information regarding how the organization was adapting to changing environments. Eight questions comprise a semistructured interview (see Leech 2002), beginning with easy questions and then moving toward questions that may be more threatening (Weinberg, 1996, p.85).

Twenty-three Common Cause leaders were interviewed from June 2014 to August 2015. All interviewees were, or still are, leaders within the organization. Eleven leaders’ experience was primarily at the national level. Eight leaders were more active in state offices. Four leaders were no longer active in the organization. Also in 2014, historian Pauline Peretz conducted interviews with early Common Cause leaders. Dr. Peretz graciously gave me permission to use excerpts from her interviews with James Banner, David Cohen, Robert Craver, Karen Hobert Flynn, Jay Hedlund, Shirley Jacobs, Shea Tannenbaum, Nick Ucci, and Fred Wertheimer. Her interviews add invaluable insight.

Content analyses gauge congruence between perceptions of Common Cause by its leaders, the press, and its members/supporters. Leaders’ messaging appears in Common Cause National Governing Board meeting notes, press releases, issue alerts, and interviews. The press’ perception of Common Cause is based on newspaper articles from 1991 to 2015 in the *New York Times* (n=252), *Washington*

Post (n=495), and *USA Today* (n=275) at the national level and the *Chicago Sun Times* (n=259) and *Austin American-Statesman* (n=366) at the state level (collected through the Lexis Nexis and Newsbank databases). Responses to the 2015 Membership Survey comprise members/supporters' perceptions.

Quantitative measurement in my study chiefly relied on results of the 2015 Membership Survey. The survey invitation was distributed to a randomly selected sample of 50,000 Common Cause email subscribers and drew 1,265 responses, a response rate of about 3%. The survey consisted of 29 questions and used a mixed-mode approach in order to maximize the likelihood of responses from a variety of respondents (Dillman, 2007, p.451-453; Selm and Jankowski, 2006).

A study of Common Cause is incomplete without devoting some attention to state offices. Analysis concludes with a mini-comparative case study of state offices in Illinois and Texas. These two states are selected for analysis due to similar challenges in the past few years but vastly different results. Comparisons will be based on the same qualitative and quantitative measurements used to investigate the national organization. Data is also collected from the state office websites, Facebook pages, and Twitter feeds.

F. Chapter Outline

A case study of Common Cause sheds light on maintaining an organization that attempts to fix government from within. Previous work examined Common Cause's political influence and ability to mobilize members and activists. This dissertation contributes a longitudinal perspective of the dynamics of organizational maintenance and advocacy through evolving contexts.

Gardner's Rules established action principles and a reputation for integrity that guided Common Cause leaders' decisions for decades. But loyalty to Gardner's vision almost led to the organization's demise. Therefore Gardner's influence grounds analysis of the organization's efforts to maintain itself and advocate public interest in governance integrity and is the subject of Chapter Two. Common Cause's narrative may be broadly grouped into three phases ("Gardner's Influence—Rules of the

Game,” “The Game Changes,” and “Changing the Rules;” covered in Chapters Two to Four). State offices play an important role in Common Cause’s revival. Analysis concludes with comparison of state offices in Illinois and Texas in Chapter Five.

Each analytical chapter investigates structure, strategy, and representation characteristics. Empirical evidence suggests how Common Cause maintains an identity based on idealism while making pragmatic adjustments that change the organization. Also, attention is given to campaign finance reform due to the expertise and stakeholder claim the organization developed over many years. Chapters Two to Five include a brief summary of Common Cause’s campaign finance reform advocacy in that time or place. These chapters detail a narrative arc tracking existential crises and revitalization in the first national public interest lobby.

Chapter Two, Gardner’s Influence—Rules of the Game, picks up the organization’s first phase where Rothenberg’s (1992) analysis ends. It sets the scene to answer the research questions: What is the tipping point at which incremental adaptations alone are no longer tenable? How do adaptations—whether incremental or major shifts—change an organization? And what can a public interest lobby tell us about citizen participation and representation?

Gardner’s Rules remain largely uninterrupted until the mid-1990s. This time period is characterized by leaders’ resistance to amending the rules even as evolving contexts severely constrain group maintenance and advocacy. Incremental adjustments primarily affect state offices and representative processes while lobbying, especially for campaign finance reform, continues apace. Yet these adjustments gradually shift the organization toward significant change.

Chapter Three, Crises—The Game Changes, analyzes Common Cause’s second phase. The selection of top leaders from outside the organization becomes a tipping point toward amending Gardner’s Rules. Similar to earthquakes and sandpiles, incremental adjustments in the 1990s

insufficiently address the constant build up of pressure from outside and inside the organization.¹²

Exogenous pressures include an increasingly polarized political environment which limits the number of potential supporters and allies in government, even as the effect of previously enacted reforms is weakened. Increasing numbers of governance integrity groups and individuated activism change aspects of resource mobilization, ad hoc coalition formation, and influence credit-claiming. Endogenous pressures are primarily driven by membership decline. Campaign finance reform achieves legislative success but is soon challenged by vested interests. Amending Gardner's Rules punctuates and destabilizes Common Cause.

Chapter Four, Renewal—Playing by New Rules, addresses the third phase that begins in 2007 when Robert Edgar, a member of the National Governing Board, took over as president. The return of organizational stability and even pockets of revitalization occur within an altered narrative but familiar identity. During this phase technological advancements necessitate different approaches to mobilization, advocacy, and representation. Revitalization and advocacy success become centered within specific state offices.

Chapter Five, Pockets of Revitalization—State Comparison, analyzes Common Cause efforts in two states—Illinois and Texas. Even though based in distinct political cultures (Elazar, 1972) they share a similar history within the Common Cause organization. In the early years the state offices exert some level of political influence. The state offices suffer through the crises years, and both lose national support. In its third phase, Common Cause is recruiting support in both states but Illinois is experiencing a revival and political success while Texas lags behind.

Chapter Six, Conclusion summarizes the evidence substantiating and refuting the hypotheses. Also, answers to the research questions are reviewed. This project ends with a discussion of how

¹² The analogy is based on Jones and Baumgartner's (2005, p.148-150) comparison of earthquakes and sandpiles to policymaking distributions that are mostly incremental with occasional punctuations.

Common Cause provides a lens for studying how key aspects of the U.S. political system—interest groups, collective action, lobbying, and representation—work as environments change.

II. GARDNER’S INFLUENCE—RULES OF THE GAME (1970 to 1995)

John Gardner asks you to join him in building a mighty “Citizen’s Lobby,” concerned not with the advancement of special interests but with the well-being of the nation . . . a third force in American life which upholds the public interest against all comers, particularly the special interests that dominate our national life today.

Common Cause newspaper ad, August 1970

A. The Foundation of a Lobbying Organization

The opening epigraph reveals elements of neopluralism at the birth of Common Cause. The concept of a “citizen’s *lobby*” implies focused political action within the policy process (instead of research or education). The action occurs as Common Cause lobbyists apply countervailing power against special interests in particular issue areas.

The time was right for such an organization and John W. Gardner was the right man to lead the new organization. Exogenous characteristics (e.g. a social movement, changes in public interest advocacy, and technology) improved opportunities for mobilization and political influence. Gardner’s brand of charisma inspired others to join Common Cause as leaders, activists, and members, and advanced his vision of governance integrity. Within a few years pursuit of the vision was manifested by Gardner’s Rules, or the basic action principles set forth by John Gardner and early leaders. These rules and the expertise of lobbyists were critical elements of what came to be Common Cause’s greatest resource, a reputation for integrity among Members of Congress.

By the mid-1990s exogenous and endogenous changes were taking place that would soon threaten the organization’s existence. Yet leaders’ adaptive decisions remained well within the parameters of Gardner’s Rules. Incremental adaptations upheld the rules and kept the organization solvent but were insufficient to reverse building existential crises.

Common Cause’s narrative consists of three phases. Chapter Two details the first phase, or “Gardner’s Influence—Rules of the Game.” Historical analysis in the chapter sets the scene to answer the research questions: What is the tipping point at which incremental adaptations alone are no longer

tenable? How do adaptations—whether incremental or major shifts—change an organization? And what can a public interest lobby tell us about citizen participation and representation? Also it provides necessary analytical background to address the first hypothesis:

H1: Large public interest groups tend to follow the rules and norms set up under the founding leadership and first years of success.

H2: Large, long-term public interest groups change their founding rules and norms only when there are changes to the external environment and under threats to the interest group's survival.

The chapter ends with a general overview of campaign finance reform and Common Cause advocacy from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s. This particular issue is highlighted due to the organization's expertise and stakeholder claim as well as a general misperception of Common Cause as a single-issue group.

Common Cause is unique because it is the first national government reform lobby. Also it is unique due to the long-term impact of Gardner's Rules and the organizational culture that developed around these rules. Yet its narrative informs general theories of how interest group leaders remain loyal to a group identity even at some cost to the principles on which it is built. It also provides a basis for understanding the negotiability of collective action, lobbying, and representation characteristics when an interest group is threatened.

Gardner's Rules were the foundation of Common Cause's basic action principles and identity. Organizational identity is based on "both formal structures and informal rules and procedures that structure conduct" (Scott, 2001, p.33; also March and Olsen, 1984). In this manner identity legitimates an organization (within a population and to those involved) and establishes an internal culture in which leaders and supporters become invested over time (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004; Wilson, 1995 [1974]; 1989).

Later leaders were resistant to amending the rules even when Common Cause's survival was threatened by environmental changes (for example it took about seven years and three attempts before

an education fund was created). Even as Common Cause faced mounting crises, leaders' adaptations were limited by disproportionate information processing. Bryan D. Jones and Frank R. Baumgartner (2005, p.5) explain disproportionate information processing is a model "based on how the cognitive limits of decision makers and formal and informal arrangements of groups of decision makers affect the dynamic processing of information." The model subsumes Baumgartner and Jones' (1993) theory of punctuated equilibrium, or the trend of incrementalism with occasional significant change in the policymaking process.

B. A Propitious Time

The 1970 newspaper ad quoted in the epigraph above featured a picture of, and was signed by, John W. Gardner. The effectiveness of Gardner's appeal was quick. Within months over 100,000 people joined the nascent organization; within a few years the number grew to three times as many. A nation-wide constituency developed of mostly white, middle and upper-middle class professionals, living in northeast and west coast states (Member surveys found constituent geographical distribution percentages were about the same in 1976, 1981, and 2015).¹³ Early advocacy successes included an end to the Vietnam War and passage of the Federal Election Campaign Amendments of 1974.

During the second half of the 20th century several trends arose which were conducive to Common Cause's founding. The Civil Rights Movement spurred a broader social movement. The social movement propelled the nation toward a new reform cycle where economic interests were perceived as wielding an unacceptable amount of political power. Public trust of government declined significantly and government operations became more salient (see APPENDIX B: GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND PUBLIC TRUST). Bipartisan support for government reform grew after the Watergate scandal of the early 1970s. In addition, increasing middle class wealth, organizational innovations, and improved technologies created the means for a new type of political participation.

¹³ Lawrence Rothenberg (1993, p.34) posits Common Cause's lack of racial diversity is "perhaps because as a collectivity it has not generally concerned itself with the everyday struggles of economic survival."

As middle class prosperity improved after World War II, political values shifted towards quality of life goals such as environmental protection or justice. These postmaterial goals provided some level of stable backing for government reform groups (Berry, 1999; Rothenberg, 1992; Inglehart, 1977; also see McFarland, 2004, p.75). Thus they comprise purposive incentives that overcome the collective action problem (Wilson, 1995). Rothenberg's (1992, p.67) analysis of Jonathan Siegel's 1981 Common Cause membership mail survey found the "vast majority of contributors believe they got involved for broad, purposive reasons." The steady decline of middle class wealth since the 1980s made the stable backing, usually of committed activists, ever more critical for Common Cause's survival.

The late 1960s and early 1970s' social movement set in motion forces leading to an "advocacy explosion." It mobilized formerly unactivated people, or secondary activists, who were alarmed by domestic and foreign events and increasingly cynical about political institutions. Many wanted to express their dissatisfaction with government but were not attracted to demonstrations or more radical protests (McFarland, 1984, p.30). Increased mobilization and citizen dissatisfaction helped Common Cause quickly attract a significant number of members in the early 1970s (McFarland, 2004, Ch. 5; Costain and McFarland, 1998; McCarthy and Zald, 1977).

Collective action to achieve government reform may be traced back to the Progressive tradition beginning in the late 1800s. Both the Progressive Era and the social movement in which Common Cause arose mobilized citizens whose activism was short-lived. Tammany Hall's George W. Plunkitt dismissed the transitory nature of Progressive reformers by likening them to "Mornin' Glories" (Riordan, 1905; also see deactivation of secondary activists in Chapter One). Additional criticisms launched toward the Progressives and other civic reformers included being naïve and moralistic in their advocacy of good government (a basis for the pejorative "goo-goos" label) and believing in scientific administration, among others (McFarland, 1984, Ch. 2). As Gardner's Rules took shape, Common Cause's early leaders developed action principles that addressed these criticisms by giving citizen activists an important but supporting role and by focusing on pragmatic lobbying tactics.

Even when government reform efforts are successful, their effectiveness may be short-lived or allow for unintended (and sometimes intended) deleterious consequences. Unforeseen political inputs and bargaining affect policy before, during, and after enactment (Wildavsky, 1979). Indeed, “Laws can be partially, or even wholly, reversed during the policy implementation process. Special interests can continually press for change when they are no longer opposed by reformist morning glories” (McFarland, 2011, p.137). Also reformers’ attempts to improve government accountability may result in diminished democracy and the need for more reforms (see Bridges, 1997). In other words, reform is “frequently tak[ing] three steps forward and two steps backward in relation to the original state” (McFarland, 2004, p.57). Sustained advocacy is essential to the realization of Common Cause goals—John Gardner and early leaders understood reform would not work unless a politically organized constituency demanded enforcement.

The formation of Common Cause sits at the cusp of two organizational trends: (1) federated associations with civic engagement emphases and (2) professionalized advocacy with public support. As the first national government reform lobby it provided a prototype for a new type of activism, soon employed by other public interest groups. Yet unlike many of those groups, Common Cause relied on individual contributions and did not accept foundation or government grants for many years (see Walker, 1991). In his 2014 interview with Pauline Peretz, Jay Hedlund noted “Common Cause depended on small donor contributions (inspired by the example of the McGovern campaign). Common Cause bought McGovern lists.”

Technology improvements of the late 1960s facilitated development of a nationwide-constituency. Communication costs between leaders and members were lowered by mass membership mailing and Wide Area Telephone Service long distance calling. Also Common Cause developed an innovative advocacy infrastructure, organized around the Washington Connection (see *infra*), to inform and mobilize supporters across the country.

A social movement, increasing middle class wealth, organizational innovations, and improved technologies created exogenous circumstances conducive to the formation of Common Cause. Hundreds of thousands of people soon joined Common Cause but the organization's successful launch was not just a matter of timing. It also required the right person to create and lead an innovative form of political participation.

C. **A Charismatic Founder**

John W. Gardner possessed a type of charisma appropriate to lead during the reform cycle of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Gardner believed that government institutions could change and had done so before (see Zelizer, 2006, p.101). What was needed was a “third force” representing citizens' interests (i.e. an experiment of a political organization fixing government from within instead of a third political party running candidates and becoming incorporated by a major party).

Yet Gardner was no “goo-goo”—his professional experiences gave him insight to the use and abuse of power. To change institutions from the inside required access to the political process and legislators' support. Common Cause's signature issues under Gardner's leadership—attacking the corrupting influence of money in politics and the House seniority system—dealt with shifting power, distributing it more fairly and ending its abuses.

In Max Weber's (1978 [1922]) model of charismatic authority, power is granted due to perceptions of an individual's exceptionality. These perceptions are based on emotion and subsequently inspire loyalty. Gardner was an exceptional person. In regards to founding Common Cause, McFarland (1984, p.31) wrote:

. . . few besides Gardner could have raised \$250,000 or more for mailing and newspaper advertisements, inspired confidence among the constituency of educated professionals who would be attracted to such an organization, commanded outstanding speaking and writing skills, and been able to assemble . . . competent staff . . .

Indeed, contemporaries who attempted to form public interest groups were not as successful (e.g. Fred Harris in 1972 and George Romney in 1973; see McFarland, 1984, p.196).

Yet Gardner was not a typical charismatic person. Jay Hedlund, a Massachusetts state activist in the early 1970s who later joined the national staff, explained John Gardner's brand of charisma in a 2014 interview with the historian Pauline Peretz: "Gardner was calm and would take an hour every day to close his office and not respond to the phone and think. People who followed him were very substantive, thoughtful."

Other Common Cause leaders and activists who worked with Gardner described the man and his imprint on the organization as: "the classiest Republican I ever met;" "he was genuine;" "Gardner was brilliant;" "The reputation of Gardner flowed through the organization;" and "Common Cause was the *image* of Gardner writ large, not a cult" (emphasis added). One activist stated Gardner's reputation was not due to the man necessarily but the principles behind him; a motivation for the common good. This perspective echoes McFarland's (1984, p.196) comment that "More than anything else, Gardner wanted to influence American society for the better."

Gardner believed in developing leadership within the organization. In a 2014 speech David Cohen, expert lobbyist and second president of Common Cause (1975-1981), stated Gardner believed "the possibilities of people stepping up as leaders . . . is without limit." Cohen also summarized his sense of Gardner's multiple legacies:

1. Use Our Democratic Instruments of Self-Governance—Citizenship, he would say, "is not a spectator sport. Get off of the sidelines. Rollup your sleeves and quit sucking your thumb. To complain, you have to be engaged."
2. Reflection Leads to Action—Gardner opposed "the paralysis of analysis;" he promoted learning by doing
3. Good Government Extends Beyond Civic Virtue, Worthwhile as that Is—Common Cause was not only about civic virtue. It was about challenging power where it was abused and using the instruments of self-governance to correct those abuses. Gardner believed that power dynamics are constantly shifting so an alert citizenry is required to play the watchdog role. The people must bark and bite at the ankles of the powerful. That is very different from demonizing people or institutions.
4. Government Has to Be Made to Work, Even if It Is Imperfect—He constantly told Common Cause members that government had to be accountable, open, effective, and responsive.
5. Organize People and Understand Them—He understood that Common Cause could not remain vital with the classic chapter structure. Shifting "networks of responsibility," a Gardner phrase, had to be created so that people would be informed, engaged and would

apply their energies to the issues at hand. In doing so the members . . . “amateur democrats,” in Wilson’s [1962] telling phrase, were supported by a professional staff whose constituents understood and navigated complex political and policy systems. That staff had to respect citizen participants.

6. Leadership Counts—Gardner spent lots of time thinking and writing about leadership. He stayed skeptical of the leader-rescuer. He was determined to avoid reliance on charismatic leadership.

Also it was important to match the right type of leader to the right task at hand. For example, the Common Cause President was in charge of practical day-to-day operations while the National Governing Board Chair fulfilled a morale building role, encouraging people to believe they could be effective (Gardner, 1990; McFarland, 1984).

John Gardner’s professional experiences—in psychology, education, administration, and advocacy—contributed to his particular brand of charisma and the development of his rules. Gardner held a doctorate in psychology from the University of California at Berkeley and taught psychology (including human development) at Connecticut College until World War II. In 1946 he joined the Carnegie Corporation; a decade later he became the corporation’s President and head of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (where he proposed the White House Fellows program, a year internship for young leaders at the highest levels of government, which U.S. President Lyndon Johnson founded in 1964). Next Gardner served as Lyndon Johnson’s Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (1965-1968) where he engineered many Great Society programs.

Immediately prior to founding Common Cause, Gardner led the Urban Coalition (formed under I.R.S. tax code 501c3) from 1968 to 1970. The coalition was an ambitious attempt to coordinate business and civic leaders’ efforts to tackle poverty and racism at the local level. The Urban Coalition successfully initiated programs in some U.S. cities but Gardner soon realized major institutional change would not begin at the local level.

Most of the Urban Coalition’s successes were achieved through a legislative lobbying arm (I.R.S. tax code 501c4), the Urban Coalition Action Council (UCAC). By working with influential

insiders (e.g. Members of Congress) and outsiders (e.g. the NAACP), the UCAC was able to claim victory in several issue areas such as extensions of the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Voting Rights Act, and the rejection of G. Harrold Carswell as Supreme Court nominee. By April 1970 the UCAC referred to itself as “an increasingly effective new ‘people’s lobby’” and touted its success at mobilizing a “broad spectrum of American leadership” to support social interest legislation (excerpts are taken from the Princeton Archives).

Most of the Urban Coalition’s income came from the tax-deductible contributions of multiple firms, including foundations. Yet the UCAC did not elicit the same response—only one corporation, one individual, and two labor unions gave non-tax-deductible contributions. As a lobbying organization, the UCAC was prohibited from accepting foundation contributions by the Tax Reform Act of 1969. Subsequently the UCAC began to develop a strategy for attracting a mass financial base that soon led to the formation of a new type of interest group.

The balance of idealism and pragmatism inherent in Gardner’s brand of charisma influenced the organizations he led and inspired loyalty among his supporters. The UCAC’s self-depiction as an effective and broadly representative “people’s lobby” foreshadowed Common Cause’s innovative approach to political participation. Both organizations’ strategic emphasis on lobbying Members of Congress was a pragmatic approach to problem-solving. Within a few years after Common Cause’s founding, Gardner and early leaders developed rules which structured the necessary balance between idealism and pragmatism.

D. Rules of the Game

Common Cause was born as an outgrowth of the Urban Coalition Action Council (based on evidence from the Princeton Archives). By the summer of 1970 Gardner was prepared to launch the first mass membership-supported national government reform lobby. Within two years Common Cause became “a nationwide symbol of reform with 200,000 members and an action program for institutional change” (McFarland, 1984, p.69). The action program—Gardner’s Rules—was built by Gardner and

early leaders, developed prior to and in the first few years of the organization's founding (see FIGURE 1; copied below).

FIGURE 1
GARDNER'S RULES

Issues—focus on government structure and process

Strategic Focus—heavy priority on lobbying Congress; not states, not courts

Lobbying—insider-outsider

Professional Advocacy (insider)—professional and expert lobbyists on national staff; low priority given to development of civic virtues or debating issues

Members' Roles (outsider)—members are mainly contributors but five percent more active; Common Cause helps them do their homework and find political leverage points

Pragmatic—willing to compromise; “no permanent friends and no permanent enemies,” but this does not rule out working with longtime congressional allies

The rule's six components established the identity of a politically influential public interest group. They also structured an innovative form of political participation and representation. Although the propitious time soon changed with the return of a business cycle, the influence of Gardner's charismatic leadership inspired continued loyalty to his rules (and limited adaptive options).

1. Issues—Focus on Government Structure and Process

Common Cause exerted influence as the first national government reform lobby, but a focus on structure and process issues developed after the organization was established. An issue poll conducted among members soon after the group's formation indicated top concerns were disgust with Congress, environmental issues, and ending the Vietnam War.

In 1971 Fred Wertheimer was a Common Cause's legislative director (he served as president of the organization from 1981 to 1995). In a 2014 interview with Peretz he explained one strategy the organization used to successfully influence Members of Congress to end all appropriations for the Vietnam War:

In 1971 there were enough votes in the U.S. Senate to cut funding for military operations in Vietnam. The U.S. House's two-stage system allowed unrecorded votes to be taken in a Committee of the Whole during the first stage. Bills that passed the first stage subsequently would rise to the House for a recorded vote. Common Cause leaders organized 20 to 30 people to sit in the gallery to watch Committee of the Whole votes and make public the Representatives' names. Eventually Common Cause forced the House's first recorded vote on ending the Vietnam War. The organization's efforts created a new level of accountability for Members of Congress and by 1974 all appropriations for the war were stopped. In sum, the process of government affected policy substance.

Common Cause was "the leading antiwar lobby in the House" and influenced certain members of the Democratic Caucus through mass mobilizations in their districts (see McFarland, 1984, p.187-190).

After successfully pressing for an end to the Vietnam War, Gardner and other leaders decided issue focus was imperative in order to field a relatively unified organization (instead of one fragmented about issue priorities), avoid divisive issues, and attract upper middle income moderates. Issue poll results suggested members and leaders shared a conviction that governance integrity must be improved, or as Gardner wrote to staff in 1975, "our governing institutions should be less corrupt, less under the control of special interests, more effective instruments of the people" (October 21, 1975 letter, stored in the Princeton Archives). Also for the country as a whole, government operations were an increasing concern in the early 1970s (APPENDIX B: GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND PUBLIC TRUST).

Subsequently, structure and process issues became Common Cause's approach to governance integrity advocacy. Structure and process issues were defined as access, accountability, and responsiveness within the political process. Leaders also created an agenda to reform campaign finance—in particular through lobbying law, public financing, conflict of interests, and financial disclosure. Even though campaign finance reform was prioritized under Gardner's Rules other reform work could be framed within a focus on structure and process issues (see APPENDIX C: COMMON CAUSE SELECTED ADVOCACY ISSUES 1970-2015).

The Watergate scandal served as a focusing event (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Baumgartner and Jones 1993) that pushed government reform up the political agenda. The U.S. House's Democratic

Caucus was strengthened by the influx of “Watergate Babies,” or Democrats first elected in 1974 following President Nixon’s resignation. Junior members of both parties were supportive of reforms that would fragment power (see Schickler et al., 2003).

Common Cause actively pressed for congressional reforms enacted in the 1970s—such as the congressional seniority system, open meetings, and the Subcommittee Bill of Rights. A significant achievement for the organization was passage of the Federal Election Campaign Act Amendments of 1974 (which creates the Federal Election Commission to enforce previously enacted limits on “hard money” contributions; see discussion of campaign finance reform *infra*). Other successful reforms improved executive agencies’ transparency (e.g. Government in the Sunshine Act of 1976 opens agency meetings; Ethics in Government Act of 1978 requires public disclosure and a longer waiting period before prior agency officials may lobby that agency).

Structure and process issues added to the organization’s unique identity. When Common Cause began, government reform groups often sought substantive reforms (e.g. NAACP) or advocated similar issues within a larger program (e.g. Ralph Nader’s Public Interest Research Groups). Structure and process issues expanded countervailing power efforts beyond substantive issue areas. But leaders continued to advocate substantive issues within the broader framework of government reform (e.g. passage of the Equal Rights Amendment).

Structure and process issues were a means to avoid cooptation by ideological or partisan labels. The focus also justified Common Cause’s watchdog role (i.e. being attentive during the policy process and with regard to an official’s actions while serving a public function). Watchdog efforts are a means to limit political corruption or “the misuse of public power for private gain” (Karklins, 2005, p.40). In a 2014 interview a leader referred to Common Cause as a nonpartisan watchdog that “points on both sides of the aisle.”

Common Cause’s focus on government structure and process issues continued for over forty years. Although originally unintended, the focus soon signified purposive goals that mobilized the

collective action of a nationwide constituency. Lobbyists' advocacy efforts within specific issue areas built Common Cause's identity among Members of Congress.

2. Strategic Focus—heavy priority on lobbying Congress

Under Gardner's Rules Common Cause's primary advocacy strategy is lobbying Members of Congress to pass reform measures. Lobbyists target the earlier and more critical phases of the political process, when issue frames and proposed solutions are selected. One reason is a belief that getting an issue on the congressional agenda is the largest hurdle for enacting reform. Another reason is based on the adage "who does the draft rules the world," in other words the results can be controlled by working on the initial draft (during his 2014 interview with Peretz, Fred Wertheimer attributes the quote to Phil Burton (D-CA) who served in the U.S. House from 1964 to 1983). Thus attributes of expertise and professionalism are particularly important—including the ability to draft a measure, line up congressional supporters, and confirm a measure is reported out of committee prior to a floor vote.

Common Cause lobbyists mostly work with Members of Congress who are supportive of their reform efforts. Maureen Shea and Susanne Tannenbaum, two lobbyists working during the organization's first phase, knew two-thirds of the Members by face and would catch them off the House floor to brief them (based on 2014 interviews with Pauline Peretz). Common Cause lobbyists offer expertise and strategic information to be used by the Members in order to convince representatives with whom they are friendly, but are undecided, about voting on a particular reform measure. They also effectively manage campaigns to secure public commitments of support from Members of Congress.

Lobbyists work very long hours—coming in very early and staying late at night. They also work on Congress' schedule. Shea and Tannenbaum argue it made a huge difference to have Common Cause members lobbying within their congressional districts (i.e. outsider lobbying) and nobody coordinated insider-outsider lobbying like Common Cause.

Letters and petitions from Common Cause members are a frequent tactic used to lobby Members of Congress from the outside. But after an initial concrete indication of widespread support, these

communications become routinized. Local members pressure their representatives by using Common Cause material to contact the right decision maker at the right time, write letters to the editors of local papers, and communicate with the press through meetings or phone calls. During its early years, Common Cause leaders learned how to lobby from different pressure points—the congressional district, the media, and the Members.

Timing is a key element of effective lobbying. In their 2014 interviews with Pauline Peretz, Shea and Tannenbaum explain “You have to build the ground for an issue, but there has to be an opening” and “if you can’t figure out how you can get those votes, that’s not the issue then.” Also the organization spared its resources, focusing on one or two issues at a time (while continuing to follow other issues).

Common Cause’s national office staff was organized to enhance lobbyists’ efforts. McFarland (1984, p.108) describes lobbying as a multifaceted activity:

Publicity is needed to get widespread support . . . Research makes sure the remedy seems adequate to the problem in the eyes of the legislators. Litigation is part of an overall strategy . . . Common Cause managers must be sure that a lobbying strategy does not impose too-heavy tasks on its staff . . . political tactics must be coordinated with congressmen and other groups supporting a bill.

Publicity efforts are enhanced by media’s attention to public interest groups generally (see Berry, 1999) and referring to Common Cause research and quoting leaders in articles specifically.

Common Cause’s prestigious reputation and a national identity were built by focusing on lobbying Congress. Political historian Julian E. Zelizer (2006, p.102) notes “Legislators paid attention to Common Cause not only because it represented politically active citizens but also because the group was quite skilled at Washington politics and media relations.” At the same time, state offices were lobbying state legislatures and achieving reforms. Also lawyers worked in the national office to promote reforms through the court system. Yet states and litigative efforts were secondary to Common Cause’s primary advocacy strategy.

a. States

State offices were not in John Gardner's original plan. A national focus was reflected in a newspaper article announcing the UCAC's rebirth as a yet unnamed organization and quoting Gardner (Harnett, 1970):

Local groups can do a lot of important things . . . significant, useful things . . . If you want effective social change, you've got to know what's bothering people and you've got to have leadership at the local level. But grassroots leadership without national links just becomes sentimental.

As Common Cause took shape, the basic unit of field organization was the congressional district under the leadership of regional directors. Grassroots mobilization was intended to work hand-in-hand with national lobbying efforts.

Some leaders supported the creation of state offices as an expression of a political movement. Others perceived tension arising since the national office is the only incorporated entity with legal standing. Also state offices were initially self-created (then would get approval to be Common Cause offices), in contrast to the legitimating authority given to the national organization by a mass-based membership.

In 1971 Common Cause supported a state-level prototype effort, the Colorado Project. Its leader in Colorado, Craig Barnes, concluded there was a great need for a citizen's lobby at the state level as ordinary citizens were often denied access to government machinery (based on "The Colorado Project" file stored in the Princeton Archives). Results of the Colorado Project convinced leaders to allow other state offices to open (leaders opted to remain one organization instead of becoming a federation). By the mid-1970s activists formed committees in forty-eight states to lobby for state government reforms under the Common Cause brand (McFarland, 1984, p.73).

In the organization's first decade successful advocacy by state offices were beacons of reform (enacting sunshine laws, sunset laws, and ethics reform). Common Cause then used state laws to badger

and embarrass Members of Congress from other states. In this manner, state successes were important even as strategic focus remained on lobbying Congress.

Common Cause leaders had to coordinate national and state political efforts without overtaxing staff or the organization's resources. Besides lobbying legislative bodies, the national office coordinated efforts to influence executive branch officials and lawsuits to promote reform through the courts. Like advocacy in the states, court cases played a supporting role to lobbying Congress.

b. Courts

Common Cause is a national reform lobby, but litigation is part of its overall strategy. The organization "occasionally institutes lawsuits in the political reform field, both for the sake of getting reform by judicial decree and to help define a legislative issue" (McFarland, 1984, p.109). The national offices include a legal division committed to lawsuits, particularly those involving the regulation of political campaigns.

Lawsuits achieved maximum effect when coordinated with lobbying efforts. Like outsider lobbying, lawsuits were a form of leverage to advance Common Cause's program. The legal team strategically selected the right case, at the right time, and went before the right judge (Fleishman and Greenwald, 1976, p.119). Litigation often focused on campaign finance reform—filing cases to enforce laws, challenge counter-productive implementation, and support laws against constitutional challenges. Common Cause's research that informed court cases also helped lobbying activities and press releases.

A strategic focus on Congress enabled the interest group to press for national government reforms in the early stages of the political process. It also prioritized the organization's advocacy efforts before other branches, in the states, and within the national office. This focus, when combined with the work of expert and professional lobbyists, established Common Cause's greatest resource—a reputation for integrity among Members of Congress.

3. Lobbying—Insider-Outsider

Common Cause’s advocacy infrastructure is based on the strategic focus of lobbying Congress; not states, not courts. The organization claims an Internal Revenue Code designation as a 501c4 political lobbying group (see Chapter One). The national staff generates research primarily to support lobbyists’ insider efforts and to inform outsider activists. Lobbyists work with Members of Congress who agree with the organization’s stance, then let those members try to persuade the undecided. Efforts are made to substantiate a nonpartisan label by working with (or challenging) members of both political parties (a Common Cause leader recalled that until around 2000, the organization was routinely identified as a liberal, progressive group but not a Democratic Party ally).

Common Cause lobbyists advocate reform among Members of Congress and the media. Early leaders such as David Cohen and Fred Wertheimer brought with them already established relationships with political officials and journalists. Research conducted by the national staff combined with these long term relationships to place Common Cause lobbyists in the position to offer a lot of information. In a 2014 interview with Peretz, Wertheimer commented “We could brand bills. We would say this is the solution. And we had the credibility for people to accept that, to want that message out.”

For most of its first phase, Common Cause was the biggest group using insider-outsider lobbying for government reform. The organization had a much larger staff and membership base than other groups doing similar work (e.g. Public Citizen, PIRG). Political influence was achieved with the combined efforts of five or six professional lobbyists, organizational leadership, and grassroots pressure (based on comments made by Karen Hobert-Flynn during her 2014 interview with Pauline Peretz).

Insider lobbying is supplemented by members’ activism on the “outside.” As lobbyists press for reform with a particular Member of Congress or their staff, Common Cause members in their districts are mobilized by the national office. Members’ visits to local congressional offices, questions during town hall meetings, and letters (among other efforts) signal broad public interest and enhance

countervailing pressure (particularly important when Common Cause wants a bill reported out of committee).

Common Cause was innovative in its focus on Members of Congress and organization of members by congressional district. Other organizations targeted senators because it was easier to focus on only two officials per state. Before an important vote in the House undecided Members of Congress would receive a large number of phone calls from their congressional district. Common Cause was the first organization to do this in the House but was soon joined by other organizations that copied the tactic (based on Peretz' 2014 interview with Nick Ucci).

For most of its first phase, Common Cause's outsider lobbying infrastructure was extensive. In many congressional districts volunteers would perform functions such as phone tree coordinator, media coordinator, and steering committee member. Steering committees were composed of five or six people who would determine strategies and schedule meetings with state representatives. By October 1973 steering committees could be found in 350 of 435 congressional districts.

The outsider lobbying infrastructure is an example of the "third force" envisioned by John Gardner. In October 1973 David S. Broder, a journalist with the *Washington Post*, wrote Common Cause "is assembling a grass-roots field organization that rivals that of the old parties." Initially a system of regional offices was responsible for local organizing and relaying requests for action from the national office to the local organizations in the congressional districts. The extra organizational layer slowed down transmission of information and requests for action until Jack Conway, Common Cause President from 1971 to 1975, created an innovative form of participation called the "Washington Connection."

The Washington Connection grew out of member volunteers and interns' efforts to support Common Cause in the national office. Volunteers were politically sophisticated (e.g. retired judges, NSA, CIA, attorneys). There was a large intern program, with young college students willing to stick a foot in the door looking for a job (up to 50 college kids volunteered over the summer, graduate or

undergraduate students, from all over the country). Initially volunteers fulfilled clerical duties. As they gained experience they were given more responsibilities until the Washington Connection was created in 1973, headed by a volunteer coordinator on the national staff.

Washington Connection volunteers were the linchpin for insider-outsider lobbying. Using long-distance WATS lines, they communicated with activists in one or more congressional districts or on state steering committees (and often developed friendships with their state contacts). They relayed to local activists how a particular Member of Congress stood on a Common Cause issue and on action needed at the district level. They also gathered information on what the legislator said at home about Common Cause issues.

In his interview with Pauline Peretz, Jay Hedlund, an early activist with his Massachusetts congressional district steering committee then Director of Grassroots Lobbying for over a decade in the 1980s and 1990s, described the insider-outsider lobbying infrastructure during Common Cause's first phase. Common Cause's national headquarters was set up like a newsroom or political campaign. In the middle of the office complex there was open space for volunteers, lobbyists had their offices on the edges of the room but were open offices.

Washington Connection volunteers were part of a Tuesday morning briefing covering the goals for that week, printed on a yellow memo. During the Washington Connection volunteers' briefing everybody listened. Senior staff members briefed volunteers who asked "tough questions." Thus the national staff had direct feedback regarding how volunteers and activist members thought, and issues they disagreed with or supported (information and quotes are based on Pauline Peretz' 2014 interviews with Shirley Jacobs and Nick Ucci).

The Washington Connection also gave volunteers a central role in the organization's issue work. Volunteers were assigned to a state desk, like the State Department and the Peace Corps would have country desks. Volunteers had membership lists for states they were covering and would call everyone on the day they were in (usually Tuesdays and Thursdays when there was a general office briefing for

staff and volunteers on status of issues and strategy). For example, the goal might be getting press coverage prepared for the launching of a story the next day on campaign finance legislation. The national staff prepared letters to the editor based on a study of the issue. After the briefing the volunteers would be talking to steering committee coordinators in 200 districts within a couple of hours, and the action would be proposed—once you see this news coverage, write a letter to the editor saying congressman so and so needs to support the legislation.

Common Cause invented this organized form of insider-outsider lobbying strategy. The national office built the congressional district structure, mostly over the phone and through mail, and with phone trees (hundreds or thousands of calls to Members of Congress could be generated almost instantly). Common Cause developed and became the model for a very sophisticated phone tree system and outsider lobbying which coordinated state desks and local mobilization.

Shirley Jacobs, a key member of the Washington Connection (her activism with Common Cause stretches from 1971 to at least 2014), organized the state of Florida. Jacobs had a list of Common Cause members in Florida and would call the most motivated to contact their Member of Congress and write letters to the editor. At the end of each day with the Washington Connection, she told the volunteer coordinator how many calls she made, how many letters she got people to write, and if she heard anything interesting the organization should know about. Jacobs added “The [national] staff would know that day if something was going on in Florida before it went to Capitol Hill—you could go to the Hill and tell the Congressman of Florida ‘this is just what you said in your state. . .’” (excerpt from Pauline Peretz’ 2014 interview with Shirley Jacobs). Thus the Washington Connection fulfilled important supporting functions for insider and outsider lobbying.

As the first national government reform lobby, Common Cause’s reputation was dependent on effective lobbying tactics. The unexpected influx of volunteers at the national office led to the creation of the Washington Connection—an innovative means to mobilize collective action across a diffuse

membership that also gave credence to the organization's claim to represent citizens. But the organization's reputation was built by the professional advocacy of Common Cause lobbyists.

4. Professional Advocacy (Insider)

John Gardner hired experienced and respected lobbyists to join his leadership team (e.g. Lowell Beck, David Cohen, and Fred Wertheimer). Other leader-lobbyists rose up through the ranks of the organization (e.g. Ann McBride). McFarland (1984, p.127) stated:

Common Cause lobbyists . . . know the legislative process, thoroughly understand the issues with which they are concerned, and make a good personal impression. The lobbyists are assigned to particular issues, which they follow for years . . . Common Cause lobbyists are well liked by congressmen sympathetic to their platform.

Lobbyists' efforts influenced the policy process and soon established a prestigious organizational reputation among political officials.

David Cohen, one of Gardner's early hires, was Common Cause's first Chief Lobbyist and was known for his sense of professionalism. According to Cohen (1999, p.85), Gardner believed in several requirements for effective advocacy. In 2014 interviews for this project, several past and present Common Cause lobbyists explained how they understood Gardner's requirements:

a. Stamina and Persistence

Lobbying, in Congress and state legislatures, is about building relationships with allies on the inside of government. Early Common Cause presidents were known to chase lobbyists out of the national office, telling them they "gotta be physically on the Hill." The focus is on the long-haul within the political process, especially as government reform issues are often complex and take time. Particularly apt is Max Weber's quote, "Politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards" (see Karpf, 2016, p.165). Advocacy will often be thwarted so lobbyists need to know how to find a way back when that happens.

Lobbyists "can't be on the barricade every second." At times their role is to educate officials about the political process. There is no absence of an agenda but the emotions are not the same.

b. Narrow Issue Focus

It is important to fight specific battles because influence has to be concrete rather than abstract. Structure and process are issue areas that encompass a variety of specific issues on which to concentrate (e.g. disclosure of lobbyists' activity and spending as enacted in the Lobby Reform Act of 1995). Common Cause's advocacy addresses slices rather than a whole issue area. Of issues most important to early members—disgust with Congress, environmental issues, and ending the Vietnam War—only Vietnam was narrow enough.

At times political opportunities include substantive issues or opposing specific people. Common Cause's leaders often frame these opportunities as pertinent to their governance integrity mission (e.g. expanding and protecting voting rights as a means to keep government accountable). An exception is the early 1980s priority of leading a coalition against the MX missile's manufacture and deployment as a means to limit nuclear proliferation.

Presidential nominations and congressional leaders may be opposed for perceived ethics and civil rights violations. The 1984 appointment of Edwin Meese III as Attorney General was contested as an ethics issue. Senator Howard M. Metzenbaum (D-OH) and Common Cause argued Meese's ethical conduct made him unfit for the job, contending there were questions regarding Meese's "failure to disclose financial relationships with people he later approved for federal jobs" (see CQ Almanac 1985). Also Common Cause joined civil rights groups in opposition to the 1987 appointment of Robert Bork as Supreme Court Justice. The National Governing Board issued a resolution stating Robert Bork cannot "judge fairly, constitutional claims to liberty and equality" (see Marcus, 1987). Later the organization called for ethics investigations of House Speakers Jim Wright (D-TX) in 1988 and Newt Gingrich (R-GA) in 1995.

c. Credibility

The credibility of Common Cause lobbyists is a priority within the organization. To be credible, lobbyists must press for specific issues that are explicable regarding the organization's prior dealings,

reputation among Members of Congress, and identity. Also, there is an element of knowledge-based credibility based on Common Cause's in-house expertise; enhanced by commitment to narrow issue advocacy.

A Common Cause leader explained credibility consists of external and internal characteristics. To the outside world, Common Cause's involvement with an issue should be explicable due to prior dealings, public presence, and public identity. In house, there must be substantive credibility based on expertise and sufficient resources. The leader noted "if Common Cause is doing something they are the best in town at it and are the go-to organization. Common Cause wouldn't get involved if it didn't have the resources."

Political officials need leadership information to understand why they are being asked to do something. The point—and challenge—is to motivate Members of Congress with credibility instead of outrage (i.e. no "lobbing shells from outside to change things" through radical or ideological protests). Another important point is to avoid a "holier-than-thou" tone that reformers can take (McFarland 1984, p.128). Lobbyists should convey information as a conflict model around an issue, not hammering one side. Also credible lobbyists listen because a Member of Congress can have legitimate questions.

d. Ability to Work with Other Groups

Common Cause's lobbyists are advocacy leaders, particularly in the early years as fewer groups existed to lobby for government reform. Yet across its history Common Cause leaders and lobbyists have also worked with coalitions to promote favored issues (e.g. opposing the SST, supporting full voting rights for District of Columbia residents, various civil rights reforms). A recent example is Common Cause Florida activists working with the League of Women Voters and the Florida Tea Party to advocate municipal ethics reform (Burlew, 2014).

Gardner's lobbying requirements set standards for professional advocacy, especially at the national level. They guided the development and maintenance of Common Cause's identity and

reputation for integrity among Members of Congress. Thus insider lobbying is the primary conduit for political influence within Gardner's Rules.

Gardner and early leaders gave low priority to development of civic virtues or debating issues. Members were polled for their issue priorities (see discussion of representation, *infra*) but there was an assumption that members were already well educated (supported by evidence from member surveys). Even though the organization claimed to be a citizen's lobby it was run by top-down decision makers focused on national lobbying.

Professional advocacy was key to establishing Common Cause's identity and political influence. To support insider efforts, Gardner and his team developed an advocacy infrastructure to mobilize members in congressional districts. In sum they created a new mode of collective cooperation to advance a public interest in governance integrity (see creative participation in McFarland, 2011). Most members collectively cooperated by financially supporting Common Cause's lobbying efforts, but some members also became activists.

5. Members' Roles (Outsider)

Although Common Cause was the first national government reform lobby, early leaders felt nothing could get done unless citizens were engaged. Citizens supported the organization primarily through contributions. But activists' commitment empowered an advocacy infrastructure designed by Common Cause (one leader commented that the organization always empowered membership more than other organizations).

Funding by mass-based membership in support of professional advocacy is an important reason why Gardner formed Common Cause as an outgrowth of the UCAC. Although a few prominent philanthropic benefactors (John D. Rockefeller, Nelson Rockefeller, and board members of the Chase Manhattan Bank or the Rockefeller Foundation; see McFarland, 1984, p.75) provided necessary start-up funds, the goal was to be supported by members' contributions. A dependency on members for

resources legitimized the organization as a public interest group even as other groups were helped by government and foundation grants (Walker, 1991; Bosso, 2005).

Membership renewal dues and contributions soon became Common Cause's primary source of income. Thus it may be argued that members' most important role is to sustain the organization.

Gardner (1972, p.118-119) wrote:

. . .in any voluntary citizens' organization like Common Cause, the most conclusive vote cast by the individual is his decision to join or resign. When people join it is in effect a vote for the movement; their resignation or failure to renew membership is a vote against. Thus, collectively, the members hold life-or-death control over the organization. If enough of them fail to renew their memberships, that will be the end of Common Cause.

Like most public interest groups, Common Cause's ability to influence policy is dependent on their ability to attract enough support to survive and maintain relationships with insiders.

Initially Gardner and early leaders used newspaper ads, television commercials, and mass direct mailings to grow the membership. Direct mailings, a recruitment tactic worked out from 1968 to 1975 or so, is a craft of advertising specialization. Within a few years direct mail became "the workhorse of membership recruitment efforts" (quote by Jane Mentzinger, Common Cause's Senior Vice President for Finance, in June 1999 memo to Board Chair Derek Bok; Princeton Archives). Yet as a recruitment tactic they were a net loss for the organization as the return in new dues paid was substantially less than the costs. Thus Common Cause's total revenue was largely dependent on members' sustaining dues and contributions.

Common Cause membership dues lag behind inflation. In 1982 annual dues were raised to \$20 where they remained through the 1990s even as inflation increased by about 70 percent. Thus revenue erosion caused "a steady intensification of fund raising to supplement dues" (Rothenberg, 1992, p.82), primarily through contributions (until formation of the Common Cause Education Fund in 2000).

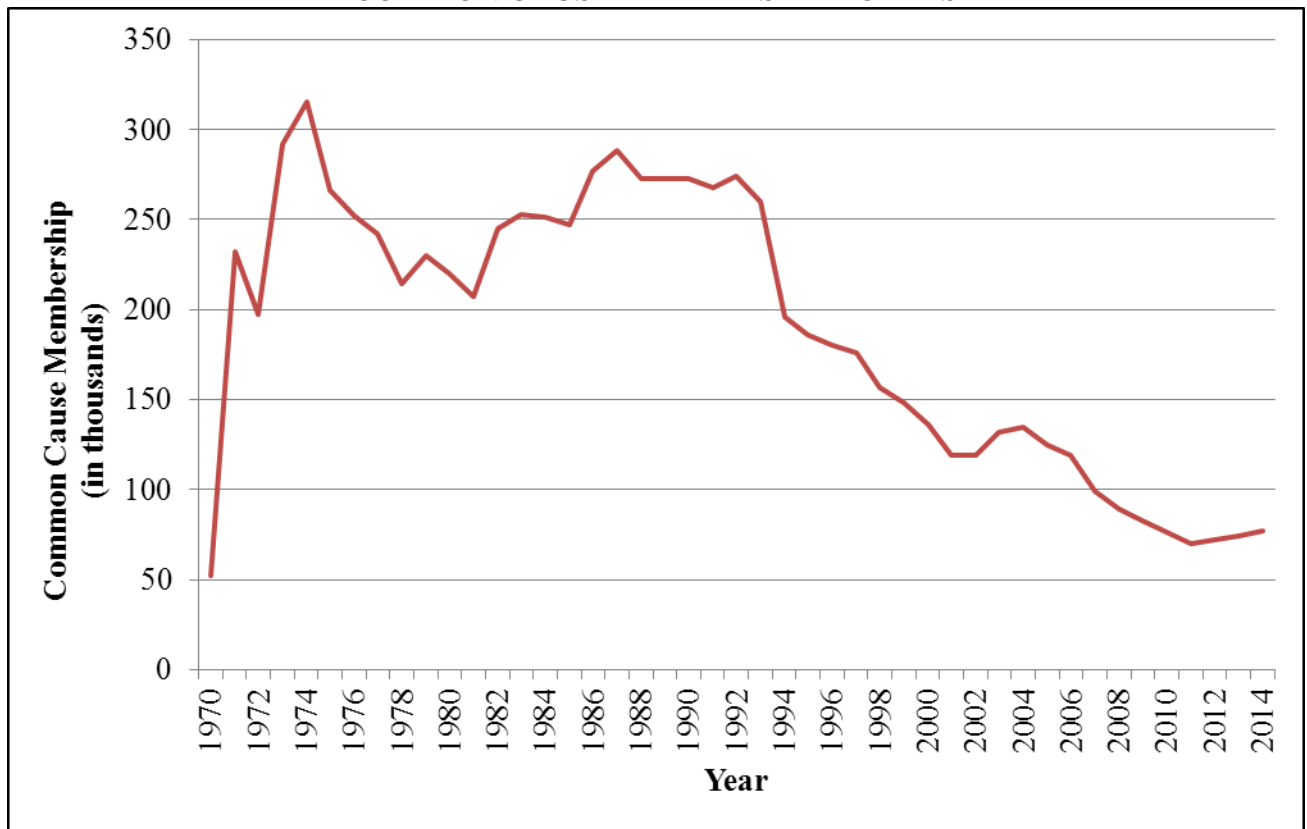
Membership dues are only the first rung on a "ladder of engagement"—after joining members are asked to make small contributions to, or mobilize in support of, specific issues. Leaders keep dues low relative to most citizens' ability to pay in order to encourage experiential learning and additional

contributions. Direct mail contributions are the “bread and butter” of Common Cause’s income (quote from Edward S. Cabot’s October 24, 1997 letter to the Board; Princeton Archives). In 1992 about sixty percent of the members gave additional contributions.

Although contributions are critical to Common Cause’s income levels, strict contribution limits are in place. Limits are enacted to protect the organization’s independence and reputation for integrity. Any donation in excess of \$2500 (\$1000 until 1992) from any source requires approval by the National Governing Board Chair, the President, the Chair of the Board Finance Committee, and the Vice President for Finance. Gifts (cash or in-kind) from corporations and labor unions are limited to \$100 (up to \$1000 per year). Individuals’ contributions are limited to \$10,000 maximum per year.

Determining the exact number of Common Cause members is almost impossible (especially as internet activism takes hold in the late 1990s). Some memberships represent a family; some indicate people who no longer contribute but remain on the rolls. In 1994 the total number was adjusted to reflect only those memberships that gave money to the organization within the previous two years, creating an exaggerated drop between 1993 and 1994 (see FIGURE 3).

FIGURE 3
COMMON CAUSE MEMBERSHIP TOTALS



Source: Common Cause Historical Records in the national office.

FIGURE 3 depicts the quick rise of Common Cause’s membership in the early 1970s, a drop in the late 1970s after early victories, resurgence in the 1980s during Republican presidential administrations and general decline beginning around 1987. Other membership upturns occur after 2000 and 2010.

Membership increases in the early 1980s, early 2000s, and after 2010 are in line with “the adversity theory of Common Cause” (McFarland, 1984, p.13). The adversity theory applies when political events that are perceived to be adverse to group goals have the effect of increasing membership. In the early 1980s people were “aggravated by Reagan’s arms buildup and by his lack of concern about the role of special-interest contributions in congressional elections.” After the 2000 election, there was widespread alarm about the integrity of voting processes. The 2010 Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* overturned a prohibition on corporations using general treasury funds for independent political expenditures. Subsequently independent expenditures exploded,

particularly in the form of “Super PACs” supporting a single candidate (PAC is an acronym for Political Action Committee). A 2015 Common Cause membership survey found overturning *Citizens United* is a reason people joined the organization as well as one of the most important issues the organization pursues on the national and state levels (discussed in Chapter Five).

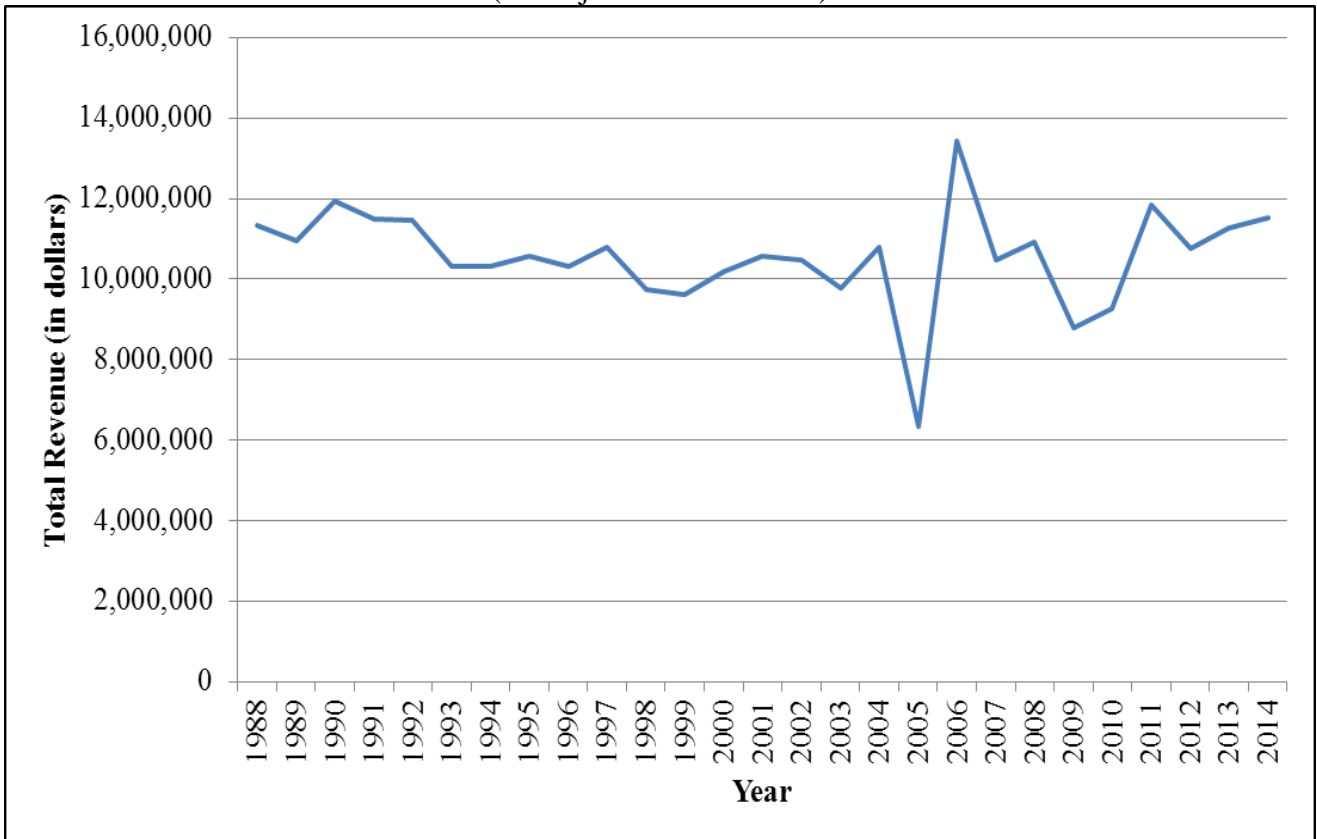
FIGURE 3 depicts numbers of members who made financial contributions within a certain time frame. If those who support Common Cause campaigns but do not contribute financially are included, then the number of members is much larger. For example, in 1998 Common Cause claimed about 150,000 paid members, but around 235,000 supporters. The number of supporters remained somewhat stable until 2010, when the number rose to 400,000. After Donald Trump’s election as U.S. President in 2016, the number almost doubled to over 700,000. Although more people join campaigns, the lack of members making financial contributions seriously jeopardized Common Cause’s existence.

Several exogenous variables contribute to the trend of membership decline beginning in the late 1980s. In the 1980s middle-class prosperity begins a descent that continues in 2015. Also an economic recession occurs in the early 1990s, with New England and west coast states particularly hard hit (areas with a relatively higher density of Common Cause members). Many of the government reform groups that organized after 1970 use 501c3 designations to accept tax deductible contributions unlike Common Cause (at least until 2000). More government reform groups increase competition for supporters and their resources. Since citizen groups are organized around collective interests it is “more difficult for them to carve out a niche to protect themselves from competition” (Walker, 1991, p.68). More reform groups also challenge Common Cause’s leadership in specific issue areas (most notably with campaign finance reform issues).

Besides membership, total revenue is another way to measure Common Cause’s maintenance (see FIGURE 4). Data begins at 1988 as membership totals turn toward decline. From 1988 to 1999 total revenue is based on the organization as a 501c4 lobbying group only. In 2000 Common Cause establishes a 501c3 education and research arm (the Common Cause Education Fund; discussed in

Chapter Three). Data from 2000 to 2014 combines revenue for the 501c4 and 501c3 components of the organization.

FIGURE 4
COMMON CAUSE TOTAL REVENUE 1988-2014
(not adjusted for inflation)



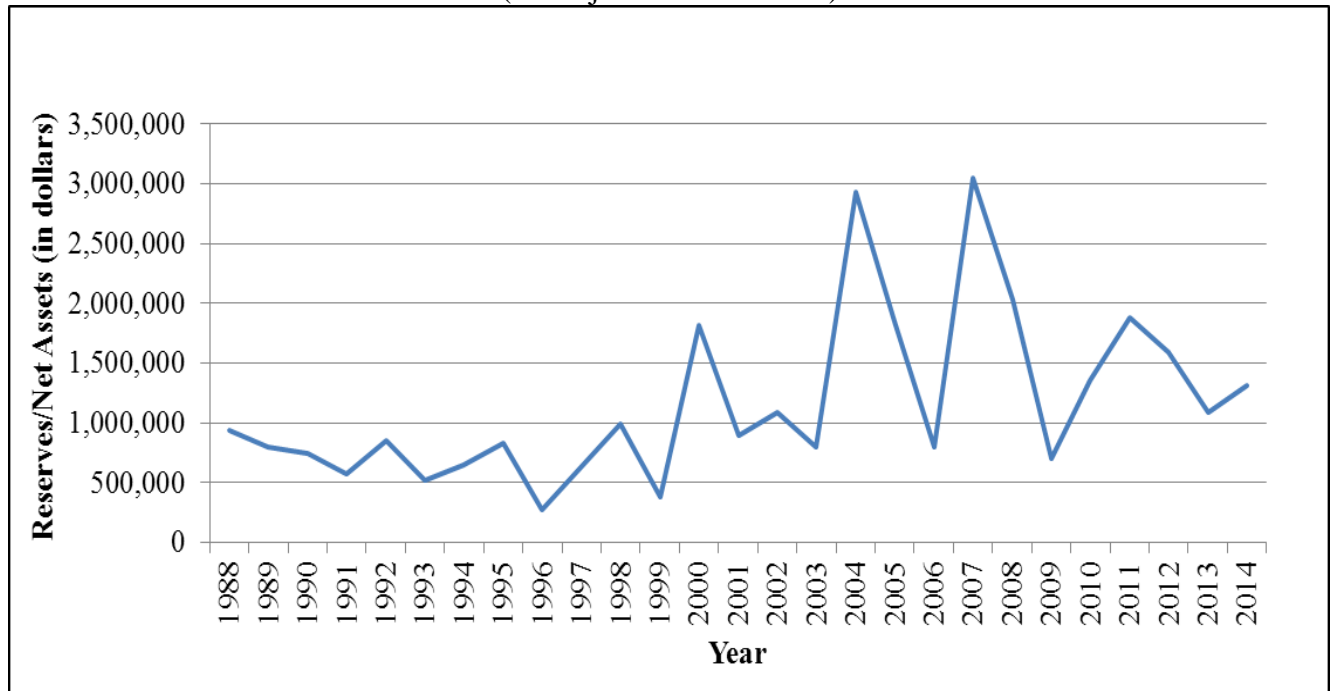
Sources: Series 19: 2003-14; 1920-2003; Common Cause Records, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; and Common Cause Financial Records in the national office.

FIGURE 4 highlights a loss of about \$2 million in revenue from 1990 to 1999. Common Cause's second phase, or crises years, is marked by total revenue fluctuations in the early 2000s. Third phase renewal is suggested by an upward trend after 2008.

A more accurate depiction of the organization's financial stability is measured by reserves/net assets, i.e. a cushion to overcome unexpected financial shortfalls. FIGURE 5 illustrates year-to-year fluctuations in Common Cause's reserves/net assets. Again data from 1988 to 1999 are based on a

501c4 lobbying designation only. The years from 2000 to 2014 combine reserves from the 501c4 and the 501c3 Common Cause Education Fund.

FIGURE 5
COMMON CAUSE RESERVES/NET ASSETS 1988-2014
(not adjusted for inflation)



Sources: Series 19: 2003-14; 1920-2003; Common Cause Records, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; and Common Cause Financial Records in Washington, D.C. office.

Reserves/net assets decline in the early 1990s, similar to membership totals and total revenue. Like total revenue, the crisis years include wide variations in reserves that began to stabilize after 2010.

When combined, FIGURES 3, 4, and 5 suggest relying on members for revenue was a losing proposition in the early 1990s. Indeed, membership dues/renewals accounted for 58.2% of Common Cause's budgeted income in 1982 but only 31.3% by 1991 (see McFarland, 1984, p.77; Walker, 1991, p.84). These percentages reveal small contributions (dues) from a diffuse constituency are no longer the main source of income. Instead Common Cause relies more on other sources such as major contributions, bequests, and eventually foundation grants.

Common Cause leaders and national staff educate members by helping them do their homework about current governance integrity issues and where Common Cause stands on those issues.

Information is distributed to members through the Washington Connection, newsletters, *Common Cause* magazine (until 1997), and direct mail appeals (now also emailed). The goal was to educate members to put pressure on officials and let them know we are watching them (based on Peretz' 2014 interview with Nick Ucci).

In addition, the information was used to support Common Cause and recruit new members. Activist members would hold fundraisers at their homes for their friends "country club style" and educate them about Common Cause issues to bring in new people. Others found keeping a copy of the *Common Cause* magazine on their coffee table would inspire conversation and interest in joining the organization (information and quotes based on my 2014 interviews with Common Cause leaders).

Common Cause also helps members find political leverage points. Across its history, about five percent of the members are also activists in the national and states offices, "the individuals who form the backbone of the group, who contribute the volunteer labor essential for the association's political endeavors" (Rothenberg, 1992, p.43). Common Cause skillfully used its volunteers as it built an advocacy infrastructure.

Common Cause was distinctive because it empowered its members more than other professionalized lobbying organizations. The advocacy infrastructure built around the Washington Connection was a means to get the grassroots to do the speaking (i.e. outsider lobbying). While the group's national leaders lobbied in the halls of Congress, mobilization of activist members was easier at the state and local levels (information collected from my 2014 interview with a Common Cause leader).

Under Gardner's Rules, Common Cause members and their resources provide critical support for the organization's primary strategy. Most members advance lobbying efforts with their dues and contributions. About five percent are more active—their efforts are key elements of outsider lobbying pressure. They are a critical source of leverage for insider lobbyists using a pragmatic approach.

6. Pragmatic—Willing to Compromise

Gardner's Rules were based on a pragmatic approach to politics. This approach enabled leaders to avoid mistakes of earlier reformers in the Progressive tradition (see *supra*). It also was a way to form a "third force" and avoid cooptation by ideological or partisan labels.

A leader who joined Common Cause in the 1970s stated Gardner believed in a nonpartisan mission and reasonable people. The point was to have a reasoned discussion, because debates may lead to something that benefits both. In general, everything that affects all of us can be negotiated. Although enacted reforms may not be perfect, they show reform is possible and establish a starting point for subsequent advocacy efforts.

Chief lobbyist David Cohen's aphorism "no permanent friends and no permanent enemies" is an overstatement but it enhances a reputation for independence (McFarland, 1984, p.118-119). It keeps Common Cause from becoming tied to particular Members of Congress and their agendas. At the same time it does not preclude working with longtime congressional allies.

The aphorism also keeps Common Cause from being co-opted by a political party. Common Cause is often perceived, by its members and the press, as a progressive or liberal-leaning group. But after Ronald Reagan's election in 1980, David Cohen, then Common Cause President, argued "in politics you can always find converging interests if you look for them." He added Common Cause shared a fundamental priority with Mr. Reagan and Republican conservatives generally: "If the President is serious about cutting federal spending, he'll have to take on the special interests . . . And if he does, he'll find us a natural ally." (excerpt taken from Farney, 1981). Another example is Common Cause urging the House Ethics Committee to investigate House Speaker Jim Wright (D-TX) in 1988, which led to his resignation the following year. Increasing party polarization since the mid-1990s makes working with Republicans more difficult.

However, the pragmatic approach may work against stable relationships with Members of Congress. Common Cause developed a reputation for serious and credible research which enhanced

lobbyists' efforts. But some Members did not like research publications that uncovered conflicts of interest—even for those who had been allies in a fight (comments made by Maureen Shea and Susanne Tannenbaum in their 2014 interviews with Pauline Peretz).

Gardner's Rules structure formal and informal group characteristics through which an organizational identity is established. Leaders, activists, and members lobby for governance integrity goals. Yet structure, identity, and advocacy decisions are the purview of organizational leaders.

E. Common Cause Leadership (1970-1995)

The Common Cause decision making structure is oligarchical, or top-down, headed by the National Governing Board Chair and President. The Board Chair fulfills a public leadership role. The chair is usually a respected public celebrity who contributes to efforts to increase the organization's visibility and survival prospects. Many, like Gardner, also enact a morale-building role (see McFarland, 1984, p.63).

The Chair also heads Common Cause's National Governing Board. The original Board was composed of about forty members (including notable leaders from civil rights, business, and labor organizations). Later the board was set at sixty members nominated through a board election committee, most elected by the entire membership to three-year terms. In order to improve demographic representation on the board a percentage of seats were set aside to be filled by leaders instead of elections. For about two decades board members were flown in from all over the country but in the late 1990s the Board was reduced to thirty members and soon after becomes an all-appointed board.

The National Governing Board works through a committee system. Its policy committee evaluates and debates issue proposals prepared by the national staff. Issues are selected based on organizational mission fit, if it is possible (i.e. legislators are sympathetic and supportive of reform), and if it will avoid duplicating efforts of other reform coalition partners). Committee decisions are usually reached with general agreement instead of close margin votes. At times there may be disagreement

between the Board and staff—in these instances the Board decision is final. An example is disagreement about opposing the failed-nomination of Robert Bork to the Supreme Court in 1987. The staff was against it but the National Governing Board decided to oppose his nomination on the basis of Bork’s record on civil rights (see Bamberger, 1987).

Board members sit for three-year terms. They may sit for two terms but then must cycle off before serving again. The Board Chair serves for a two-year term and, like the organization’s President, does not have term limits.

The Common Cause President oversees day-to-day operations and sits on the National Governing Board. The president works with the national staff in an office located near K Street in Washington, D.C. Over 100 paid staff worked in the national office in the 1970s. For the next twenty years the size of the national staff gradually decreased and leveled out to approximately 50 by the mid-1990s.

1. National Governing Board Chair

John Gardner was the first National Governing Board Chair (1970-1977). When Gardner stepped down the board elected Nan Waterman as its second chair. Waterman was a strong leader from the civic tradition of the League of Women Voters and served from 1977 to 1980.

The Board elected Archibald Cox to serve as its third chair from 1980 to 1992 (Cox sat on the Board twenty-five years, from 1976 to 2001). Cox was probably best known for being President Kennedy’s Solicitor General and a Watergate Special Prosecutor fired by President Nixon in the “Saturday Night Massacre.”¹⁴ Prior to becoming Chair, Cox was a lawyer for Common Cause and was known to “lead with his best all the time” and to possess “as much integrity as Gardner” (comments made by Common Cause leaders in 2014 interviews conducted by Reynolds and Peretz). Cox continued

¹⁴ During the “Saturday Night Massacre,” the U.S. Attorney General and Deputy Attorney General resigned instead of firing Cox as ordered by President Nixon. Finally Solicitor General Robert Bork, sworn in as acting attorney general, fired Archibald Cox.

Gardner's morale-building legacy as he traveled across the nation to meet with members and state leaders. Cox pressed for reform by testifying at congressional hearings, lobbying senators and representatives, writing letters to Congress, and working with the media.

After sitting on the Board for seven years, Edward S. Cabot was elected to replace Cox as chair in 1992. Cabot hailed from corporate America, serving as President of the New York Chamber of Commerce and Industry as well as holding top positions at Equitable Life. Other positions held by Cabot included a Professorship at New York University and founder of the non-profit Housing All Americans, Inc. Cabot stepped down from Board Chair in 1999.

From 1970 to 1999 Common Cause's National Governing Board was led by four chairs. Likewise, four presidents served during the same years. Years of commitment to Common Cause established a line of leadership continuity.

2. President

Jack Conway, a part of Gardner's founding leadership team, was elected the first president of Common Cause, serving from 1971 to 1975. Prior to joining Gardner, Conway was the principal advisor to Walter Reuther, President of the United Auto Workers' (UAW) labor union. David Cohen, another member of the early leadership team, served as President from 1975 to 1981. Cohen was an expert lobbyist, having worked with Conway as a UAW lobbyist. Fred Wertheimer, hired as a lobbyist in 1971, rose in the ranks to become Vice President then President from 1981 to 1995. In October 1993 Wertheimer announced he would resign from Common Cause, effective upon the naming of his successor. Ann McBride was elected to succeed Wertheimer in March 1995 and was the final president who worked with Gardner, serving from 1995 to 1999. McBride started working for Common Cause as a volunteer in the early 1970s then rose to staff member then Vice President and finally President.

During the first phase, Common Cause presidents made the national office a good environment in which to work. Presidents David Cohen (1975-1981) and Fred Wertheimer (1981-1995) instituted Tuesday briefings, a way for the staff to stay connected and not self-segregate into departmental "silos"

(especially critical as the national office was then spread across three floors). In the 1970s a weekly tradition began where new staff members or interns stopped by each office with a candy tray, facilitating introductions and comradery (i.e. “Candy Thursday”). Also many important leadership roles were filled by women. Even though there was not a written policy, people were encouraged to take care of their families.

Prior to the critical juncture in leadership there was a self-reinforcing coherence to Common Cause’s organizational culture, promoted by the stability of the national staff. New hires were mentored by experienced staff and over time absorbed intangibles such as how decisions were made. In a 2014 interview with Peretz, Common Cause lobbyists Maureen Shea and Susanne Tannenbaum described the national staff as “a very close and loyal staff.” Thus a type of generational passing of knowledge developed from one set of staff to another that extended organizational pathways.

During the first phase of Common Cause’s narrative, top leaders made trustee-like decisions that upheld Gardner’s Rules and enhanced the organization’s infrastructure. Members’ exit option comprised a powerful threat and limited adaptive options. Leaders who were hired, trained by, and/or worked with Gardner were constrained by disproportionate information processing biased toward extending his rules into the future. Consequently, adaptations made in this phase were incremental but they softened up the organization for significant change in the future.

F. First Phase Adaptations (1991-1995)

Darren Halpin and Anthony Nownes (2012, p.66) propose a hierarchy of change exists, wherein organizational identity is more difficult to change than structure, strategies, or technology. For most groups “maintenance involves changing organizational features and strategies or only technical settings *within* an overarching identity.” During the organization’s first phase, Common Cause’s leaders’ followed pathways established by Gardner’s Rules and protected its identity as a national government reform lobby. Their decisions suggest how disproportionate information processing may constrain

adaptive choices (analysis of Common Cause's first phase adaptations are based on Princeton Archives and 2014-2015 interviews).

Until 1999 Common Cause was led by individuals who rose up from within the organization. Adaptations from the foundation to early 1990s are subjects of scholarly analyses in Andrew S. McFarland (1984) and Lawrence Rothenberg's (1992) case studies. This project extends their work from 1991 to 2015.

From 1991 to 1999 the National Governing Board was chaired by Edward S. Cabot. During the first half of his tenure (1991-1995), he led Common Cause with President Fred Wertheimer and Vice President Ann McBride, among others. The second half of his tenure (1995-1999) was served with Common Cause President Ann McBride. Taken together, these three individuals represented over 64 years of leadership experience.

The transition from the first to second phase in Common Cause occurs during Ann McBride's presidency of the organization. Thus analysis of first phase adaptations ends with Fred Wertheimer's departure as president. Wertheimer and other contemporary leaders made adaptations in finances, organizational structure, state dynamics, and technology that did not challenge Gardner's Rules.

1. Finances

General declines in membership, total revenue, and reserves beginning in the late 1980s forced budget cuts in the early 1990s (see FIGURES 3, 4, and 5, p.49-52). In 1991 the financial plan was cut by 4%, the basis for the following year's budget. As these cuts proved insufficient, the 1992 budget included an 8.8% cut in national expenses and 6.8% cut in national support of state offices.

Balancing the budget required slashing expenditures. The 8.8% national budget cut was achieved by significant reductions. Specific reductions occurred with the number of staff and officers' salaries, the size and circulation of *Common Cause* magazine, Board meetings held three times a year instead of four; leaders traveling less, and fewer support services. The 6.8% cut in national support of state programs was achieved by eliminating rebates for state-recruited memberships. Efforts to improve

income in 1992 included a special large donor fundraising effort being undertaken by a group of Board members headed by Chair Ned Cabot, pressing states to raise their own funds, and a membership dues increase test.

The national office eliminated staff or left vacated positions unfilled. A leader commented in 2014 that Common Cause lost a lot whenever people walked out the door. The staff's stability, comfort, and expertise were affected as those remaining had to adjust and adopt new roles. Also informal mentoring decreased. Because the staff was much smaller, those who chose to remain added continuity and depth to the organization.

Aggressive fundraising addressed flagging income. Contributions from large donors improved by 1993 due to a more sophisticated cultivation program, including personal solicitations by Board members. Around the same time leaders activated a bequest solicitation program. Major contributions stabilized Common Cause's total revenue and reserves in the short run but shifted resource dependency away from the smaller contributions of its mass membership (one of the foundational precepts of Common Cause).

In the 1990s, the National Governing Board twice rejected adding a 501c3 arm (in 1993 and 1996). Groups under the 501c3 I.R.S. tax code designation emphasize research and education and, unlike 501c4 groups, may receive foundation grants. Generally 501c3 groups were seen as educating the public outside of one's organization (although the League of Women Voters did both). Also opponents on the board argued maintaining the organization's identity and integrity as an independent lobbying organization was more important than expanding income sources.

2. Grassroots Mobilization

Ironically fewer members and resources mean public interest groups must rely more on grassroots mobilization (Nownes and Freeman, 1998; Cigler and Loomis, 1995). In a 1992 letter to the Common Cause Community, President Fred Wertheimer wrote of the need for reorganization in the Program Operations Department to "improve our ability to bring grassroots pressure to bear on the

political system at all levels . . . to help build our national and state volunteer leadership, and to make the most effective use of available resources in a time of economic constraints” (Princeton Archives).

Subsequently a reorganization of the national office’s Program Operations Department. A new office was formed—Grassroots Lobbying and Communications—to facilitate coordination of a modified version of insider-outsider lobbying within Gardner’s Rules.

The Grassroots Lobbying and Communications office added new tactics to Common Cause advocacy. Grassroots, or large-scale volunteer activism, was a means to adapt to changing environments. In a 2014 interview with Peretz, Jay Hedlund commented that rallies were not part of the repertoire until the 1990s. Then Common Cause started to use posters and demonstrations on the Hill. Attendance at rallies was enhanced by the national office driving buses full of volunteers to Washington, D.C., in line with grassroots mobilization as a top-down—instead of bottom-up—process.

In March 1993 the Common Cause National Governing Board created a Long-Range Mission Working Group. The purposes of the group were to discuss organizational priorities and efficient use of increasingly limited resources. The group report was submitted as Ann McBride became president in 1995 and is detailed in Chapter Three (part of the report was a proposal to add a 501c3 arm, debated and rejected in 1996).

3. State Dynamics

A shift of resources from national to state programs (as a percentage of expenses) occurred from 1988 to 1993. While the number of national staff numbers diminished, state office staff remained steady with some movement from full time to part time. From 1990 to 1995 the size of Common Cause’s national office decreased from 64 to 42. Meanwhile state office staff numbers were more stable from 31/37 to 28/39 (full-time/part-time). Also for over a decade (1981-1994) Common Cause gathered its state leaders each year for a three-day State Leadership Conference.

One leader commented that all Common Cause state office Executive Directors and State Board Chairs met annually at the State Leadership Conference until the organization “ran out of money” in

1990s. At the conference state leaders voted on resolutions to present to the national office. Then the conference chair (a state leader) would lobby the National Governing Board to pass state-supported resolutions.

The State Leadership Conference was suspended after 1994, primarily due to budget constraints. Yet it was also perceived as emblematic of prioritizing national over state objectives. State leaders increasingly felt like the adage “all politics is local” was being ignored by the national office. Growing tension is evident in some leaders’ perception that what they were doing was not important even though it is easier to train a political official at the local level regarding open meetings, ethics, disclosure as they run for school board, etc. In the early 1990s states were urging the national office to put more resources into states to counteract decreasing interest in Common Cause (information and quote based on 2014 interview with a Common Cause leader).

State funding processes also changed over time. In the 1980s state offices received \$20,000 automatically from the national office. Automatic funding created some tension among states due to the idea that small membership states were being subsidized by bigger states. In addition to automatic funding, state offices received allocations determined by their membership size. In the mid-1980s allocations were increased and state leaders were granted more autonomy when drawing up budgets.

By the mid-1990s state offices no longer automatically received funds from the national office. Instead their funds consisted of allocations, new member rebates for state-recruited members, and funds raised entirely by states through fundraising appeals, raffles, and special events. In 1995 the National Governing Board adopted State Performance Guidelines (which were never put in place) that would have made state leaders more accountable for how they used their budgets.

Accountability extended to states running a budget deficit. State offices with an unanticipated budget deficit were required to recover the funds the following year. If the difference was not recovered, then the next year’s allocation from the national office would be reduced by an offsetting amount.

The suspension of the State Leadership Conference and revision of state funding processes occurred within a few years in the early 1990s. These adaptations created some discontent as state leaders believed their work was undervalued. Also they were concerned about too much emphasis on supporting national campaign finance reform..

4. Technology

Wertheimer and the national office struggled to balance the budget with shrinking revenues while remaining loyal to Gardner's Rules. Both the national and state offices were affected by budget cuts. State leaders also lost a substantial communications channel among the states and with national leadership when the State Leadership Conferences were suspended. The National Governing Board formed a working group to create a viable plan moving forward.

At the same time, Common Cause was working to improve intra-organizational communication with new technologies. By 1985 computers were in use throughout the organization (the national office assisted states with a computer loan fund). In 1992 Common Cause went online with CauseNet, a communication and information network available to all state offices. CauseNet included access to a research database of studies, model legislation, press releases, and issue mail responses. Computer hardware and software upgrades in 1996 facilitated internal and external email communication. The following year Common Cause launched its first webpage, receiving over 117,000 hits in a month.

Adaptions from 1991 to 1995 were made under the leadership of a President and Board Chair with years of experience in the Common Cause organization. Their adaptive decisions illustrate disproportionate information processing which produces a pattern of stability and occasional punctuations, or significant change (see Jones and Baumgartner, 2005, Chapter 6). Disproportionate information processing is suggested by sieve-like processes that rule out certain adaptive choices. These processes contribute to a greater change from the status quo when it finally occurs.

Sieves are illustrated by leaders making decisions to address environmental challenges in a sequential order (i.e. if one decision does not effectively address the problem, then another is tried; see

Jones and Baumgartner, 2005, p.142-145). As financial constraints grew, Common Cause leaders cut national expenses first then began exerting more control over state operations. National staff reorganization and internet technology tied states more firmly to the national office; at times replacing lost financial support with enhanced program support. As financial challenges continued, state offices were held accountable for their expenditures. Also the organization turned to large donors and bequests more often to make up for budget shortfalls.

Meanwhile leaders and lobbyists continued to act according to Gardner's Rules. National campaign finance reform was the top priority even though other issues were pursued, such as limiting expenditures and enacting reporting requirements for franked mail, opposing the Balanced Budget Amendment, and U.S. Congressional Term Limits (see APPENDIX C: COMMON CAUSE SELECTED ADVOCACY ISSUES 1970-2015). In the early 1990s the Common Cause organization, under the leadership of President Fred Wertheimer, was well known as a leader in the campaign finance reform issue area.

Widely-read newspaper articles credited Common Cause for its leadership in the campaign finance reform issue area. Michael Wines, a *New York Times* journalist, described Common Cause as "the nation's most prominent clean-government group" in a 1994 article about presidential campaign fund-raising restrictions. Also in 1994 Basil Talbott and Michael Briggs, journalists with the *Chicago Sun Times*, described Common Cause President Fred Wertheimer as "a leading advocate of campaign finance reform." A 1993 *USA Today* article, written by Bill Montague, described Common Cause as a "leading reform group" regarding campaign contributions. The perception in the early 1990s was Common Cause represented a public interest in campaign finance reform, among other issues.

G. Representing a Public Interest

As a mass-supported public interest lobby, Common Cause provides a lens to investigate dual representation, or "the what before the who." Dual representation builds off of Hanna Fenichel Pitkin's (1967) seminal work on the concept of representation. In Pitkin's terms, there is a distinction between

agents “acting-for” the principal’s interests or the “what” and agents who “stand for” or descriptively represent the principal or the “who.” In both conceptualizations, influence is unidirectional, flowing from the principal to the agent or the “who before the what.”

A dual representation approach adjusts Pitkin’s model based on Saward’s (2006) work on the representative claim. Saward argues that representation is a “two-way street” as agents (leaders and lobbyists) make claims accepted by the principal (members and supporters). Common Cause’s top-down decision making supports oligarchic tendencies (Michels, 1911), and to an extent the representative claim, but members exert some level of influence on the claims being made.

Exploring the “what” in a public interest group also extends “trustee” versus “delegate” distinctions, studied by political science leader Heinz Eulau and his colleagues (1959). Common Cause provides a lens to examine how public interest group agents act. Moreover it suggests the extent to which members accept leaders’ representative claim to be acting in their interests.

The concept of public quality (based on recent work by Tepe and McFarland) is defined as a collective political quest unbounded by space or time, or even certain leaders’ interpretations. Governance integrity is a public quality, as it is a core aspect of the normative cohesion binding together the U.S. political system. Tepe and McFarland, relying on cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas, define a collectivity as a human association itself defined by having boundaries (usually spatial) within which humans are bound together by normative cohesion. Political governance institutions are the chief instruments of such cohesion. Accordingly, the what of representation can sometimes be specified as representing an existential quality of the collectivity, its existence in time and space, as well as maintenance of its governance institutions of cohesion. This perspective falls within the Durkheimian tradition of social theory. Governance integrity is a quest that applies to Progressive Era reformers as well as more recent government reform groups like Common Cause.

John Gardner believed that Common Cause represents “A” public interest, not “THE” public interest. There is a plurality of ways to look at the public interest and Common Cause uses one

interpretation. All interest group leaders and lobbyists may be said to advocate special interests, and the specifics of what Common Cause represents is often in the eye of the beholder. Indeed every Common Cause president views what the organization represents differently and adjusts its programs accordingly.

A public interest is apparent when looking at the U.S. political system in its entirety (e.g. branches of government, federalism). David Cohen (1999, p.95) wrote “Public interest lobbyists are especially concerned with incorporating the views of people who are not normally part of the process” (i.e. a public). In 2015 interviews, Common Cause leaders voiced similar perspectives: Common Cause defines a public interest; is meant to speak for those who don’t articulate their concerns; broadly Common Cause represents all Americans, including those who cannot afford a lobbyist, to form a Super PAC, or to come to D.C. In sum, leaders act as trustees when they aggregate and identify a public interest, exemplified by issue selection and how leaders’ frame issue appeals.

Many public interest groups “thrive on controversy” in order to attract media attention and keep members informed and interested (Walker, 1991, p.12). Indeed leaders often attempt to frame or reframe an issue to suggest controversy (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Snow, 2004; Stone, 2002; Goffman, 1981; Edelman, 1964 and 1988). For example, when state legislators in Connecticut tried to defund a public campaign financing system in 2015, an email sent to members declared “we weren’t about to let old-school politicians and lobbyists take us backwards. . . At Common Cause we’re all about holding power accountable and fighting for the public interest—no matter who we’re up against.”

Common Cause’s history and prior studies suggest leaders also act as delegates. Leaders’ decisions are limited by members’ ability to exit the organization—a salient leverage point when the organization was almost completely funded by its members (see McFarland, 1984; Hirschman, 1970). McFarland (1984) found members exercised a minority veto over new issues. If poll results indicated at least 20% of member respondents were opposed to a specific policy, then leaders would not pursue it in order to keep members from using the “exit option.” He also found an indirect minority veto from the National Governing Board. If the national staff believed that 20 percent of the Board would object to a

suggested position, then it would not be adopted (p.85). Organizational structures (enabling member input) and strategies (insider-outsider lobbying) suggested symbolic and practical evidence of members/activists influencing leaders based on political exchange (Dahl, 1956 and 1961); participation (Bachrach, 1967; Pateman, 1970); descriptive representation (Pitkin, 1967); national and state coordination; and the unity arising from general agreement on government reform issues. Until 2000, leaders' issue selection was very restricted by membership issue poll results.

In addition, Rothenberg (1992) found evidence of activist members influencing issue proposals. The outsider lobbying structure established informal communication channels with leaders and activists. Besides regular phone calls, national staffers traveled to states to meet with activists. Referring to a growing concern with the expansion of nuclear capabilities, activists persuaded leaders to propose a new issue to the National Governing Board—limiting MX missile production and deployment. The MX missile was a hot issue in the early 1980s for rank-and-file and Board members alike. Leaders framed limiting the MX program as process issues. Their efforts proved successful as limits were imposed upon MX production and deployment. Subsequently the Board voted to return to structure and process issues to avoid alienating members committed to government reform.

Rothenberg argued that activists (contributing money or time) develop a heightened commitment to the organization. They learn to exercise their voice as policy advocates which prompts more responses from leaders (in contrast to Hirschman's 1970 theory that voice is a reaction to diminished performance). In addition activists gain experiential knowledge which subsequently applies to group efficacy. Leaders encourage this reaction "by telling members that they make a difference by acting collectively" (i.e. "You can help make this certain" and "We can win this fight;" p.116).

From Rothenberg's political economy approach the activists' influence is less a sign of leaders being guided by members than a desire to facilitate contributions and membership retention. Indeed, leaders pay more attention to "contributors giving larger, politically contingent gifts" (188) than to the rank-and-file members' preferences. However, the latter still exercise some level of control through the

exit option—which was suggested by the National Governing Board’s return to structure and process issues.

Another facet of the argument that activists influence leaders’ decisions is two-way representative process (see Saward, 2006). At bottom is the assumption that few people are cognizant of and have clear and stable opinions regarding issues deemed important by organization leaders (Converse, 1964). Even when people express opinions they may be more reflective of how political elites frame issues than individual preferences (Druckman et al., 2013; Disch, 2011; Saward, 2006; Zaller, 1992).

The public quality of governance integrity, or the “what,” is understood by the claims made by Common Cause leaders. The claims are made through issue selection and the normative frames leaders use to communicate with the members. But leaders are constrained by the exit option, especially when most of the income is derived from members.

In Pitkin’s terms the “who” of dual representation is defined as agents who “stand for” or descriptively represent the principal. During its first phase, Common Cause leaders and members agreed that the Board must include a number of people who are women, minorities, Republicans, and from the West and South to balance the frequent election of board members from the Eastern Seaboard and metropolitan Washington, D.C. (McFarland, 1984, p.102). The Board election committee recommended thirty candidates balanced according to the desired demographics. At some level, descriptive representation was achieved in the governing body until the late 1990s.

Pitkin (1967) adds symbolic representation as a means for an agent to “stand for” the principal. Symbolic representation is similar to a representative claim as it is “a kind of two-way correspondence . . . a matter of existential fact” built on manipulating responses in the principal, not on appearances or action (p.92, 106). Evidence of symbolic representation is suggested by results from a 1981 survey of Common Cause members (conducted by Jonathan Siegel). Most members “feel they are well

represented” (see analysis in Rothenberg, 1992, p.188). On the other hand, formal and informal characteristics based on Gardner’s Rules channel a level of active input from members.

Some level of participation by members predated Common Cause’s formation. As mentioned *supra*, by April 1970 the UCAC referred to itself as a “people’s lobby” that mobilized American activists. A national membership-based organization was envisioned for financial, legitimacy, and subsequently mobilization support.

Although Common Cause members’ support was mostly financial, representation of their interests was more than symbolic. Early leaders acknowledged a role for activist members in lobbying strategies. The existence of steering committees in almost every congressional district provided these members with a means to add their voice to insider lobbyists working with Members of Congress.

In addition John Gardner believed in survey research. Soon after formation Common Cause members were polled about which issues the organization should pursue (polls are still conducted at national and state levels). A 1978 Common Cause Task Force Report summarized issue selection as “the members express their general issue concerns through an annual issue referendum; the staff explores areas in which the greatest interest is expressed and prepares proposals for the Governing Board; and the Board makes the final decision on which issues will be approved.” For many years an annual poll was distributed to members with the slate of candidates for the Board election. However Common Cause members are self-selected, joining largely due to general agreement with its purposive goals, so their responses are usually supportive of leaders’ issue selection.

Until the late 1990s members elected the National Governing Board. But only 20 to 25 percent of the members voted in board elections; another 24 percent did not even know there was an election. Most of the voters, knowing little about alternative candidates, voted for the election committee’s recommendations or were influenced by descriptive demographic and regional criteria (McFarland, 1984, p.96; Rothenberg, 1992, p.161). Thus even with limited information and members’ bounded rationality (see March and Simon, 1958) a form of descriptive representation existed in Board elections.

Issue polls and election results were published in *Common Cause* magazine—a material benefit to members from 1980 to 1997. *Common Cause* was a high quality, award-winning magazine. Reporters writing for the magazine went on to stellar careers (e.g. Peter Overby at NPR started with the magazine).

The magazine gave members a tangible link to the organization. It was also an effective publicity tool used by members to draw others into the group. One Common Cause leader commented members felt like they owned the magazine.

Yet the magazine was an expensive membership perk. The national office did not want to accept advertising because it would hurt the organization’s reputation for independence. As the organization’s finances tightened in the 1990s, the budget for the magazine was reduced by more than fifty percent, the number of issues decreased from six to four a year, and members were required to subscribe to the magazine after an introductory issue.

In Common Cause the “who” is largely the leaders who stand-for their interpretation of members’ interests, in line with the representative claim. But linkages in place until the mid-1990s indicate leaders’ also stand-for members’ preferences. A dependence on the members for resources (financial and activist) limited issue selection and encouraged leaders to attend to members’ preferences.

Placing the “what before the who” prioritizes acting-for over standing-for representation. Thus dual representation explains how elite leaders represent a public interest within the U.S. policy making system. It also justifies a line of Common Cause leaders acting more like trustees than delegates.

H. Campaign Finance Reform—First Phase

For many years campaign finance reform was Common Cause’s primary, but not only, issue focus (analysis is based on data from the Princeton Archives and work by McFarland, 1984 and Rothenberg, 1992). As early as November 4, 1970 the National Governing Board approved a resolution that Common Cause should give priority attention to campaign finance reform. Specifically the Board resolved to seek:

- (1) Public and other methods of financing of the legitimate expenses of political campaigns;
- (2) Reasonable limits on the amount spent on campaigns, full and open reporting of expenditures, and stringent enforcement of the law; and
- (3) Universal voter registration.

Goals (1) and (2) were partially achieved with the Federal Election Campaign Amendments of 1974 and the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002. Yet prioritizing campaign finance reform enabled some misidentification of Common Cause as a single-issue group.

After successfully leading a coalition to limit MX missile production and deployment in the mid-1980s, Common Cause targeted campaign finance reform issues. Rothenberg (1992, p.223) wrote:

Common Cause . . . almost totally refocused its political efforts toward . . . overarching reform of the campaign finance system. In its singleminded pursuit to revamp the finance system, it has increasingly garnered a reputation as a one-issue group. . . efforts to recruit new members since the mid-1980s have focused almost exclusively on electoral [campaign finance] reform . . . This is the only issue accorded a separate place in the formal organizational structure . . . Common Cause is the group that the popular press contacts when it needs commentary on a breaking scandal involving campaign abuses or on political proposals to amend the way elections are regulated.

Prioritizing campaign finance reform garnered Common Cause a reputation as a one-issue group and isolated the group politically. Also a focus on financing of elections was supported by members in issue polls but Common Cause was for the most part alone in its pursuit. This particular issue area required Common Cause to shift the status quo while opposing Members of Congress could employ procedural machinations to protect the status quo.

Common Cause's advocacy and vision of campaign finance reform developed with Gardner's Rules. Campaign finance reform fit well within a structure and process framework and could be extended to substantive issues. For example, in 1995 the National Governing Board discussed building a "broad coalition to work for reform, with special outreach to other organizations such as environmental groups that may be more interested in campaign finance reform in light of those organizations' recent failures to achieve substantive reforms" (March 3, 1995 1995 Long-Range Mission Working Group Recommendations; Princeton Archives).

John Gardner believed campaign contributions were the primary means by which special interests bought favors at the expense of public interests at all levels of government. Thus contribution limits were necessary to improve governance integrity. He stated “There is nothing in our political system today that creates more mischief, more corruption, and more alienation and distrust on the part of the public than does our system of financing elections.”

1. Legislative Influence

In the early 1970s the time was right to lobby Members of Congress for campaign finance reform due to the issue’s salience—almost two out of every three Americans supported public financing of presidential elections. Democrat and Republican Members of Congress, including the 1974 “Watergate Babies,” were supportive of reform as a means to fragment power (see *supra*). The cascade of attention to the issue, a type of cognitive architecture, contributed to significant policy change (see Chapter One; based on Jones and Baumgartner, 2005, p.140-142). For John Gardner, advocating campaign finance reform was like “riding the wave in.”

Although the organization successfully pressed for other government reform issues, campaign finance reform was a niche created and mostly filled by Common Cause from the early 1970s until the mid-1990s. Fleishman and Greenwald (1976, p.116) argued “between 1972 and 1974 Common Cause gradually preempted the election reform issue. . . [and] became the major recognized group spokesman for campaign finance reform” by “using information as a resource to create for itself an influential policymaking position . . .” Rothenberg (1992, p.225) noted there were only a few groups lobbying for campaign finance reform with Common Cause, such as Congress Watch (the lobbying arm of Ralph Nader’s Public Interest Research Groups) and an ad hoc group called Lobbyists and Lawyers for Campaign Finance Reform.

The issue also contributed to the organization’s reputation as an effective citizen’s lobby. Contemporary scholars supported this interpretation. David Adamany and George Agree (1975, p.207) explained that in the early 1970s there was a new impetus for reform, partly because:

...an effective lobby for campaign finance reform, especially public financing, emerged for the first time. The spearhead was Common Cause, which brought to the fray substantial resources—a relatively large, well-educated, and attentive membership; ample funds; a skilled Washington staff; and a genius for winning media attention. In addition to the usual techniques of legislative lobbying, Common Cause used meticulous research and relentless litigation to good advantage. Its 1972 Congressional campaign finance monitoring project revealed the amounts spent, the size of gifts, the special interest contributions, and the money edge of incumbents in every Congressional race in the country.

Joel L. Fleishman and Carol S. Greenwald (1976, p.114) argued

More than any other individual or group actor, Common Cause shaped current law regulating election finances. It managed to do so by developing and carrying out a craftsmanlike strategy which blended litigative, legislative, and publicist tactics into a coherent and mutually advantageous whole. Without litigation, the need for new laws might well not have become obvious. Without legislation, the court suits could have left campaign finance reform unconsummated. Together, they constituted an impressive example of a citizen lobby operating resourcefully and productively to benefit the public interest.

Due to its importance to the organization's reputation and historical narrative, a summary timeline of campaign finance reform and Common Cause's advocacy in the 1990s follows (also see APPENDIX D: SELECT CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM LEGISLATION AND COURT CASES 1970-2014).

The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 (FECA) and the 1971 Revenue Act were enacted within months after Common Cause's founding. The FECA included comprehensive disclosure requirements for federal candidates, political parties, and political action committees (PACs). For Common Cause, the requirements did not solve the influence of moneyed interests but it did reveal how big a problem existed and provided the ammunition for further reform efforts (comment taken from Peretz' 2014 interview with Fred Wertheimer).

Implementation of the FECA was weakened by the lack of an independent body to monitor and enforce disclosure rules. Compliance with the FECA was monitored in the House of Representatives by the Clerk of the House; in the Senate by the Secretary of the Senate; and for presidential candidates by the Comptroller General of the U.S. General Accounting Office. These overseeing officials referred

cases to the Justice Department for prosecution. After the 1972 election over 7,000 cases were referred to the Justice Department for prosecution but few were litigated (see Adamany and Agree, 1975, p.206).

The 1971 Revenue Act established public funding of presidential general election campaigns. Funds were collected from a voluntary \$1 check-off on individual income tax forms beginning with the 1973 tax year. The 1971 Revenue Act established a Presidential Election Campaign Fund to collect check-off donations then the Treasury Department pays out funds to candidates.

The 1973 tax return required filing an additional paperwork instead of checking a box on the regular form. Public response was inadequate to fund a presidential election. Subsequently a Common Cause lawsuit—*Common Cause et al. v. Shultz et al.*, C.A. 433-73 (D.C.D.C.)—forced the Internal Revenue Service to place the check-off box on the tax return's main page (McFarland, 1984, p.157). Public funding was available to presidential nominees who qualified and agreed to campaign spending limits and to ban all private contributions during the general election campaign (extended to primaries and nominating conventions in the 1974 FECA amendments).

The check-off amount was increased from \$1 to \$3 in 1993 yet two decades later public funding of presidential elections is basically dead. The percentage of income tax returns including a check-off donation decreased from almost 29 percent in 1977 to 6 percent in 2013 (Ellis, 2014). Presidential candidates who accept public funds are far outspent by enormous amounts of money flowing through PACs and Super PACs. In 2008, Barack Obama was the first major party candidate to reject public funds and in 2016 only one major party presidential candidate, Democrat Martin O'Malley, accepted public funds.

The FECA became effective on April 7, 1972. By that time, Common Cause's advocacy infrastructure (i.e. steering committees were organized within a majority of congressional districts) was established. During the summer and fall of 1972 Common Cause volunteers issued complaints against 286 congressional candidates who did not file disclosure statements as stipulated by the law.

Common Cause played an important role in undermining the status quo of financing elections. In addition to insider-outsider lobbying, the organization successfully sued Nixon's Committee to Re-Elect the President (*Common Cause et al. v. Finance Committee to Reelect the President et al.*, C.A. 1780-72). According to the FECA, full reporting of campaign contributions was effective on April 7, 1972. Prior to the law taking effect, the committee collected large sums of money—including large sums from corporations which are prohibited by the *Federal Corrupt Practices Act of 1925* (FCPA). The court ruled that under the FCPA's disclosure requirements Nixon must make public donors' names and the amount of money they contributed.

Common Cause actively lobbied for passage of the Federal Election Campaign Amendments of 1974. For two years Common Cause's main priority was the amendments' substance. The national staff actively met with the staff of congressional backers and helped shape some of the bill's provisions (see McFarland, 1984, p.156-157). The influence of Common Cause on the 1974 Amendments is generally accepted, for example Larry Sabato and Howard R. Ernst (2007, p.148) wrote "The campaign abuses of the 1972 presidential election and the rise of Common Cause, a liberal reform lobby, led to the 1974 FECA amendment."

The FECA amendments placed legal limits on campaign contributions (e.g. "hard money") from individuals, PACs, and political party committees. It also created the Federal Election Commission (FEC) to ensure compliance with the FECA. A public funding mechanism was created for presidential elections (adding primaries and nominating conventions to general election funding). Other provisions limited total campaign expenditures and independent expenditures advocating the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate.

Independent expenditures may be defined as money spent by individuals or groups to buy ads, send mail, or otherwise advocate for the election or defeat of a specific candidate. Independent expenditures may not be made in cooperation, coordination, or concert with a candidate's campaign.

The 1974 Amendments limited independent expenditures to \$1000 per candidate per election, overturned by *Buckley v. Valeo* (421 U.S. 1, 1976).

Provisions of the Federal Election Campaign Amendments of 1974 were immediately challenged as unconstitutional in the case *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976). Common Cause, with the Center for Public Financing of Elections and the League of Women Voters, won permission to intervene as defendants. The Supreme Court upheld most of the 1974 Amendments (including the public funding mechanism for presidential campaigns) but overturned restrictions on total campaign expenditures. Also independent expenditures could only be limited when expressly advocating the election or defeat of a candidate. In short, the Court ruled that the FECA 1974 Amendments' contribution provisions were constitutional, but the expenditure provisions violated the First Amendment. Leave to intervene was granted to various groups and individuals including Common Cause and John W. Gardner, among others.¹⁵

Members of Congress passed new Federal Election Campaign Amendments in 1976 in reaction to the *Buckley v. Valeo* ruling. Provisions in the amendments repealed campaign expenditure limits except for candidates who accepted public funds. They also reversed an advisory opinion issued by the FEC that permitted corporations to use treasury money to establish, operate, and solicit contributions to a PAC (yet the proliferation of PACs that began in the late 1970s continued into the 1980s).

In 1979 Congress unanimously passed—and Common Cause supported—a package of amendments to the FECA intended to strengthen state parties. The amendments lifted limits on money spent for party building activities (e.g. voter registration, get-out-the-vote drives, bumper stickers, handbills, brochures, and posters). In addition the amendments codified FEC advisory opinions that allowed state political party committees to accept money above contribution caps if used for nonfederal state party building activities. The FEC permitted money raised by state party committees to be mixed

¹⁵ Other intervenors included: the Center for Public Financing of Elections, the League of Women Voters of the United States, Chellis O'Neal Gregory, Norman F. Jacknis, Louise D. Wides, Daniel R. Noyes, Mrs. Edgar B. Stern, Charles P. Taft, and Ruth Clusen

with FEC-regulated funds for party building activities for both state and federal candidates. Thus the combination of regulatory changes in the 1979 amendments led to the “widespread use of nonfederal money at the federal level” (see Mutch, 2014, p.163).

The 1979 Amendments opened a loophole which avoided hard money regulations on sources and amounts of contributions to be used in support of federal candidates. Party committees took advantage of the lack of oversight to allocate expenses so that most were paid with soft money. Soft money, or unrestricted contributions not subject to FEC regulations, first appeared in the 1980 election.

The FEC only required that state and local party committees’ allocation of nonfederal soft money spending be “reasonable.” Corporations and labor unions—otherwise prohibited from contributing to campaigns under hard money regulations—could contribute unlimited soft money to state party committees. Also state parties were not regulated in their spending in support of a candidate (as were the national party committees). Thus soft money was a type of “outside money” because it was raised and spent outside FEC regulations (see Mutch, 2014, Chapter 9).

Within two decades, campaign finance reforms intended to staunch the flow of large sums of money into federal elections were undermined. Soft money facilitated donors’ access to political officials and their staff. In the 1996 and 2000 election cycles “tens of millions of soft dollars raised by the national leaders in Washington D.C. were routed to various state party committees where hot congressional and presidential battles loomed” (Thomas, 2003, p.3-4).

The soft money loophole undermined Gardner’s early goal of limited election spending by special interests. Likewise the proliferation of PACs, independent expenditures, and bundling (individuals and groups collecting a significant amount of checks from individual contributors and then turning them over to a candidate) significantly increased election spending. Pushback and circumvention of the law arose from “aggressive campaign consultants, lawyers, and office-seekers and disapproving judges and FEC commissioners” (Thomas, 2003, p.2).

Common Cause leaders, lobbyists, and legal team fought to stave off the opposition's pushback. Common Cause Presidents David Cohen (1975-1981) and Fred Wertheimer (1981-1995) maintained the organization's early commitment to campaign finance reform (except for the 1982-1985 MX missile campaign).

In the late 1980s an Action Manual, distributed to activists and now stored in the Princeton Archives, listed the organization's priorities:

- (1) Pressing for enactment of legislation to reform fundamentally congressional campaign financing;
- (2) Stopping wasteful and dangerous nuclear weapons systems and promoting efforts to achieve nuclear arms control agreements;
- (3) Upholding standards of ethics and making government officials accountable for their actions; and
- (4) Pressing for the adherence to basic issues of civil and equal rights for all citizens.

The focus on campaign spending was critical to maintaining reform. But it also contributed to a misidentification of Common Cause as a single-issue group.

Common Cause leaders explained the organization's reputation regarding campaign finance reform. One leader commented for years the organization was perceived as the expert on campaign finance reform and had a monopoly because it was thought they occupied the field. Another leader said Common Cause was always the "go-to" group for campaign finance reform. The organization produced thorough, reliable research which the FEC used in a PAC report. A few other leaders commented how the focus on campaign finance reform made state offices feel irrelevant, particularly during the late 1990s' lead up to the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002.

During the 99th Congress (1985-1987) Senators David Boren (D-OK) and Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) proposed a bill (S. 1806) limiting the aggregate amount of PAC contributions a federal candidate could accept. Common Cause leaders supported even though it was weaker than they would have liked (for analysis of Senate attempts to pass campaign finance reform in the late 1980s see Rothenberg, 1992, Chapter 9). Lawrence S. Rothenberg (1992, p.238) describes Common Cause's official position on the bill with a quote from Fred Wertheimer:

Our long term campaign finance goal continues to be a comprehensive new system for financing congressional races similar to the presidential one. It may take another election or even two to set the stage for convincing Congress that it must undertake this kind of fundamental reform for its own campaigns. And the Boren-Goldwater fight provides us with an important bridge in moving from our present congressional system to a comprehensive new one.

Willingness to compromise was integral to a pragmatic approach under Gardner's Rules. Yet it also led to criticisms that the organization was selling out (see Kirk 1997; discussed in Chapter Three).

From the 99th to the 104th Congress (1985-1996) a succession of campaign spending reform bills were unable to gain sufficient support to pass. For example, in 1995 (104th Congress) Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Russ Feingold (D-WI) introduced a bill (S. 1219) that would impose limits on soft money but failed when the final six votes to invoke cloture could not be found in the Republican-led Senate. Throughout these years Common Cause leaders and staff were focused on campaign finance reform. Almost every "Action Alert" published in *Common Cause* magazine asked members to contact Members of Congress about the issue.

In the meantime Common Cause's national staff researched and published data on election spending. For example, a 1986 *The New York Times* article reported Common Cause's findings that PAC contributions had doubled to members of the House Ways and Means Committee. They also exposed soft money spending (e.g. a 1996 data-driven expose of soft money by Vicki Kemper and Deborah Lutterbeck in *Common Cause* magazine). National newspaper articles about campaign finance reform often cited Common Cause reports, press releases, and leaders' statements.

Exogenous characteristics made it more difficult for Common Cause to influence campaign finance law in the late 1980s and early 1990s than it had been in the early 1970s. A conservative business cycle replaced the social movement context. Government reform was less salient and public trust in government rose and fell (see APPENDIX B: GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND PUBLIC

TRUST). No focusing events like Watergate occurred, although some attention was given to soft money during the “Keating Five” scandal.¹⁶

While lobbying Members of Congress, Common Cause held the FEC accountable for implementing reforms. In the 1980s and 1990s Common Cause filed petitions with the FEC asking the commission to uphold reporting requirements. If the petitions were dismissed, then complaints that the FEC was acting contrary to the law were filed in federal district court.

2. Litigative Support

Common Cause’s legal department specialized in cases involving the regulation of political campaigns. Campaign finance reform opponents successfully used First Amendment arguments to chip away at enacted limitations. Their successful litigation changed the legal context in which Common Cause fought for reform. Three lawsuits—in which Common Cause took part—illustrate tactics of those opposed to campaign spending limits after *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976): *Federal Election Commission v. National Conservative Political Action Committee* (470 U.S. 480, 1985), *Federal Election Commission v. Massachusetts Citizens for Life* (479 U.S. 238, 1986), and *Maine Right to Life Committee, Inc. v. Federal Election Commission* (914 F.Supp. 8, 1996). In each case, Common Cause lost, yet filing an amicus brief was a way to reassure members of the organization’s vigorous efforts to promote its objectives (see Schlozman, et al., 2012, p. 418).

(1) *Federal Election Commission v. National Conservative Political Action Committee* (470 U.S. 480, 1985). The FEC and Common Cause challenged extensive spending by independent organizations. The Court (in a split 5-4 decision) struck down independent expenditure limitations on PACs. The opinion finds PAC expenditures are a form of political speech protected by the First Amendment. In contrast, campaign contributions may be limited due to a real or apparent threat of corruption.

¹⁶ Charles Keating, Chairman of the failed Lincoln Savings and Loan Association, gave large soft money contributions to five U.S. Senators—Alan Cranston (D-CA), Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ), John Glenn (D-OH), John McCain (R-AZ), and Donald Riegle, Jr. (D-MI). The five senators were accused of improperly interfering with the Federal Home Loan Bank Board’s investigation of Keating in the late 1980s.

(2). *Federal Election Commission v. Massachusetts Citizens for Life* (479 U.S. 238, 1986).

Common Cause filed *amicus curiae* brief for the appellant. The FEC sought a civil penalty against Massachusetts Citizens for Life (a non-stock, non-membership corporation) because they spent general treasury funds to purchase flyers advocating the election of certain candidates. The Court (5-4) held that independent expenditure limitations were unconstitutional when applied to nonprofit ideological corporations.

(3). *Maine Right to Life Committee, Inc. v. Federal Election Commission* (914 F.Supp. 8, 1996),

U.S. Court of Appeals, First Circuit. Common Cause filed *amicus curiae* brief for the appellee.

Common Cause argued issue ads were being used as express advocacy, which falls under FEC regulations (corporations and labor unions are prohibited from expressly advocating the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate for federal office). Maine Right to Life Committee, a nonprofit ideological corporation, argued the regulations were too broad. The appeals court ruled the FEC regulation was invalid due to its chilling effect on free speech.

3. Campaign Finance Reform in the States

Within various states and localities Common Cause leaders were also actively lobbying officials, crafting legislation, and mobilizing public support for campaign finance reform. Beginning in the 1970s state leaders successfully pressed for public financing of state and local elections (in line with the national OUTS program; see *supra*). Yet throughout its first phase Common Cause's priorities lay at the national level, in line with Gardner's Rules and supporters expectations (see McFarland, 1984, Chapter 7). During his interview with Peretz, Common Cause leader Jay Hedlund remarked "People would join [Common Cause] for national issues, and only the most active would then get involved in state issues."

Common Cause diligently focused on campaign finance reform by lobbying, filing petitions, and litigation at the national and state levels. Yet the perception of some that Common Cause was a single-issue group was misleading. Various structure and process issues were advocated within a campaign

finance reform frame. For example, Common Cause spotlighted the late 1980s savings and loan crisis and subsequent federal bailout as evidence of a corrupt campaign finance system.

Advocacy success in other issue areas also challenged the misperception. Common Cause used insider-outsider lobbying to press for passage of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995. In its watchdog role, Common Cause called for investigations into House Speakers Jim Wright in 1988 and Newt Gingrich in 1995. An example of substantive reform was Common Cause's coalitional efforts advocating passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Common Cause's organizational identity was affected by prioritizing campaign finance reform over many years, but mainly for those unfamiliar with the organization. Common Cause was a stakeholder in the campaign finance reform advocacy community. Focusing on these types of reforms fit well within Gardner's Rules. But it also underscored a growing misfit between the rules and intraorganizational tension.

I. Conclusion

Long after Gardner stepped down the rules were not readily changed. When exogenous and endogenous circumstances began to threaten the organization, leaders remained loyal to the rules and made lower order adaptations. These adaptations were necessary to maintain solvency but inadequate to keep the organization from heading into years of crisis.

Darren Halpin and Anthony Nownes (2012) argued that a public interest group's organizational identity is difficult to change. The first phase of Common Cause's narrative suggests why. Loyalty to a charismatic public interest group leader and the organizational structure he developed were elements of cognitive architectures (e.g. sieves, friction) that constrained adaptive options. Leaders dependent on collective action were reluctant to tamper with the balanced tension between idealism and pragmatism that attracted and retained membership. Lobbyists were trained by generational transfer to perpetuate tactics learned from the founder. The "what" of representation, advancing governance integrity, came

before the “who.” Members were invested in how leaders claimed to represent their interests, yet leaders were constrained by the members’ ability to exit the organization.

Common Cause leaders played according to the “rules of the game.” Yet by the late 1990s the game had changed. The mismatch between Gardner’s Rules and the exogenous and endogenous environments led to an existential crisis.

III. CRISES—THE GAME CHANGES (mid-1990s to 2007)

A reform organization must be ready to change itself

National Governing Board Meeting June 1998

A. Environment and Rules Mismatch

Gardner's Rules structured the first national government reform lobby. Under the rules Common Cause leaders and lobbyists successfully influenced the policy process. Yet adhering to the rules also contributed to existential crises.

By 2000 Common Cause was nearly insolvent and in 2004 there was a question whether the organization would be forced to close its doors. Incremental adaptations made in the 1990s were insufficient to reverse total revenue declines. The mass membership foundation, in 1998 about half the size of its highpoint in the early 1970s (see FIGURE 4, p.56), continued its downward trend.

Environmental changes threatened the efficacy of Gardner's Rules. Exogenous characteristics—party polarization, weakening of enacted reforms, new government reform groups, internet activism—contributed to a more ideologically-driven and competitive context. Endogenous characteristics—established by Gardner's Rules and dependent on members' resources—threatened Common Cause's ability to survive.

Even in the face of environmental threats Common Cause kept to well-established organizational pathways based on Gardner's Rules (e.g. narrow issue focus, particularly regarding campaign finance reform). Leaders' adaptive decisions were constrained by disproportionate information processing. David Jones and Frank Baumgartner (2005, p.155) describe disproportionate information processing as “the decision maker locks choice into a set of facts based in the past.” Loyalty to Gardner's Rules limited adaptive choices for many years. When environmental pressures could no longer be ignored, punctuation occurred as leaders established new pathways.

In the 1990s, leaders' incremental adaptations softened up loyalty to Gardner's Rules. By the end of the decade, the National Governing Board selected top leaders (the Board Chair and President)

from outside the organization. These relative newcomers were less constrained by disproportionate information processing and soon amended Gardner's Rules.

Amending Gardner's Rules destabilized Common Cause. In effect, new leaders introduced and enacted agendas that punctuated organizational policy. By 2007 Common Cause was a different organization and primed for its third phase under the effective leadership of Robert Edgar (as described in Chapter Four).

This chapter investigates the second phase of Common Cause's narrative, or the changes under the new rules and norms. Existential crises lessened resistance to amending Gardner's Rules. New leaders' adaptations changed elemental components of Gardner's Rules, lessening the organization's distinctiveness. Yet their adaptations enabled Common Cause to survive and eventually led to pockets of revitalization. Events described in this chapter provide critical evidence for the hypotheses:

H1: Large public interest groups tend to follow the rules and norms set up under the founding leadership and first years of success.

H2: Large, long-term public interest groups change their founding rules and norms only when there are changes to the external environment and under threats to the interest group's survival.

This chapter provides a general overview of campaign finance reform and Common Cause advocacy from the mid-1990s to 2007. Even in the midst of crises and destabilization, significant election reform was achieved at the national level with the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act in 2002 (BCRA). Also many Common Cause state offices successfully advocated for state and local level campaign finance reforms. The BCRA was a signal achievement for Common Cause but it also opened a window of opportunity for leaders to prioritize other issue areas.

Examination of Common Cause's second phase relies on several analytical factors which, taken together, form a pattern. Gardner's Rules established organizational path dependency limiting lobbyists' activities to a narrow issue focus—mostly campaign finance reform. Membership recruitment and retention signaled support for their efforts, as Gardner expected. Yet congressional prioritization of

campaign finance reform diminished after a few efforts in the late 1980s (see Rothenberg, 1992, p.234-247). Campaign finance reform again rose on the congressional agenda after soft money excesses of the 1996 election forced Members of Congress to take a public stand.

Common Cause members expressed support for a focus on campaign finance reform. A 1996 Issues Poll asked members if campaign finance reform should continue to be a major emphasis for Common Cause, to which 99.7 percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed. Yet self-selection bias is suggested by a response rate of about 12 percent of the total polls mailed.

Better measures of member support for campaign finance reform efforts are recruitment, retention, and contribution numbers. Direct mail technology for recruitment was worked out in the late 1960s and early 1970s (e.g. Common Cause bought mailing lists from George McGovern's 1972 presidential campaign). Direct mail is a craft of advertising specialization but its returns legitimized lobbying efforts.

In the late-1990s declining revenue from direct mailings contributed to financial crises. The combination of Common Cause's narrow issue focus plus little movement in Congress led some to question the relevance of the organization. Around that time a Board member commented that members wanted "tangible returns on their investments" and felt badly that the organization had not succeeded, since 1974, in getting money out of national politics (based on October 14, 1998 email from Bill Keane to Common Cause National Governing Board regarding 1998 Membership Recruitment; Princeton Archives). Although retention levels remained at about 75 percent from year to year, the loss of 25 percent due to attrition was rarely made up the following year. By the late 1990s Common Cause was forced to suspend direct mailings due to diminishing returns.

Common Cause leaders adhered to Gardner's Rules until relative newcomers took the helm from 1999 to 2007 (National Governing Board Chair Derek Bok and Presidents Scott Harshbarger and Chellie Pingree). During the 1990s leaders' resistance to amending the rules was softened by incremental adaptations and ongoing proposals (e.g. grassroots mobilization, unifying staff, adding a 501c3 arm).

New leaders brought with them reorganization plans that, when implemented, significantly amended Gardner's Rules. They established new pathways and thus embody the last push over an organizational tipping point.

This chapter advances answers to the research questions: What is the tipping point at which incremental adaptations alone are no longer tenable? How do adaptations—whether incremental or major shifts—change an organization? And what can a public interest lobby tell us about citizen participation and representation? In addition, Common Cause's survival through existential crises speaks to theories of interest groups (within a population and as an organization), the changing nature of collective action, lobbying tactics, and the process of representation in the U.S. political system.

B. The Game Changes—Exogenous and Endogenous Threats

At its founding Common Cause benefitted from a propitious time and John Gardner's brand of charisma. Gardner's Rules were developed during this time by Gardner and early leaders. The rules structured political influence at national and state levels. But two decades later the rules no longer fit the game.

1. Exogenous Threats

Exogenous changes contributed to a mismatch between Gardner's Rules and the political environment. An extended business cycle, increasing party polarization, and a qualified increase of public support for government made it more difficult to pass reform legislation. At the same time, outside spending diminished the effect of previous campaign finance reforms. Many of the newer government reform groups organized with a 501c3 tax designation, allowing them to accept foundation grants unlike Common Cause. This threatened Common Cause's role as lead organization (particularly regarding campaign finance reform issues). The rise of internet activism meant established groups like Common Cause had to catch up or be left behind.

a. Extended Business Cycle

A business-dominated political cycle, symbolically in place with President Reagan's election in 1980, still exists in 2017. Public opinion polls indicating government operations as the most important problem dropped from a highpoint in 1974 to almost zero in the mid-1980s, then rose again in the late 1990s and around 2010 (see APPENDIX B: GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND PUBLIC TRUST). In this atmosphere government reform advocacy became less about "riding a wave in" than persistent commitment to building support and looking for political opportunities.

Democrats controlled both chambers of Congress during the first phase of Common Cause's narrative for all but six years (97th-99th Congress, 1981-1987, when Republicans controlled the Senate and Democrats the House of Representatives). Common Cause's second phase coincides with the "Republican Revolution of 1994" and Republican dominance in both chambers that lasts until 2007 (104th-109th Congress, 1995-2007). Republicans often supported a populist version of government reform (e.g. privatization of public services) which further strengthened businesses' interests vis-à-vis the countervailing power of public interest groups. Republican dominance and reform frames strengthened resistance to Common Cause lobbyists' attempts to influence Congress. Although major contributions and bequests improved total revenue and reserves/net assets for Common Cause (see FIGURES 4 and 5, p.51-52), membership levels did not improve (see FIGURE 3, p.54), further weakening lobbyists' ability to successfully advocate reforms at the national level.

b. Increasing Party Polarization

Since the 1970s the two major parties in Congress have become increasingly polarized. Newt Gingrich, the Republican House Speaker from 1995 to 1999 (104th-105th Congress) furthered the divide by adhering to a "majority of the majority" rule, meaning he would not bring a bill to the floor unless a majority of the Republican representatives agreed to support its passage. Even if a Democrat-favored bill gathered enough Republican votes to pass, it would not be brought to the floor for a vote. This

doctrine became known as “the Hastert Rule” for Dennis Hastert (R-IL) the House Speaker from 1999 to 2007 (106th-109th Congress) who replaced Gingrich after he was forced to resign.

During his tenure as House Speaker, Gingrich also changed House rules regarding lobbyists. He limited lobbyists’ access to Members of Congress, in effect getting them off the House floor and not allowing them to go where the public could go. To speak to Members, lobbyists “had to be either outside with coats on or in the basement” (the quote and information used in this paragraph is based on Pauline Peretz’s 2014 interview with Susanne Tannenbaum, a Common Cause lobbyist from 1976 to the 1990s). Thus it became much more difficult for Common Cause lobbyists to be physically on the Hill, according to Gardner’s Rules.

Redistricting since the 1970s contributes to the number of safe Congressional seats and partisan divisions among Members and constituents. These divisions entrench polarization; subsequently the bipartisan agreement needed to pass government reform has become almost nonexistent (see Theriault 2008). A Common Cause leader commented there are still some Republicans in Congress who are sympathetic to Common Cause issues but “do not want to go out on a limb in this environment.” Factors such as limited time, gerrymandered districts, and frequent elections work against bipartisan compromise. In addition, polarization strengthens a perception of Common Cause as a Democratic organization, which challenges leaders’ claim to be nonpartisan and lobbyists’ pragmatic lobbying (i.e. no permanent friends and no permanent enemies).

c. Uneven Public Opinion

In 1988 public concern about government operations began to rise. However the concern was tempered by a “softening of general attitudes toward the federal government” from 1994 until the early 2000s (findings of a March 10, 1998 Pew Research Center Report). During the latter 1990s, general distrust of government remained substantial but public evaluations of federal workers and agencies improved (see APPENDIX B: GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND PUBLIC TRUST). Less

bipartisan agreement and some increase in public trust limit the effectiveness of lobbying for government reform according to Gardner's Rules (e.g. insider-outsider lobbying).

Although some congressional activity advanced campaign finance reform no legislation was enacted from 1979 to 2000 (see Rothenberg, 1992, Chapter 9). The leadership and expertise of Fred Wertheimer, Common Cause President 1981-1995 and "the eminence grise of the campaign reform movement," (Dionne Jr., 1999) kept the issue before Members of Congress. Yet the lack of success affected membership as some questioned contributing to an organization that had not achieved significant legislation in years.

d. Reform Loopholes

At the same time, campaign finance reforms already in place were eroded by regulative loopholes and Supreme Court decisions. Soft money and 527 groups (tax exempt organizations; see *infra*) opened channels for unlimited spending to influence elections. Much of Common Cause's national lobbying efforts in the 1990s focused on closing these loopholes.

Soft money contributions (unlimited contributions to state party building activities; see discussion in Chapter Three) became the focus of concern when political parties tripled the amount of soft money raised between the 1992 and 1996 elections. Public funding of presidential campaigns was the primary source of money for presidential campaigns until 1996, when political parties raised and spent more soft money than the candidates received from public funds. In general the 1996 campaign was conducted largely outside of FEC regulations even if inside the law (Mutch, 2014, p.164-167).

A 527 group is an I.R.S. tax code designation. Congress added Section 527 to the tax code in 1975 to clarify the tax-exempt status of groups organized to electioneer, or influence the election or defeat of political candidates. Clarification was needed because regulations within the Federal Election Campaign Amendments of 1974 made visible the widespread use of PACs by corporations, banks, and trade associations. Subsequently 527 groups became a loophole to avoid disclosure of funding sources.

The *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976) opinion distinguished between 527 groups' express advocacy and issue advocacy communications, based on the use of certain words encouraging action for or against candidates—the so-called “Magic Words” doctrine. The Supreme Court upheld regulating 527 groups' political speech but only when they expressly advocated the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate for federal office (see Page 424 U.S. 44). Express advocacy was conveyed by words such as “vote for Smith,” “elect,” or “defeat,” also known as the “magic words” of the Buckley decision. Another result of the decision was issue advocacy no longer counted as a political expenditure regulated by the FEC (Mutch, 2014, p.173).

In the late 1990s the I.R.S. clarified that 527 groups using issue advocacy communications retain tax-exempt status. Subsequently new 527 groups formed that received tax-exempt status but did not have to register with the FEC as political committees. Thus they were not subject to FEC disclosure requirements or contribution limits (Common Cause coined the term “Stealth PAC” to describe 527 groups who work to influence elections outside public scrutiny). The *Full and Fair Campaign Finance Disclosure Act of 2000* required 527 groups to disclose donors to the I.R.S. and make these reports available to the public upon request—the first campaign finance reform achieved since 1979 (discussed *infra*). However the I.R.S. lacks means to make the information public.

Two key Supreme Court decisions in the 1990s challenged reformers' goal to limit the influence of a wealthy few on elections. In the case *Austin v. Michigan Chamber of Commerce* (494 U.S. 652, 1990), Common Cause filed a brief of amici curiae arguing for a Michigan law prohibiting the use of general treasury funds for independent expenditures in support of state candidate elections. The Court upheld the state law, but their decision signaled a turn in interpretation from distinguishing between corporations and individuals as differences in kind to differences of degree (and establishing a line of decisions leading to *Citizens United v. FEC* in 2010; discussed in Chapter Five). In *Colorado Republican Federal Campaign Committee v. Federal Election Commission* (518 U.S. 604, 1996) Common Cause submitted a brief of amici curiae in support of FEC limits on soft money expenditures

in connection with a general election campaign of a congressional candidate. In general the Court had to decide if state political parties using funds to purchase radio advertisements attacking their opponent's likely congressional candidate is "in connection with" a campaign. The Court decided against the FEC regulation. Thus even though the Federal Election Campaign Act Amendments of 1974 continued to successfully limit hard money contributions, outside spending and Supreme Court interpretations nullified the intent of campaign finance reforms.

e. Interest Group Population Changes

Many business-friendly groups arose or were reorganized following the advocacy explosion of the late 1960s and early 1970s. These interest groups imitated reform groups' successful advocacy strategies. A prime example is astroturfing, or mailing thousands of industry-generated letters to Members of Congress that are deliberately intended to look like expressions of public opinion (Ostler, 2011). Another example is sending direct mailings to citizens asking for some level of support. Direct mail became commonplace and less effective with use—and abuse—over time by a variety of groups, including those representing business interests.

By the mid-1990s numerous advocacy options existed for individuals interested in government reform from various perspectives. Thus Common Cause faced challenges regarding political influence, attracting resources, and its role within the public interest group population. One leader succinctly explained Common Cause is no longer the "only game in town."

From its early years Common Cause led structure and process efforts in Congress and participated in coalitional efforts, usually for substantive issues (e.g. voting rights, rights of the disabled, LGBT rights). During its second phase, Common Cause remained a lead organization advocating campaign finance reform at the national level, largely due to the focused efforts of President Fred Wertheimer and other leaders. For other issues (e.g. ethics) Common Cause often participated in coalitions composed of frequent advocacy partners.

In the early 1970s it was not uncommon for interest groups to form under the 501c3 I.R.S. tax designation which allowed tax-deductible donations but limited lobbying. Indeed most of the national level government reform groups that arose after Common Cause used a 501c3 designation. The 501c3 status allowed them to pursue foundation grants and tax-deductible contributions.

Common Cause was distinctive because it did not originally include a 501c3 arm. John Gardner was adamant against forming a separate 501c3 entity as the organization's purpose was lobbying effectiveness—not discussion about issues. When Common Cause leaders added a 501c3 arm (the Common Cause Education Fund) in 2000 it was a significant departure from long-held organizational pathways. In addition, the organization was a bit “late to the game” and had to compete for grants with groups that had funding experience and histories with foundations supporting government reform programs.

National level government reform groups that arose after the early 1970s focused on specific issues or ideologies. These characteristics distinguished them from Common Cause's mission to promote structure and process issues through pragmatic lobbying of Congress. Activists now had a variety of opportunities to support national government reform efforts besides Common Cause. Three groups are particularly illustrative of changes to the government reform group population during Common Cause's second phase:

(1). Center for Responsive Politics

The Center for Responsive Politics (501c3) was founded in 1983 by former U.S. Senators Frank Church (D-ID) and Hugh Scott (R-PA). The organization's original mission was to track and analyze the contributions of political action committees to every Member of Congress, as well as independent expenditures of interest groups and large corporations. Their analyses were published in book form until after the 1996 elections when they launched the website OpenSecrets.org. Beginning in 1996 the Center for Responsive Politics collected, analyzed, and posted information about money in politics.

In contrast, beginning in the early 1970s Common Cause's research team collected, analyzed, and distributed campaign finance data as information pertinent to specific issues. Research and reports were not the end product but a means to influence Members of Congress. For many years Common Cause occupied a leading role in campaign finance reform efforts and its research team produced high quality reports. Over time it became "one of the major centers . . . for compiling and organizing data on the financing of political campaigns" (McFarland, 1984, p.63). Even as existential crises developed, Common Cause reports and leaders were often cited in newspaper and academic articles on campaign finance reform and other organizational efforts (e.g. internet integrity, media conglomeration).

In the late 1990s Common Cause campaign finance reform research focused on soft money contributions and "Stealth PAC" spending. Soft money research reports, analyzing Federal Election Commission data, were often cited in the *Washington Post* during the late 1990s (a Lexis Nexis search reveals Common Cause soft money research is cited about ten times between 1995 and 1998). Common Cause's 2000 report "Under the Radar: The Attack of 'Stealth PACs' On Our Nation's Elections" was cited by Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) as he argued for passage of a bill requiring public disclosure for all 527 groups (see 107th Congress' Congressional Record, June 28, 2000, page 12849). The Senate passed the bill with only six Republicans voting against the measure. The House endorsed the bill 385 to 39. Previously President Clinton signaled his support of the bill and he signed it into law July 1, 2000 (see Schmitt and Broder 2000).

In January 1997 Common Cause launched its first interactive website with campaign finance data on every Member of Congress, soft money data organized by industry, and online versions of Common Cause's campaign finance studies (see February 1997 Memorandum to the National Governing Board Regarding Common Cause Technology Development—Internet Web Site and Computer Network; Princeton Archives). The website made their research more accessible to members and interested parties. But now it competed with the Center for Responsive Politics that, although

smaller, was singularly focused on providing money in politics information. Moreover as a 501c3 group, the Center was supported by contributions from foundations as well as individuals.

(2). Public Campaign

Public Campaign (501c3) and Public Campaign Action Fund (501c4) were founded in 1997 by Ellen S. Miller, previously Executive Director of the Center for Responsive Politics (1984-1996). Public Campaign specifically concentrates on “clean elections,” or publicly funded elections at federal and state levels. The organization funds state groups, trains activists, and provides model legislation and ballot initiatives.

Public Campaign and Common Cause advocate public financing of campaigns and are frequent partners in coalitional efforts. Both organizations advance public financing at national, state, and local levels. But Common Cause contrasts with Public Campaign in significant ways.

For many years Public Campaign was singularly focused on full public financing of campaigns. Common Cause’s willingness to compromise led Ellen S. Miller to publicly scold the organization for being a “Beltway player.” In addition Public Campaign focused on outsider instead of insider lobbying, unlike Common Cause (according to Gardner’s Rules).

(3). Democracy 21

Democracy 21 (501c3) was founded in 1997 by Fred Wertheimer, two years after he stepped down as president of Common Cause. Democracy 21 focuses on legislative action, money in politics, public financing, and court cases regarding campaign finance law. Unlike Common Cause, Democracy 21 specializes in campaign finance reform and lobbying issues exclusively. From 1997 to 2015 Democracy 21 and Common Cause often worked as partners in coalitions to advance campaign finance reform.

Fred Wertheimer’s departure was a significant loss for Common Cause’s political influence, resources, and role among other reform groups. As Common Cause President, Fred Wertheimer led according to Gardner’s Rules. From the late 1980s to the time he stepped down, Wertheimer focused

organizational efforts on lobbying Congress for specific campaign finance reforms. Insider lobbyists—especially Wertheimer—worked closely with Members of Congress to build support for reform policies. The Washington Connection coordinated insider-outsider lobbying efforts.

Fred Wertheimer advanced Common Cause’s reputation for integrity at the national level. Wertheimer was particularly well-suited to the task as he had been groomed by David Cohen, one of the foundational leaders and Common Cause’s President before him (McFarland, 1984, p.87). By the early 1990s Wertheimer had over two decades experience building long-term relationships with allies on the inside of government. He possessed a great amount of information to offer Members of Congress and the press. In a 2014 interview with historian Pauline Peretz, Wertheimer remarked “[Common Cause] could brand bills. We would say this is the solution. And we had the credibility for people to accept that, to want that message out.” Branding bills provided Common Cause members evidence of results.

Wertheimer embodied a wealth of media resources for the Common Cause organization. He spent most of his time on Capitol Hill but about one-third of his time was spent talking to journalists and editorial writers. He built a reputation as the media contact “Rolodex” guy for campaign finance, his image looked good on television, and he specialized in pithy remarks. Also Wertheimer’s wife is Linda Wertheimer, the award-winning political correspondent for National Public Radio (the couple married in 1969). Wertheimer’s leadership and connections gave Common Cause an edge as the group competed for media attention with other government reform organizations. In sum, Wertheimer’s departure and formation of Democracy 21 hurt Common Cause after 1995.

The Center for Responsive Politics, Public Campaign, and Democracy 21 emphasize different aspects of campaign finance reform—data collection and publication, full public financing of campaigns, and the legislative and legal environment—that overlap components of Common Cause’s program. The three groups also exemplify the fracturing of campaign finance reform advocacy. More importantly they suggest increasing competition for political influence, resources, and role in an issue area where Common Cause was once the undisputed leader.

In 2014 interviews Common Cause leaders summarized the benefits and drawbacks of increasing numbers of government reform groups. Competition forced Common Cause to “sharpen its game” by being more accountable with its finances; improving reaction time for political opportunities on the national, state, and local levels; convening collaborations; and creating an online presence. Yet the multiplication of government reform groups “siphoned off energy” from Common Cause.

f. Internet Activism

Internet technology introduced other existential threats to Common Cause. The spread of internet connectivity enabled innovative forms of organization and advocacy. The advent of netroots groups (e.g. MoveOn.org; see Karpf, 2012) introduced a new organizational form existing within cyberspace instead of physical space.

Netroots groups also introduced programmatic flexibility. Instead of claiming a specific issue area or policy niche, these internet organizations prefer to move from one reform issue to another, depending on the issue of the moment. The internet enables groups to gauge, and mobilize people according to, publicly salient issues in real time. Advocacy groups with large email lists (e.g. over five million) listen to their supporters through data analytics and A/B testing. Their assessments guide agenda setting and gauge mobilization tactics (Karpf, 2016).

The internet also enables individuated activism, or individuals advocating specific issues through online networks instead of within groups (see Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). Rothenberg (1992) found members join Common Cause due to vague purposive goals and remain when their interests align with specific issues being pursued. Individuated activism flips the process as online viewers support specific issues but do not necessarily become dues-paying members.

Although the internet facilitates communication and expressions of support for an organization and the specific issues it pursues, it is questionable if it leads to increased activism (see Bimber et al., 2012). Ease of obtaining information and supporting issues lower obstacles to collective action across a diffuse constituency. Yet it also diminishes incentives for joining some public interest groups, such as

exclusive access to analyses and reports. Obviously there are notable exceptions of public interest groups that offer material incentives that cannot be obtained elsewhere. For example, AARP members receive discounts on insurance, travel, and theatre tickets. National Rifle Association members receive insurance discounts and a select magazine subscription.

With the launch of its interactive website in 1997 Common Cause became an online presence. The website enhanced communication among leaders, members, and interested individuals. Even during years of crises, Common Cause updated its website and built its capacity to mobilize through the internet (e.g. an online sign up for 2004 election poll watchers).

The rise of the internet changed Common Cause's exogenous and endogenous environments. Innovative organizational forms and issue advocacy increased competition for political influence, resources, and issue leadership that already threatened Common Cause. Yet adapting to the internet enhanced Common Cause's legitimacy and ability to reach a wider audience.

Common Cause's second phase is marked by exogenous changes that threatened the efficacy of Gardner's Rules. The business-friendly environment and party polarization made pragmatic lobbying of Members of Congress (as well as a claim to be nonpartisan) increasingly difficult. Prior policy successes were undermined by loopholes such as soft money contributions and 527 "Stealth PACs" issue advocacy. The growing population of government reform groups and innovative forms of collective action offered an expanding variety of options for people interested in supporting government reform. At the same time, Common Cause faced ongoing crises from within.

2. Endogenous Threats

Exogenous changes threatened and even undermined the efficacy of Gardner's Rules but endogenous changes threatened Common Cause's survival. Ongoing membership decline affected Common Cause's financial base and advocacy infrastructure. By the late 1990s mounting financial pressures made it impossible to play by rules developed in the early 1970s.

a. Membership Decline

Membership totals steadily dropped from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s (see FIGURE 4, p.56). Between 1994 and 2007 Common Cause lost about 100,000 contributing members from its rolls (i.e. individual or family memberships that made a contribution within the last two years). Yet at the same time the number of online supporters (people who may or may not contribute) was growing which, when added to contributing members, enabled Common Cause to claim 220,000 member/supporters, a total that reached 400,000 in 2015 and over 700,000 after the 2016 election (numbers publicly claimed by leaders).

Direct mail, the “the workhorse of membership recruitment efforts,” was increasingly less effective. In the organization’s early years the acquisition return rate was about 5 percent. By 1991 the return rate was 1.26 percent; in 1998 it was less than .99 percent. Subsequently leaders suspended acquisition mailings in order to revise message framing and packaging.

In order to expand the universe of members Common Cause rents mailing lists of direct mail responsive joiners, or people who contribute in response to mailings, which appear on other organization’s “prospect lists.” The lists include members of other advocacy organizations such as environmental, women’s, seniors, international relief, civil liberties and civil rights, animal rights, and peace groups. Also “test lists” include subscribers to various publications and periodicals, health and medical research groups, public television and public radio, and museums and art societies. But as finances tightened they ceased buying mailing lists from progressive groups or magazines that well-educated people would read.

Like recruitment, direct mail appeals for additional contributions above dues were less effective by 1999. That year contributions were almost \$500,000 less than projected. Leaders, reacting to members’ complaints about the volume of mail from Common Cause, experimented with not sending appeals during the members’ renewal cycle. The experiment worked well with members whose contributions were less than \$100 but poorly with those who gave more than \$100—resulting in a net

loss for the organization. Leaders concluded “sending less mail meant getting less money,” suggesting the increasing importance of large donors—and as distinct from Gardner’s goal to rely upon diffuse membership and small contributions (information about appeals testing is found in Scott Harshbarger’s February 2000 memo to the National Governing Board regarding the Revised 2000 Budget; Princeton Archives).

b. Financial Strains

Fewer members narrowed Common Cause’s income base, destabilizing the organization’s finances. By 2000 the financial situation was dire. In October of that year Common Cause President Scott Harshbarger (1999-2002) reported to the Board:

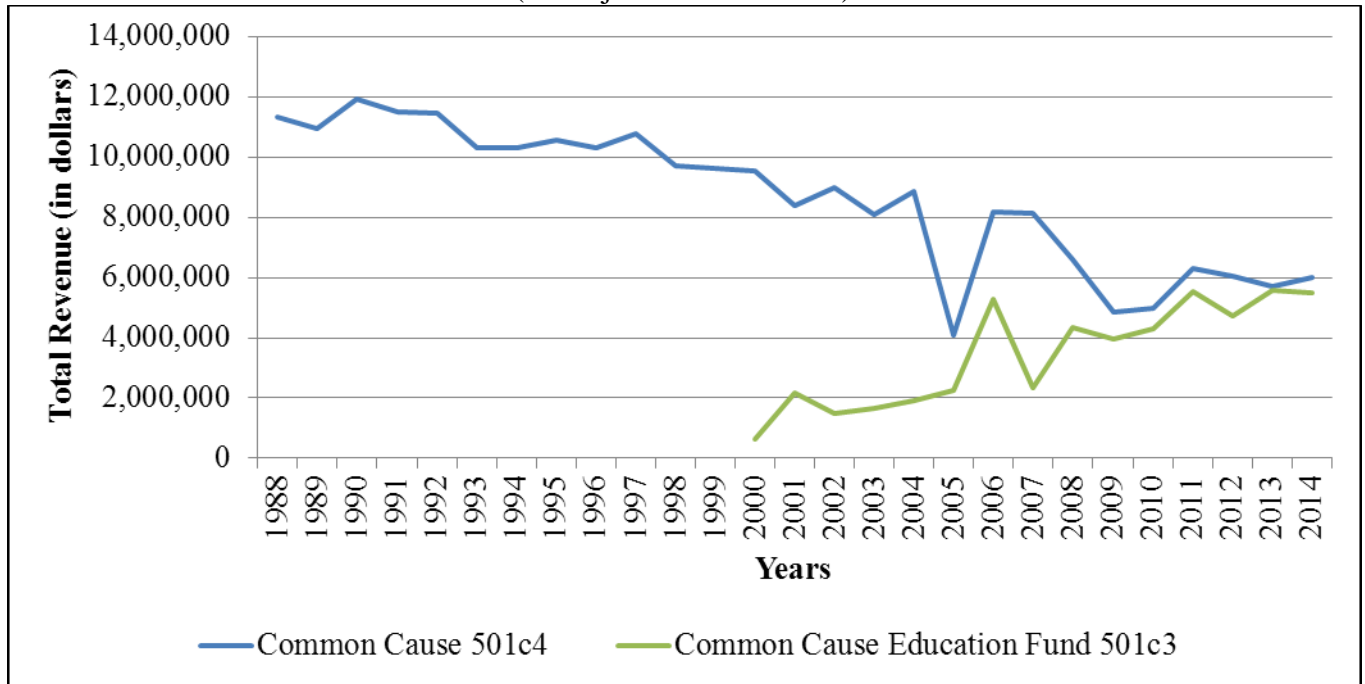
In truth, Common Cause is nearly insolvent as we prepare this draft budget. Our financial situation has grown so grave that at this time we are not able to provide this Board with a proposed balanced budget. The document enclosed—an interim operating budget—shows Common Cause ending this year in a deficit. . . . This budget and narrative is a means to serve as an even more urgent wake up call to the Common Cause Board and community; a clear warning that change is needed if Common Cause is to survive into the 21st century.

Subsequently expenditures were slashed. At the national level, budgeted staff positions were left unfilled. Administrative costs were taken from the 501c3 instead of 501c4 accounts. The National Governing Board transitioned from an elected to an appointed board, cutting about \$50,000 from mailing and printing, plus administrative expenses. At the state level, offices unable to recover from budget deficits were closed.

FIGURE 6 disaggregates total revenue data presented in FIGURE 4 (p.56). Total revenue continued to decline for the 501c4 lobbying arm but rose for the 501c3 Common Cause Education Fund (CCEF). The September 11 terrorist attacks and anthrax scares contributed to lower direct mail return (e.g. a 0.77 percent response rate to acquisition solicitations). In 2002 revenue flowing to the 501c4 revenue increased by about \$500,000 during the final push leading to the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA). Common Cause Education Fund revenue almost tripled from 2000 to 2001 (\$875,000 to

\$2.2 million). Adding a 501c3 arm helped Common Cause survive in the short term but a few years later the financial situation worsened.

FIGURE 6
TOTAL REVENUE 1988-2014
COMMON CAUSE 501c4 and COMMON CAUSE EDUCATION FUND 501c3
(not adjusted for inflation)



Sources: Common Cause Financial Records in the national office; and Common Cause (2004-2014) and Common Cause Education Fund (2002-2014) IRS 990 Tax Forms, National Center for Charitable Statistics website (<http://nccs.urban.org/>, accessed June 27, 2015).

In the 1990s total revenue declined by over \$2 million (from \$11.9 million in 1990 to \$9.6 in 1999).

The 2000 formation of a CCEF 501c3 arm enabled funding by foundation grants and a decade later the CCEF accounted for almost half the organization's total revenue.

Besides a general decline in 501c4 and increase in 501c3 revenue, FIGURE 6 illustrates a second financial crisis in 2005 (in one year total revenue dropped over \$4 million, from \$10.7 million in 2004 to \$6.3 million in 2005). At the September 2004 Board meeting Common Cause's Chief Operating Officer Sarah Dufendach reported the organization lost money in eight of the last nine quarters; for the first six months of 2004 the loss was \$1 million. Dufendach warned:

. . . If there were additional material losses, the auditor would be required to evaluate whether or not Common Cause would be able to “continue to operate as a going-concern”. Specifically, would we be able to keep our doors open?

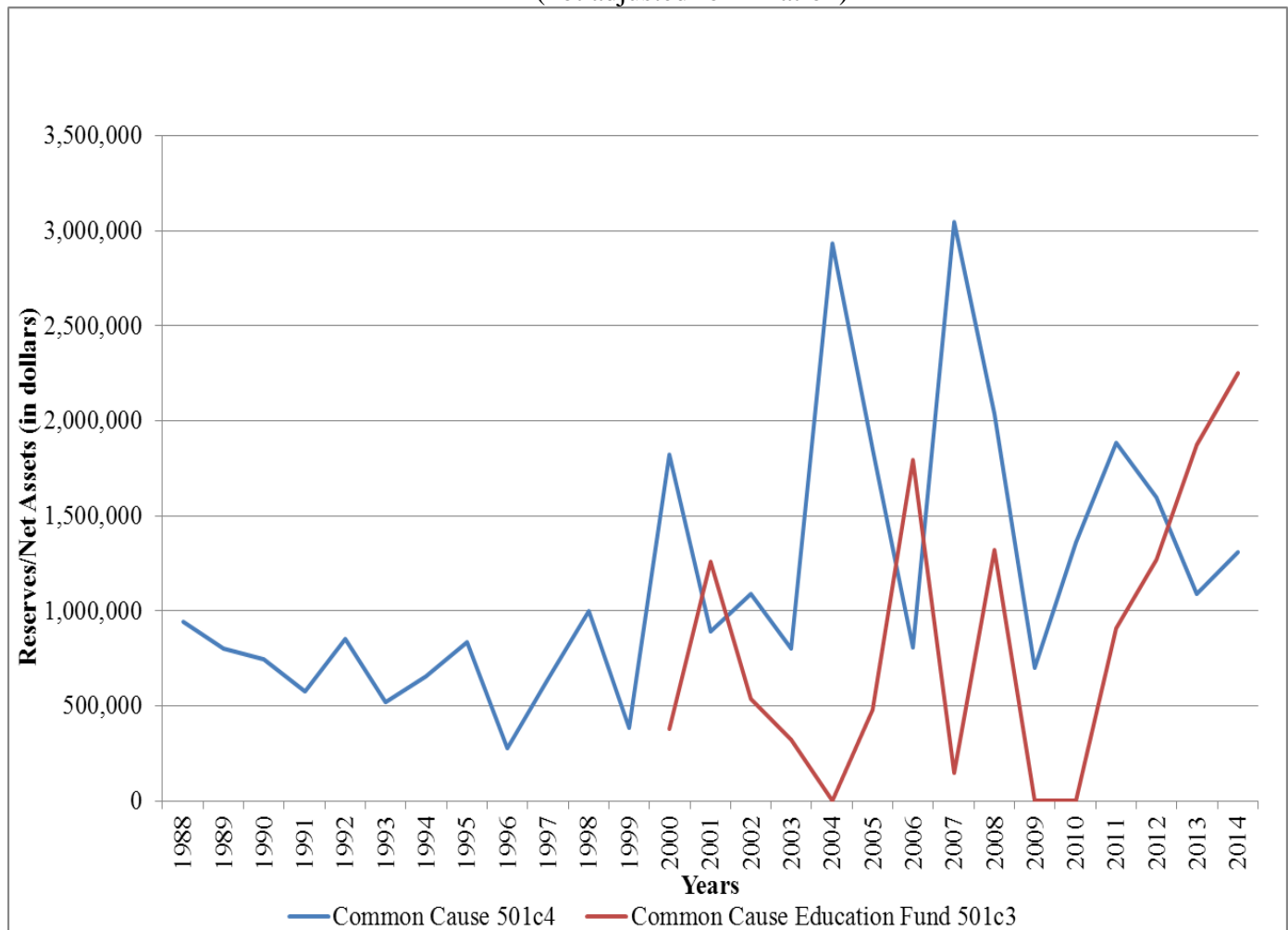
Drastic cuts were made to balance the budget and not incur a third consecutive year of loss. As in 2000 national staff was cut or had their salaries and benefits lowered. Outsourced operations were moved in-house. State offices slashed expenses by moving to smaller offices or closing.

At the same time, efforts were implemented to improve revenues. A fundraiser was hired to staff the major donor program in September 2005 (after the office remained empty for over a year). At its September 2006 meeting, Common Cause’s board was informed that in the first six months of 2006 revenue from major donors was greater than “at any time during the same time period since 1999 and possibly in Common Cause’s history.” Bequests, appeals, reinstatement of members, and revenue from the website went up. Empty space in the national headquarters was subleased.

Revenue also improved for CCEF accounts. Between 2005 and 2006 over \$1 million more grant funds were acquired. The National Governing Board lowered the floor of 501c3 solicitations from \$1000 to \$100. Total revenue (501c4 and 501c3) increased from \$6.3 million in 2005 to \$13.4 million in 2006 but a level of volatility remained until the late 2000s.

FIGURE 7 disaggregates the combined reserves/net assets data from FIGURE 5 (p.57). Financial instability behind Common Cause’s existential crises is obvious from the variability of 501c4 and 501c3 reserve/net assets accounts during the organization’s second phase (mid-1990s to 2007).

FIGURE 7
RESERVES/NET ASSETS 1988-2014
COMMON CAUSE 501c4 and COMMON CAUSE EDUCATION FUND 501c3
 (not adjusted for inflation)



Sources: Common Cause Financial Records in the national office; and Common Cause (2004-2014) and Common Cause Education Fund (2002-2014) IRS 990 Tax Forms, National Center for Charitable Statistics website (<http://nccs.urban.org/>, accessed June 27, 2015).

The CCEF was unable to maintain reserves in 2004, 2009, and 2010. Although adding a 501c3 arm improved total revenue, the volatile nature of its reserve account contributed to second phase instability. Greater financial stability after 2010 undergirds pockets of revitalization that characterize the organization's third phase.

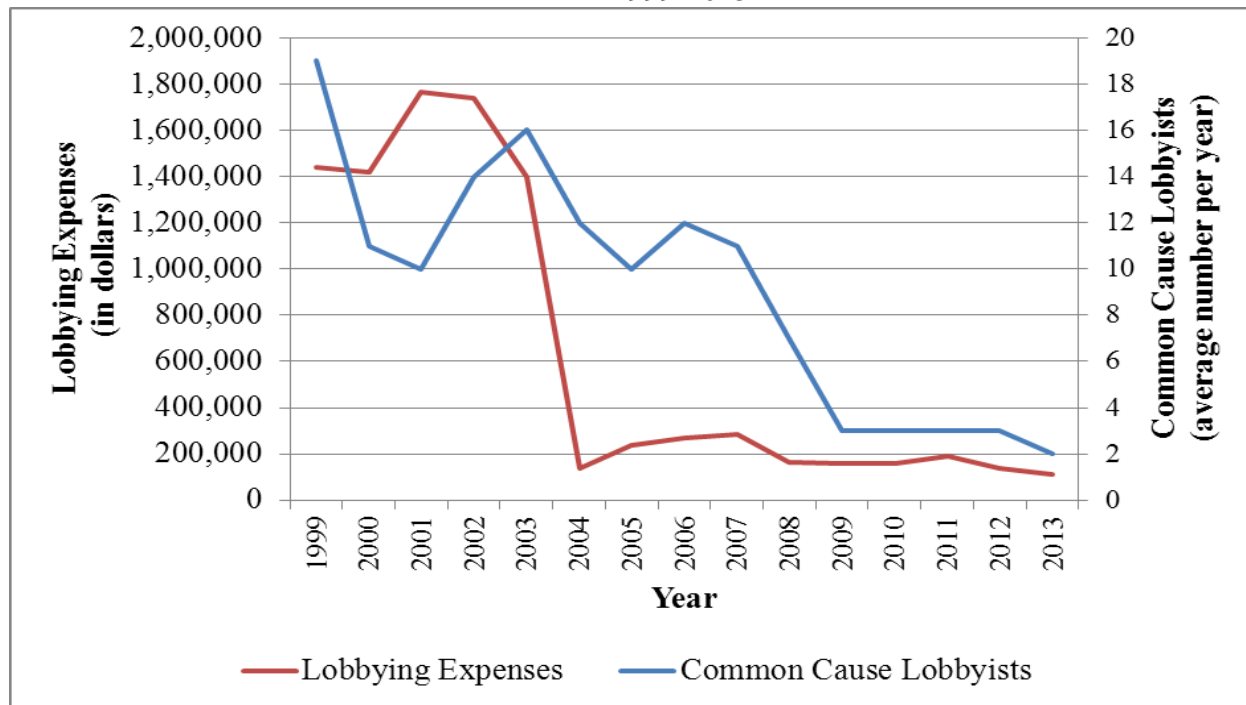
Variations in total reserves began to grow more pronounced in the mid-1990s. After the drop in reserves from 1995 to 1996, President Ann McBride recommended a reserves goal of \$1.5 million, with a \$500,000 minimum. Earmarking a level of members' dues and contributions to maintain reserves was

deemed inappropriate since their resources supported lobbying efforts. Instead, reserve goals would be met by further expenditure reductions (e.g. national headquarters moved to smaller offices in 1996; *Common Cause* magazine was suspended in 1997) and bequest donations (Ann McBride’s recommendations are found in her February 1997 memo to the National Governing Board; Princeton Archives). McBride noted unlike other fundraising appeals, bequest donors generally prefer their gifts to be used to secure organizational stability instead of day-to-day operating expenses.

c. Insider-Outsider Lobbying Changes

Common Cause’s insider-outsider lobbying infrastructure was threatened on several fronts. Decreases in 501c4 income meant less funding for insider lobbying of Members of Congress. FIGURE 8 illustrates a ninety percent drop in lobbying expenses between 2003 and 2004 (from \$1,400,000 to \$140,000). The number of paid national staff engaged in lobbying also dropped after 2003, as indicated by “Common Cause Lobbyists” levels.

FIGURE 8
COMMON CAUSE LOBBYING EXPENSES AND NUMBER OF REGISTERED LOBBYISTS
1999-2013



Source: Lobbying Disclosure, Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives (see <http://disclosures.house.gov/ld/ldsearch.aspx> accessed August 31, 2015).

Staff cuts in 2000 decreased the number of Common Cause lobbyists. As support built for passage of the BCRA in 2002, Common Cause hired more staff members to lobby. In addition contract lobbyists (from the lobbying firm Sonosky, Chambers, Sachse, Endreson & Perry, LLP) were hired for a few years. The use of contract lobbyists was a significant departure from how the organization operated under Gardner's Rules. During its first phase five or six Common Cause professional lobbyists successfully influenced Congress. Bringing in outsiders to supplement the national staff was another indication how exigencies (in this case likely legislative success and a diminished staff) increased leaders' willingness to overturn rules and norms in place since Common Cause's founding.

During a 2014 interview, a Common Cause leader explained that although lobbying expenditures dropped between 2003 and 2004 the organization's functions remained constant. Staff members that had been hired to lobby for passage of the BCRA in 2002 were let go. Chellie Pingree, elected Common Cause President in 2003, undertook a major reorganization (see discussion *infra*). After formation of the CCEF, some states continued to charge 501c4 (lobbying) accounts for 501c3 (research and education) work. In 2004 Pingree let the accounting staff go and hired an outside firm for about two years. Thus a change in accounting practices could exaggerate the drop in lobbying expenditures.

The Washington Connection continued in its linchpin role, but the loss of members weakened Common Cause's outsider lobbying infrastructure. Leaders turned to grassroots mobilization to expand the network of potential activists (e.g. Project Independence; see *infra*). In addition, national staff continued to work with volunteer activists in states where offices closed (including Illinois).

Accepting tax-deductible grants and contributions through the CCEF 501c3 arm required clear separation between lobbying and educational outreach programs. Even without exogenous threats, Common Cause could no longer maintain its strategic focus and heavy priority on lobbying Congress, especially as the CCEF funding became more critical to organizational maintenance. Thus the advocacy

infrastructure based on Gardner's Rules was increasingly out of step with the exigencies of organizational survival.

Threatening exogenous and endogenous changes forced leaders to an existential crossroads. In one direction was loyalty to Gardner's Rules and the organizational culture they built. In the other direction were new pathways which would significantly amend the rules.

Incremental adjustments in the 1990s (e.g. grassroots mobilization, cultivating major donors) softened up resistance to amending the rules while remaining within established pathways. But these adaptations were insufficient to stem the loss of membership and income. The tipping point of amending Gardner's Rules was reached only with the introduction of a new generation of leadership.

C. Common Cause Leadership (1995-2007)

Until 1999 every Common Cause President and National Governing Board Chair had worked with or for John Gardner. Even though Gardner stepped down after six years, these leaders remained loyal to his rules. In addition many people—at headquarters and across the states—were invested in an organizational identity and culture built on Gardner's Rules.

Common Cause experienced a critical juncture in leadership as it moved from its first to second phases. Between 1995 and 1999 Board Chair Edward (Ned) Cabot and Presidents Fred Wertheimer and Ann McBride stepped down. Together the three represented over 64 years of Common Cause leadership. With a few exceptions their departure ended an organizational line of leadership reaching back to John Gardner and the founding of the organization.

Most of the Common Cause National Governing Board Chairs and Presidents after the critical juncture in 1999 were relative newcomers to the organization. They lacked prior leaders' investment in Gardner's Rules and Common Cause's organizational culture. In a 2014 interview, a Common Cause leader stated that in the late-1990s there was a perceived need to open up the process and elect someone from outside.

Another notable difference is Common Cause Presidents Scott Harshbarger (1999-2003) and Chellie Pingree (2003-2007) previously served as elected state officials. Both Democrats, they were elected as presidents of Common Cause after unsuccessful campaigns (in 1998 Harshbarger lost a close race for Governor of Massachusetts to incumbent Republican Paul Celucci; in 2002 Pingree failed in her bid against the incumbent junior U.S. Senator from Maine, Susan Collins). Pingree resigned from her position as Common Cause President in 2007 and subsequently ran a successful 2008 campaign for Maine's 1st District seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The election of presidents from outside the organization and that were closely tied to the Democratic Party interrupted a line of promotion from within and weakened Common Cause's image as a nonpartisan organization. The election of well-known Democrats Harshbarger and Pingree pushed Common Cause under the Democratic umbrella. In 2007 another relative newcomer and a Republican, Jim Leach, was elected to chair the National Governing Board. His election was a means to reestablish a nonpartisan image, an effort cut short by Leach's brief tenure (2007-2008; Leach stepped down in order to publicly support Barack Obama's presidential campaign).

The critical juncture in leadership meant that relative newcomers led the organization through existential crises—both as Board Chair and President. The newcomers developed reorganization plans that kept the Common Cause name and identity as a government reform group but significantly amended Gardner's Rules. An overview of top leaders during Common Cause's second phase illustrates the critical juncture.

1. National Governing Board Chair

Edward S. Cabot stepped down as Common Cause Chair in 1999. He was succeeded by Derek Bok, a relative newcomer to Common Cause. Unlike the previous Chairs, Bok was not selected from among sitting Board members. Bok was a Harvard University Law Professor, Dean of the Law School, and University President (1971-1991). Bok continued as Chair until 2006, thus was a key figure throughout much of Common Cause's second phase.

Richard North Patterson, a best-selling novelist, former trial attorney, and liaison to the Watergate Special Prosecutor for the Securities and Exchange Commission, served on the Board for six years before his unanimous election as Chair in 2006. After serving one year, Patterson was replaced by Jim Leach in 2007.

Jim Leach, a Republican and former U.S. Representative from Iowa (1976-2007), was another relative newcomer to Common Cause. While in Congress, Leach supported campaign finance reform. During his own campaigns Leach refused PAC contributions or donations from outside Iowa. In 2007 Leach was a Princeton University professor and interim director of the Institute of Politics at Harvard University. Like Patterson he served as Board Chair about one year (2007-2008). Leach stepped down when he publicly endorsed Barack Obama in 2008 (Board Chairs are prohibited from endorsing candidates). Subsequently Martha Tierney, an attorney and expert in election law, Board Vice Chair, and Chair of Colorado Common Cause, became acting Board Chair until the election of Robert Reich in 2010.

2. President

In October 1993 Fred Wertheimer announced he would resign as President of Common Cause, effective when a successor was named. A slate of candidates—from both inside and outside the organization—were put forth and in 1995 the National Governing Board elected Ann McBride as President. McBride joined Common Cause's national office as a volunteer in 1972 before being hired the following year. She was a Senior Vice President for eleven years (1984-1995) prior to her election as President. McBride served in this role until early 1999.

When McBride left in 1999 the Board elected a newcomer, Scott Harshbarger, as Common Cause's next president. Harshbarger was Massachusetts Attorney General (1991-1999) and 1998 Democratic nominee for governor prior to joining Common Cause. Harshbarger served as President until 2002.

Harshbarger was succeeded by Chellie Pingree, a state senator in Maine from 1992 to 2000 (including serving as majority leader from 1996-2000). In the 2002 U.S. Senate race, Pingree was the (unsuccessful) Democratic candidate running against incumbent Susan Collins. In 2003 Pingree was elected President of Common Cause and served until 2007. She stepped down to run a successful campaign for U.S. Representative from Maine.

Robert W. Edgar, a member of the Board, became Common Cause President in 2007. Edgar, like Gardner, was an effective internal leader. He focused on the morale of the staff and volunteers, what Gardner believed to be the most important activity of an organizational leader. Under his leadership Common Cause moved into its third phase—renewal. Thus his presidency is discussed in Chapter Four.

Prior to 1999 the bulk of Common Cause Presidents' experience was in policy advocacy at the national level. Since 1999 presidents are selected not only from outside the organization, but are also experienced elected officials, most at the state level. Thus the critical juncture demarks a line of organizational leadership separated by political experience levels and types of advocacy—national/state, lobbying/serving as an official (with partisan identification affecting Common Cause's image as a nonpartisan organization).

Introducing relative newcomers to lead Common Cause's day-to-day operations also affected organizational culture. As Common Cause's first phase transitioned into the second, financial crises meant fewer employees on staff to pass on generational knowledge. The combination of bringing in leaders without investment in Gardner's Rules and loss of experienced staff comprised a tipping point toward significant change.

New environments, new leadership, and changing organizational culture built up pressures that contributed to significant change (similar to building pressures that result in earthquakes and sandpiles; see Jones and Baumgartner, 2005, p.148-150). Years of incremental adjustments softened up resistance to amending Gardner's Rules. Beginning in the 1990s, Common Cause leaders' adaptations established

new pathways that eventually lead outside Gardner's Rules—and which became critical to pockets of revitalization.

D. Second Phase Adaptations (1995-2007)

Loyalty to Gardner and the organizational structure that developed around his rules contributed to a status quo bias. During Common Cause's first phase, leaders sequentially chose adaptations that would address budget deficiencies. Their sieve-like incremental adjustments suggest loyalty to Gardner's Rules. Although insufficient to reverse declines in membership and total revenue, adaptations softened up resistance to change. The tipping point for amending Gardner's Rules occurred after the critical juncture in leadership.

Prior to the critical juncture, President Fred Wertheimer led Common Cause according to Gardner's Rules. In particular, his commitment to campaign finance reform reflected stamina and persistence, components of John Gardner's requirements for effective lobbying. Yet some people got tired of continued focus on an issue with no legislation in Congress.

Members of the Board wanted to do something—as opposed to Wertheimer's steady focus on lobbying for campaign finance reform. In his 2014 interview with historian Pauline Peretz, Wertheimer commented that the Board was composed of activists who came to Washington, D.C. to do something. In the early 1990s Board meetings occurred four times a year. During those meetings Wertheimer had to limit board members' desire to do something.

Wertheimer was also in the middle of power struggles between the national and state offices. State leaders wanted more representation on the National Governing Board and to have legal standing (the national organization was the only incorporated entity, reflective of Gardner's Rules heavy priority on lobbying Congress, not states, not courts). Financial pressures affected state funding structures, another source of tension. Wertheimer remained committed to Gardner's vision of a national organization because national issues attracted members and gave Common Cause its legitimacy.

Thus Wertheimer remained committed to Gardner's Rules even as the Board and states pushed for change. But exogenous and endogenous changes intensified pressure to amend the rules upheld by Wertheimer. Subsequent to leaving Common Cause, Wertheimer formed his own group (Democracy 21) to focus specifically on campaign finance reform.

1. Long-Range Mission Working Group (1993-1995)

Common Cause President Fred Wertheimer (1981-1995) announced in October 1993 that he would resign from Common Cause, effective upon the naming of his successor. A few months prior to Wertheimer's announcement, the National Governing Board formed a Long-Range Mission Working Group. The purpose of the group was to consider organizational priorities and how to efficiently use increasingly limited resources. With Wertheimer's announcement, the group used the transition to re-examine the internal structure and methods of operation developed under Gardner's Rules.

The Long-Range Mission Working Group submitted recommendations to the Board in December 1994 (Working Group on Organizational Change; Princeton Archives). Their recommendations began with a revised mission statement that was adopted the following year:

Common Cause is a non-partisan citizens' organization whose goal is to ensure open, honest, accountable and effective government at the federal, state and local levels. Common Cause seeks by sustained and focused lobbying campaigns, grassroots activities, and other efforts: To strengthen public participation and public faith in our institutions of self-government; To ensure that government and the political process serve the general interest, rather than special interests; To curb the excessive influence of money on government decisions and elections; To promote fair and honest elections and high ethical standards for government officials; and to protect the civil rights and civil liberties of all Americans.

Loyalty to Gardner's Rules was evident in continued emphasis on lobbying campaigns, but the addition of grassroots activities suggests a shift in attention toward outsider efforts in contrast to a strategic focus on lobbying Congress.

Common Cause's Articles of Incorporation (as amended through February 1974) focus on the policymaking process and supplying countervailing power to limit the influence of special interests. The document listed Common Cause's purposes as:

- (a) The improvement of our political and governmental institutions and processes on the federal, state and local levels;
- (b) The ordering of national priorities at the federal, state and local levels;
- (c) The attainment of domestic, military and foreign policies responsive to the needs of the nation and the will of its citizens.

To promote legislative, executive and administrative action and, where necessary, to take appropriate legal action to further these purposes.

To keep its members and the general public informed on these issues, thereby enabling them to make their voices heard on pertinent legislative actions at the federal, state and local levels.

The organization would keep members and the public informed on issues to enable them to take action.

In contrast the 1995 Mission Statement adds organizational strategies such as grassroots activities and strengthening public participation—distinctly at odds with the founders' intent.

Adding grassroots mobilization to the mission statement signaled organizational adaptation to changing environments. It helped establish a new strategic pathway away from Gardner's Rules. This project follows Kenneth Goldstein's (1999, p.3) definition of grassroots mobilization as "the identification, recruitment, and mobilization of constituent-based political strength capable of influencing political decisions." Thus grassroots mobilization is a top-down process instead of a groundswell rising from the bottom-up.

An element of Common Cause's uniqueness is the organizational role given to member activists. Members who rose up the ladder of engagement became invested in the organization. Leaders, particularly at the state level, interpreted this process as a form of activism rising from the bottom-up. Consequently a level of disconnect regarding grassroots activities existed among some leaders.

During Common Cause's first phase grassroots activism was part of the insider-outsider lobbying strategy, targeting specific officials and coordinated with the help of the Washington Connection. In 1992 President Fred Wertheimer and Vice President Ann McBride added a Grassroots Lobbying and Communications office. Attention to grassroots was not new to the national staff but the creation of a separate office is symbolic of an emerging pathway.

The Long Range Working Group's 1994 report recommended extensive development of a national grassroots movement (revisions submitted at the March 1995 National Governing Board meeting; see Princeton Archives). At about the same time, the total number of members was adjusted to reflect only those that gave money to the organization within the previous two years. Thus as demands for organizing members increased, their numbers dropped. Fewer members implied resource declines—both of which negatively affected Common Cause's ability to mobilize a national movement.

The 1994 report included recommendations for organizational structure and operations. Most were in line with Gardner's Rules (e.g. prioritize lobbying, a willingness to compromise to achieve some level of legislative success). The group also recommended consideration of forming a 501c3 arm to be used to "educate the public, particularly young people, about money's influence in the political process and the need for reform" and refraining from working on substantive policy issues.

Forming a 501c3 arm was proposed and voted down by the National Governing Board in 1993 and 1996 (see Princeton Archives). Fred Wertheimer, Common Cause President in 1993, believed strongly that the organization should not raise grants from foundations. Adding a 501c3 contradicted John Gardner's intent that full energy would be devoted to advocacy, funded by small donor contributions (based on Pauline Peretz' 2014 interview with Fred Wertheimer). Other reasons to reject the proposal were foundation grants would force Common Cause to distort its agenda in order to obtain grants and the organization would become dependent on funds from grants instead of its membership (comments made by a Common Cause leader during 2014 interview).

In 1996 the national staff put forward similar arguments against forming a 501c3 arm (by this time, Ann McBride was president of the organization). The staff's recommendation relied on Gardner's 1972 book *In Common Cause*. They argued Common Cause should continue as a lobbying organization with an "avowed purpose to influence legislation" (p.123). Also "We do not engage in educational campaigns for their own sake, nor research for its own sake . . ." (p.87). The main function of

educational activities and research was to support lobbyists' efforts. Subsequently the Board rejected the Long-Range Mission Working Group's proposal.

Before the critical juncture in 1999, loyalty to Gardner and his rules contributed to leaders' disproportionate information processing and status quo bias. Yet new pathways emerged, including emphasizing grassroots mobilization. Fred Wertheimer's stepping down from the presidency symbolized the end of playing the game strictly by Gardner's Rules. His successor, Ann McBride, was the last leader who worked for or with John Gardner at Common Cause. Although she was part of a leadership legacy, McBride's reorganization went beyond Gardner's Rules and the financial situation worsened.

2. McBride Reorganization (1995-1999)

After Fred Wertheimer announced his intention to resign in 1993, the National Governing Board created a Presidential Search Committee that ultimately met six times and had two lengthy conference calls. In addition Board Chair Ned Cabot retained the search firm Isaacson, Miller to assist with candidate recruitment. The firm composed a lengthy memorandum which was distributed to civic leaders who were then asked to suggest possible candidates. Common Cause leaders and Washington Connection members were given an opportunity to discuss the process and solicit recommendations. About 25 resumes were submitted to the Presidential Search Committee, leading to eight interviews. After an intensive search the Board elected the Common Cause leader who was next in line for the job, Ann McBride (information about the Presidential Search Committee's work may be found in Princeton Archives).

The National Governing Board Chair Ned Cabot announced Ann McBride's election to the Common Cause community in a letter dated March 13, 1995. Cabot's recommendation of McBride suggests a softening up of loyalty to Gardner's Rules and the adaptation preferred by the Board:

Common Cause has a splendid history and many strengths of which we can all be proud, but change is the law of life. We live in a world vastly different from the one in which John Gardner founded Common Cause. People often talk as if change were an option. In

other eras, that may have been so. In the late 20th century, change is not an “option.” It has become the law of life. We will either embrace change or see it sweep past us. . . . Common Cause cannot do everything, but there is a hole in the world which we must fill. We must build a grassroots citizens' movement unlike anything which now exists. That is the reason that we could not have a better new President than Ann McBride. I predict that when they write the story, they will say of her that she was a movement builder.

As President McBride used the Long-Range Mission Working Group’s recommendations as the basis for her reorganization plan. McBride’s plan was grounded on four principles which received support across the Common Cause community (From the February 1, 1996 Final Report of the Working Group on Organizational Change; Princeton Archives).

a. Increase Grassroots Action Capabilities

The Common Cause Board broadly defined grassroots action as involving “Common Cause members *and others* [italics added] in a concerted effort to change government . . . at the national, state and local level to make their concerns heard.” State leaders expressed mixed reactions to the new emphasis on grassroots mobilization. Their comments reflected conflicting perspectives of the role of state organizations—a source of tension since state offices formed. Some argued Common Cause was created to be a lobby and new grassroots efforts were not in line with the organization, a perspective based on Gardner’s Rules. Others argued the organization had always relied on grassroots strategies (e.g. activists rising up the ladder of engagement), a perspective based on the organization’s innovative advocacy infrastructure. For example, Common Cause Texas interpreted grassroots lobbying to mean pressure from home in the form of phone calls and letters to targeted legislators as well as meetings with the local media. They questioned whether it was “time to abandon that concept and take to the streets” (see Mailings to Members of the Common cause national Governing Board; 1997 September-1999 April 6; Princeton Archives).

The working group’s response to these concerns addresses both perspectives by arguing grassroots tactics should be based on particular state circumstances. In line with Gardner’s Rules, Common Cause offices in Rhode Island and Oregon developed Congressional District Action Teams,

based on an original Common Cause strategy from the early 1980s. McFarland described Action Teams as constituents lobbying their senator or representative in a “personal, continual, informed, and lengthy fashion” to promote a “sense of being watched by Common Cause” (McFarland, 1984, p.136-137). In line with increased emphasis on grassroots activism, state offices used strategies such as: Common Cause California activists collected signatures on initiative petitions; Common Cause Massachusetts worked with other groups to organize a town meeting on Congressional campaign reform; and fifty Common Cause members protested in front of Republican National Committee offices in Washington D.C.

In order to develop Common Cause’s grassroots capacity on a national scale, Ann McBride launched "Project Independence" (PI) in February 1997 (Project Independence data is found in National Governing Board Meeting; 1976-2002; Princeton Archives). The campaign was the result of conversations between McBride and Jerome Kohlberg, co-founder of the New York private equity firm Kohlberg, Kravis and Roberts and a long time Common Cause member. In 1995 Kohlberg and former U.S. Representative Mike Synar (D-OK) founded Campaign for America, a 501c4 dedicated to achieving campaign finance reform. The impetus for PI was the 1996 presidential election when soft money contributions raised by political parties tripled. For the PI campaign, Common Cause provided expertise and an advocacy infrastructure while Campaign for America provided financial resources. The campaign was co-chaired by former Senators Bill Bradley (D-NJ) and Alan Simpson (R-WY), and was endorsed by a variety of other organizations (e.g. AARP, Friends of the Earth, The Union of American Hebrew Congregations).

Project Independence was framed by Common Cause leaders as building a political movement by successively meeting three objectives. First, collect 1,776,000 signatures on a petition urging Congress to enact campaign finance reform legislation by July 4, 1997 (thus providing a list of potential activists to ascend the ladder of engagement). Second, use the petition process to build a cadre of citizen activists, or a new “citizens’ army for reform” to carry on the fight for campaign finance reform. Third,

demonstrate broad and deep popular support for reform by engaging citizens beyond the Common Cause community.

The Project Independence grassroots campaign was a tactic to turn around membership declines and stimulate a national reform movement. The project reinforced the grassroots mobilization pathway, turning organizational attention toward members and supporters and away from professional lobbying of Congress. Over one million signatures were collected which expanded Common Cause’s network of supporters but it did not increase total membership.

Grassroots mobilization also targeted young people. From the beginning Common Cause attracted a cadre of middle and upper-middle class professionals interested in enhancing governance integrity. When John Gardner founded Common Cause a supporter from Racine, Wisconsin wrote to him that “Your program is just the kind of aggressive, creative, imaginative program we need to prove to our young people that the ‘system’ can work” (the letter is one of hundreds responding to the formation of Common Cause, found in the Princeton Archives). TABLE 3.1 AGE DISTRIBUTION OF COMMON CAUSE MEMBERS highlights the skew toward older members.

TABLE I
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF COMMON CAUSE MEMBERS
1981-2015

Age Range	1981	2008	2015
65 or Older	33%	61%	51%
51-65	35%	23%	37%
41-50	12%	9%	7%
31-40	14%	5%	3%
Under 31	6%	2%	2%

Source: Membership surveys conducted in 1981, 2008, and 2015.

Across the years, Common Cause members are mostly over 50 years old. The data highlights increasing concentration of members from this age range—shifting from 68 to 88 percent from 1981 to 2014.

Attracting more young people is an ongoing goal of Common Cause. In the mid-1990s the National Governing Board Working Group argued that a 501c3 arm could be used to educate and encourage political participation among young people. Even though the 501c3 arm was voted down,

strategies to attract young people were emphasized or tried (e.g. being represented on the program and with booths during the music group R.E.M.'s 1995 tour; visiting college campuses; maintaining an internship program at the national office).

Like Wertheimer before her, McBride focused on campaign finance reform. Yet unlike Wertheimer she emphasized grassroots mobilization. Also unlike Wertheimer, McBride encouraged leaders to look for political opportunities where they arose.

b. Flexibility to Respond to State and National Political Opportunities

McBride's reorganization emphasized operational flexibility beyond lobbying Members of Congress. Expanding grassroots action turned the national office's attention toward state programs. A state issues organizer was added to the national staff in order to coordinate state and local level mobilization. Also the organizer facilitated national and state staff collaboration across the country (to diminish leaders' "reinventing the wheel" in various localities).

Increased attention to state offices introduced another pathway away from Gardner's Rules. Under Gardner's Rules the strategic focus was on Congress, not states, not courts. The national office's emphasis on political opportunities instead of lobbying Congress established another pathway leading away from Gardner's Rules.

c. Organized Presence in Every State

A central question was how to maintain a presence in every state even as Common Cause's membership and income declined. Allocating funds among all states limited operational flexibility to address political opportunities where they arose. Yet emphasizing grassroots mobilization required some level of organization at state and local levels.

The most controversial proposal of McBride's reorganization was terminating fund allocations to states with fewer than 2,500 members (or threshold states). In threshold states, volunteer leaders would be assisted by regional organizers and support staff in the national office. States with more than 2,500 members would receive additional allocations.

McBride's proposal exacerbated tensions between the states and national office. The Board's Working Group on Organizational Change revised the allocation formula to provide some level of funding for each state. The revised formula provided each state with a minimum allocation (for expenses such as a phone line). Additional funds were based on membership levels.

Many state offices successfully advocated for government reforms at the state and local levels as well as supporting national efforts. With no action on government reform occurring in Congress, successful influence was more likely to occur with state or local reforms. Similar to emphasizing grassroots mobilization and political opportunities within states, keeping a presence in each state did not comport with Gardner's Rules.

d. Unify and Coordinate State and National Staff

Prior to July 1, 1996 Common Cause State Boards hired, fired, and set salaries for state executive directors (data included in this subsection is taken from the Princeton Archives). State budgets were largely determined by national office budget allocations and rebates for state membership recruiting efforts. State boards and executive directors had a large degree of autonomy regarding spending their funds. Thus the presidents' authority over state directors was somewhat limited. At the same time, the national organization was the only legally incorporated entity, making the national office potentially liable for state leaders' actions. A unified staff clarified lines of authority, while State Boards continued in an advisory capacity and as the principal representatives of Common Cause in the states. In addition a unified staff centralized control over more mundane matters such as purchasing office equipment.

McBride also called for centralized control over all direct mail and telemarketing fundraising. Some states resisted, arguing these forms of fundraising were a means to communicate with members. Subsequently an opt-in or opt-out program allowed states to decide whether or not to continue their direct mail and telemarketing fundraising.

Unifying the staff shifted power from the states to the national office. But it also changed the organization's structure. The national office expanded to encompass state advocacy and fundraising efforts. Grassroots mobilization and looking to states for political opportunities, keeping a presence in each state, and unifying power undercut the action principles embodied in Gardner's Rules.

After the 1996 election and significant increase of soft money flowing to support campaigns, Common Cause's total revenue in 1997 increased (in line with the adversity theory; see discussion in Chapter Three). Subsequently net assets rose the following year (see FIGURES 4 and 5, p.51-52). Yet the organization's finances continued on their downward trend. Earlier adaptations such as cultivating large donors and bequest solicitations were expanded to make up for fewer membership renewals and contributions.

Financial constraints led to new adaptations. In 1996 national headquarters moved from occupying three floors at 2030 M Street NW (where it had been since 1981) to one floor at 1250 Connecticut Avenue, NW. During the October 1996 National Governing Board Meeting it was reported that each year the first issue of *Common Cause* magazine was sent to all members and about 15% returned a card saying they would like to receive future issues. The report added "the magazine is a quality but expensive publication, we will need to focus on the best way to communicate with members." In early 1997 the Board suspended publication of the magazine.

At about the same time, Common Cause introduced its first interactive website (in January 1997). An online presence was necessary to keep up with new technologies and evolving forms of collective action (e.g. individuated activism). In addition it improved efficiencies for member recruitment and grassroots efforts.

Common Cause members' connections to the National Governing Board were changing. Since the early years, members received an annual ballot to elect one-third of the Board. The ballot return rate throughout the 1990s was 10-12 percent or about half the return rate McFarland (1984, p.96) found a

decade earlier. The Board transitioned from 60 to 30 members from 1995 to 1997 (electing 10 board members each year instead of 20). Their meetings were already reduced from four to three times a year.

During the first phase, many cost-cutting adaptations took place in the national office. State offices had to adjust to allocation schedules and fundraising limitations. As financial challenges continued, McBride's reorganization plan moved toward centralizing power.

Tension between the national and state offices heightened during McBride's reorganization. Her four principles directly affected state leaders: (1) their response to a grassroots emphasis exposed a level of ambiguity about state office priorities (an issue since their formation by activists instead of national office planning); (2) operational flexibility introduced a level of instability to the resources and support they could expect to receive from the national office; (3) a presence in every state without increased funds would require attracting and retaining a number of volunteer activists; and (4) a unified staff affected the level of autonomy previously allowed state leaders.

Before Ned Cabot stepped down from the Chair position, he sent remarks sounding an alarm to the National Governing Board (dated June 20, 1998). Cabot argued continuing to follow a state funding structure established in the early 1980s was a questionable use of scarce resources. State allocations based on membership levels locked up resources needed to address political opportunities when and where they arose. His argument touched on a source of tension between the national and some state offices.

As McBride implemented her plan, efforts were made to bring state leaders into the decision making process. Unified staff meetings were held in 1996 and 1998. State leaders participated in Board-created strategic planning groups. In the national office, a State Issues Organizer position was added to promote coordination among the various offices. Common Cause helped states obtain a computer in order to promote linkages across the entire organization and take advantage of evolving technologies.

When Common Cause launched its first website in 1997 the list of online supporters jumped from 25,000 to 200,000 in months. Thus technology held great promise for expanding interest which

might produce a grassroots movement without officially joining an organization. By 1999 virtually everything Common Cause did “off-line” could be done online too (e.g. grassroots organizing, lobbying, providing up-to-date information to the media, releasing studies and reports about the role of money in politics, and recruiting and communicating with members).

Some Common Cause leaders remarked the organization focused on the benefits of new technologies without considering the costs. The new website saved money and increased the scale of operations. But it also created a need for a financially stable, intellectually credible flow of information which someone had to create, or “high-tech also needs high-touch.”

Common Cause was a bit slow to build an internet presence. Throughout the 1990s national and state level staff, as well as other resources, were being used to advance campaign finance reform (see Campaign Finance Reform—Second Phase *infra*). Organizational transition to the internet proceeded slowly as it took staff away from their daily tasks and staff was cut to balance the budget.

Also the internet is only one component of effective grassroots strategy. Online campaigns may promote widespread saliency and mobilization but need organization to sustain efforts for the long-term. As an established public interest group, Common Cause adapted to the internet incrementally. Grassroots mobilization via the internet was used in conjunction with face-to-face meetings, ad hoc coalition work, and other strategies.

During the late 1990s Common Cause leaders adapted by cutting budget expenses, moving toward centralizing power, and going online. Yet these adaptations were insufficient to overcome impending crises. Subsequently a critical juncture in leadership occurred beginning with the National Governing Board chair.

In 1999 a relative newcomer, Derek Bok, was selected as National Governing Board Chair. Bok continued as Chair until 2006, and became a key figure as Common Cause confronted ongoing crises during its second phase. Bok was elected as leaders were dealing with direct mail’s diminishing returns at the end of 1998. Marketing consultants recommended Bok’s arrival was a “major opportunity to ‘re-

introduce’ and reposition the organization”—words that, when followed, increased pressures building toward amending Gardner’s Rules (the consultants McBride hired were Frank O’Brien and Scott McConnell of O’Brien, McConnell, Pearson & West, a Washington D.C. firm. Their report may be found in the Princeton Archives).

One of Bok’s first tasks was to lead an ambitious review of the organization that he predicted would last about a year. At the February 1999 Board meeting Bok and McBride introduced a broad-based plan to build five- and ten-year goals for the organization. A goal they both wanted to see reconsidered was adding a 501c3 arm.

In March 1999 McBride unexpectedly announced her resignation. McBride’s implementation of recommendations by the Long-Range Mission Working Group further “softened up” resistance to amending Gardner’s Rules. Her reorganization established or strengthened new organizational pathways—toward grassroots mobilization and attention to state and local level advocacy.

Ann McBride’s departure signals the end of a line of leaders reaching back to Gardner. A Common Cause leader commented in 2014, “Like Fred Wertheimer before her, Ann McBride was extremely focused, especially on advancing campaign finance reform. Even though she introduced shifts toward grassroots activism there was continuity—Gardner [Conway] to Cohen to Wertheimer to McBride.” Donald Simon, Executive Vice President and General Counsel became acting President until the Board selected McBride’s successor.

3. Harshbarger Reorganization (1999-2002)

When McBride stepped down the National Governing Board conducted a search for someone from the outside to lead the organization. A Common Cause leader observed that “All previous presidents sat at the foot of Gardner. There was an attitude that they needed to open up the process, and they went outside rather than ‘inside the family.’ Gardner wrote about renewal—systems shouldn’t continue just for the sake of having the system, they do have to change.” In the summer of 1999 the Board selected a relative newcomer to the organization, Scott Harshbarger, as its fifth President.

Prior to joining Common Cause Harshbarger was Massachusetts Attorney General (1991-1999) and 1998 Democratic nominee for governor. A Common Cause leader commented that Harshbarger is energetic and has a good heart. He worked against big tobacco while Massachusetts Attorney General. During his tenure as Common Cause President improved the diversity of the national staff; for example, he hired Tom Hicks as Senior Lobbyist and Policy Analyst.

Scott Harshbarger and Derek Bok were both relative newcomers when they took over leadership of Common Cause in 1999. Both leaders' decision making was less encumbered by status quo bias and loyalty to Gardner's Rules. Together they led the ambitious review of the entire organization initiated in February 1999 and undertaken by strategic planning groups.

As strategic planning got underway, a report on organizational change was distributed which suggests a critical juncture. Board member Pat Stocker authored the report which noted bottlenecks are at the top of the bottle. In other words, those at the top of an organization are more likely to be constrained by disproportionate information processing. Stocker referred to a quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson, "There are always two parties, the party of the past and the party of the future; the establishment and the movement" and added "To which party do we in Common Cause belong?" (February 1999 National Governing Board files; Princeton Archives). The question divided experienced leaders. Some desired to open up the organization while others were concerned that organizational culture and identity that had cohered over time would be undervalued and become diffused (based on interviews with Common Cause leaders conducted in 2014).

The Board's strategic planning groups' reports indicated support for significant changes. Two months after arriving, Harshbarger reported to the National Governing Board:

Since assuming the presidency of Common Cause in August, I have learned a lot . . . I now fully realize that a big part of my job is to find ways to raise money. . . . In general, I think we need to establish a 501c3 educational arm of Common Cause; I think we all—as a staff and a Board—must increase our major donor fundraising; . . .

Thus Harshbarger's first order of business was revitalizing the organization, or what he called Action Plan for 2000 (based on documents in Princeton Archives).

a. A State of Near-Insolvency

At the February 2000 National Governing Board meeting Harshbarger proposed a revised 2000 budget. Revisions were necessary due to a \$750,000 revenue loss in 1999 mostly due to membership decreases, dismal performance of the appeals program, and fewer major and sustaining donors. A few months later, at the October 2000 Board meeting, Harshbarger reported "we are in a state of near-insolvency" (Princeton Archives).

Attention turned toward the number of state offices running budget deficits. Since 1982 it had been Board policy that any state deficit for one year would be covered by an allocation deduction the following year. Inconsistent implementation of the policy negatively affected Common Cause's overall balance sheet. The 2000 financial crisis meant the organization had no choice but to hold states accountable for their budget shortfalls.

States unable to recover deficits were forced to close their offices in 2001—Alabama, Arizona, Hawaii, New Hampshire, and Virginia. State offices in Kansas and Washington closed the following year. Although offices closed, the national staff provided a level of programmatic support for State Board members and volunteer activists (in line with pathways established by McBride).

Beginning in 2002 states no longer received an allocation from the organization's budget; instead the National Governing Board approved the amount each state received. That year \$400,000 was divided among 23 states (down from \$1.7 million in 2000). Fourteen states did not receive funding because: (1) they operated with a significant deficit; (2) they did not request funding; or (3) the state was not a funding priority (April 22, 2002 state funding proposals; Princeton Archives).

Cutbacks in some states meant a loss of Common Cause's presence within the political process. For example Common Cause Maryland's ability to lobby was significantly affected by the funding cuts. Daniel LeDuc of *The Washington Post* reported on January 11, 2001 that "Kathleen Skullney [the

Common Cause Maryland executive director and lobbyist], like her predecessors, was around all the time, part of the all-important link of gossiping among legislators, lobbyists, reporters and other insiders that are a key part of the way business is conducted and news is communicated during the 90-day General Assembly session.” Even though Common Cause’s presence in some states was diminished, ending allocations did not change Gardner’s Rules. But adding an educational 501c3 arm to the organization established a pathway outside the rules.

b. Common Cause Education Fund

Before the February 2000 National Governing Board meeting Harshbarger communicated with the Board about his Action Plan for 2000. He wrote “Standing still and more of the same are *not* options” [*italics his*] then listed eight top priorities, one of which was adding a 501c3 arm (Scott Harshbarger’s Action Plan for 2000; Princeton Archives). Harshbarger emphasized a new 501c3 Common Cause Education Fund (CCEF) would be used to support the 501c4 lobbying organization. Yet adding a 501c3 changed Common Cause’s focus from lobbying (which implicitly included research and educating leaders, staff, and members) to distinct programs for lobbying and research and education for a broader audience. A new pathway was established that, in contrast to McBride’s reorganization, diminished Common Cause’s dependence on its members.

The combination of financial exigencies, repeated recommendations to add a 501c3, and top leaders selected from outside the organization comprised a tipping point whereby practicalities overcame loyalty to Gardner’s Rules. Financial independence, or relying on mass-membership for the bulk of income, was instrumental to the founding of Common Cause. Adding a 501c3 arm in 2000 irrevocably changed this precept and the organization.

Accepting foundation grants and tax-deductible donations opened new revenue streams but also imposed organizational costs. Competing for grants required attracting media attention and mobilizing members in order to convince patrons of the organization’s potency—magnifying the importance of grassroots mobilization vis-à-vis insider lobbying (see Walker, 1991, p.12). Concerns remained that

small donors would switch contributions from the non-tax-exempt 501c4 lobbying entity to tax-exempt 501c3 CCEF (i.e. “cannibalize” the lobbying arm), thus a \$1000 minimum contribution was imposed (Princeton Archives). Grants were awarded to and distributed by the national office which became a source of contention among some state leaders who applied for and received grants.

After the Common Cause Education Fund was founded, the Board added civic engagement to the organizations agenda. The Board argued a general decline in political participation affected outsider lobbying. Also the issue was well-suited to CCEF 501c3 work as many foundations were concerned about civic participation.

Within months of its founding, the CCEF obtained several grants which set the tone for its civic participation research and education efforts. The Ford Foundation gave the CCEF \$115,000 in seed money to create a new civic engagement project. At about the same time, the Z Smith Reynolds Foundation awarded \$100,000 to be used for raising public awareness about campaign finance laws in North Carolina and funding outreach programs to college students, particularly those at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). The Park Foundation provided \$25,000 in start-up funds for the Common Cause Youth Initiative (CCYI), a program designed to improve civic engagement among the young through participatory democracy, or “learning by doing,” (similar to one of Gardner’s legacies; discussed by David Cohen *supra*).

The Common Cause Education Fund opened an important revenue stream to improve organizational survival. Yet it added pressure to mobilize large groups of people as a display of legitimacy and public support. Perhaps most significantly adding a 501c3 arm caused the organization to lose an element of its distinctiveness among other government reform groups.

c. The Citizen’s Army

The Citizens’ Army, an outgrowth of the earlier Project Independence campaign, was developed as a Common Cause Education Fund project. The intent of the Citizens’ Army was to attract and train unactivated citizens (i.e. secondary activists) to press for reforms across many localities. The Citizen’s

Army used contacts developed through Project Independence to contact potential activists on the local level.

Like Project Independence, the goal was to start a national grassroots movement. But instead of being part of an insider-outsider lobbying strategy focused on Congress, the Citizens' Army trained citizens to become local activists and eventually populate a nationwide grassroots movement. Thus the Citizens' Army took Common Cause further away from Gardner's Rules. Its name is symbolic of change—mobilizing a citizen's army instead of acting as a citizen's lobby. Also the differences between Project Independence and the Citizen's Army suggest that the definition of grassroots mobilization had not been settled by its leaders (e.g. top-down or bottom-up; see *supra*).

A Citizens' Army pilot project in New Jersey achieved notable success under the leadership of Common Cause New Jersey's Board Chair Harry S. Pozyski (1998-2005) and as a joint venture with the League of Women Voters of New Jersey and the New Jersey Public Interest Research Group. Their efforts between 1998 and 2002 attracted about 2,500 citizens who then successfully lobbied for reforms in 75 towns (see Leusner, 2000 and Raboteau, 2000). Reforms included banning political fund-raising on public property and requiring developers doing business with the town to disclose local political contributions.

In the early 2000s New Jersey's model of the Citizens' Army was tested in five other states—Colorado, Texas, Rhode Island, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania. State leaders were encouraged to find foundation grants to fund their projects and the national office would provide model legislation and legal support (based on files stored in the Princeton Archives). Acquiring foundation grants proved problematic. Common Cause leaders in Texas, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania prepared strategies and proposed grants but were unable to secure funding. Colorado and Rhode Island received some funds which were subsidized by the CCEF general fund.

The Citizen's Army attracted people who wanted to protect local government from big money influences. However, like the morning glories of Tammany Hall's George W. Plunkitt, the Citizens'

Army eventually disbanded. Also the lack of funding hurt momentum in the pilot states. This particular attempt to foment a grassroots reform movement from the local level up was unsuccessful. Yet the project developed a strategy that later became important to pockets of revitalization in Common Cause's third phase.

d. Technology

In a 2014 interview, a Common Cause leader shared several thoughts about Common Cause's adaptations to the internet. For example, in 2000 Common Cause stood at an internet precipice and a premonition of things to come financially. Also, the internet became key to attracting younger members and supporters. The interviewee concluded by stating in 2001 the internet was at "full blast."

The internet facilitated collective pursuit of specific issue programs. Online networks encouraged individuated activism (e.g. bottom-up grassroots participation) and grasstops coordination (e.g. individuals who lead groups or are in some way politically influential). Databases organized grasstops leaders according to issues, profession, and congressional district. These databases were seen as key to Common Cause's future effectiveness within the growing population of government reform interest groups.

The internet affected the insider-outsider lobbying strategy of Gardner's Rules. A May 2002 National Governing Board report noted that new technologies made the number of calls and letters needed to influence Congress exceed the capacity of the Washington Connection. Subsequently Washington Connection volunteers turned increasingly toward state level campaigns where officials were more responsive to grassroots pressure.

e. Representation

The National Governing Board's Governance Committee on Selection of Board Members recommended ceasing elections. Few members returned ballots, very few similar organizations elected their boards, the need for diversity on the Board often went unfilled, and the cost was excessive at over \$50,000 a year. Beginning in 2001 a nominating committee, whose members would represent U.S.

regions and both large and small state offices, would annually select ten nominees to replace those with expiring terms. The Board would give final approval to the nominees.

The loss of an elected Board was significant. In the 1970s having an elected governing board was put forth as a central part of Common Cause's image. It contributed to an image of the board—and subsequently the organization—as representative of the public. Ceasing board elections was a significant change in Common Cause's "branding" for the public.

An elected governing board was a form of descriptive representation as members used cues such as descriptive demographic and regional criteria when they cast their ballots. Suspending the elections diminished democratic and representative processes in the organization. In addition, National Governing Board ballots signified an empirical connection between members' preferences and Common Cause leadership, a form of representation that no longer existed.

However a mass-membership base remained important to the organization. Board members argued membership: (1) added legitimacy to lobbying efforts; (2) provided financial and activist resources; and (3) improved diversity across the organization. At about this time the number of supporters (e.g. non-member participants in the Citizens' Army) was added to the dues-paying member totals as an indication of public support.

Counting supporters with the membership totals was an adaptation to environmental changes. It took into account the growth of individuated activism. It also explained why in 2001 Common Cause publicly quoted their membership as 200,000 as opposed to a 131,145 base membership (defined as the number having paid at least \$10 in dues in last 20 months).

The "what" of representation no longer received member input. Without membership elections, Common Cause leaders were less accountable to members in their advocacy decisions. The "who" of representation was less evident as it included a diffuse group of Common Cause members plus individuals supporting specific issues. Yet because the Board decided to retain a mass membership base, the exit option continued to limit leaders' decisions.

f. Shifting Issue Focus

Harshbarger led the organization when two campaign finance reform laws were passed—21 years after the last such reforms. The *Full and Fair Campaign Finance Disclosure Act of 2000* imposed disclosure requirements on I.R.S. tax code Section 527 groups that did not expressly advocate for a specific candidate’s election or defeat. The *Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002* (BCRA) prohibited soft money contributions and imposed regulations on issue advocacy ads. Both represented the fruition of much effort by Common Cause (see discussion *infra*).

At the National Governing Board meeting following President Bush’s signing of the BCRA in March 2002, President Harshbarger and Board Chair Bok asked the board to convene a Task Force on Agenda and Message. The task force was comprised of board members and staff—including Harshbarger and Bok—and headed by Richard North Patterson, a member of the Board since 2000 and future Chair. Patterson issued the task force’s report in August 2002, a month before Harshbarger stepped down.

The Task Force on Agenda and Message issued recommendations for organizational direction following passage of the BCRA. For many years Common Cause’s major focus had been national campaign finance reform but now it was time to consider other options. Focus group research conducted by the task force found that “long-time members remain loyal out of affinity for the big-picture vision that inspired the founding of Common Cause” even though they did not “have a very clear sense of the specifics of our policy agenda or even how we pursue it.” In order to attract new members the task force suggested focusing on a substantive issue area, one that affected people in their everyday lives (based on records stored at Common Cause’s national headquarters).

On one hand, focusing on a substantive issue instead of structure and process reforms was a means to address questions of survival. A substantive issue expands the potential resource base and range of coalition partners (McAdam and Boudet, 2012; Tarrow, 2005; McAdam et al., 2001; Gerhards

and Rucht, 1992; Schattschneider, 1960). In addition, connecting organizational pursuits to personal concerns is a means to increase mobilization (Han, 2009).

On the other hand, focusing on a substantive issue was inconsistent with Gardner's Rules. It was also contrary to recommendations issued by the 1994 Working Group Report just eight years before. But it is indicative of how changing environments—in this case passage of significant campaign finance reform—and survival questions were addressed with new rules and norms. Scott Harshbarger stepped down as Common Cause president soon after the task force's report; thus, it was up to his successor, Chellie Pingree, to decide which substantive issue to pursue.

4. Pingree Reorganization (2003-2007)

Chellie Pingree was elected President of Common Cause after a six-month national search. Pingree's reorganization improved several elements of Common Cause's organizational structure. During a 2014 interview, one leader noted when Pingree arrived the national staff was very "silo-ed" (a characteristic not unique to Common Cause). The lobbyists worked in one corner, organization people running programs worked in another corner, the media department was in a third corner and there was not a lot of talking and sharing. The leader continued, Pingree "integrated everyone into everything"—including state leaders—so that people were aware of what other parts of the organization were doing.

Pingree's reorganization prioritized working in the states and building strong representation on the National Governing Board from the states (even as state funding reductions remained in effect). It was her goal to become "one Common Cause"—with regional directors assisting state operations (see files stored at national headquarters). A state executive directors' retreat was held in 2004. In this manner Pingree advanced McBride's earlier efforts to unify and centralize leadership. Yet Pingree's plans were challenged by another financial crisis.

a. Keeping Common Cause's Doors Open

Even though Common Cause membership levels improved in the early 2000s, by 2004 the financial situation was dire. Some concerns remained about the CCEF cannibalizing the lobbying

entity's funds. But an overarching need for funds predominated. National Governing Board Chair Derek Bok argued the bulk of Common Cause's revenues came from direct mail donations of under \$100, so a tax deduction might be appealing. In May 2004 the Board lowered the floor on CCEF contributions from \$1000 to \$100 (also see *supra*).

At the September 2004 Board meeting it was reported that Common Cause lost money in eight of the last nine quarters; for the first six months of 2004 the loss was \$1 million. Additional losses would require the auditor to evaluate whether or not Common Cause would be able to "continue to operate as a going-concern. Specifically, would we be able to keep our doors open?" (taken from files stored at national headquarters).

Drastic cuts were made to balance the budget and not incur a third consecutive year of loss. Ten staff members were laid off and those remaining took pay cuts, employee benefits decreased, and eleven staff voluntarily left. But savings from such cuts would not be felt until 2005.

Other savings came from national and state adaptations. Administration of the Common Cause blog was moved in-house instead of outsourced to a consultant. State offices eliminated their own consultants and made other cost-cutting adjustments such as moving to smaller offices and reducing travel costs. The Arkansas office closed.

Over the course of the next few months, revenues improved. Besides spending cuts, empty space was subleased in the 1133 19th Street national headquarters. Bequests, appeals, reinstatement of members, and revenue from the website went up. Staff dedicated to the major donor program had been cut in 2004, but in late 2005 a full-time fundraiser was hired. In addition, Pingree traveled across the country to meet with major donors.

Revenue also improved for CCEF accounts. Between 2005 and 2006 almost \$1.5 million was acquired to promote Media and Democracy work. Total revenue (501c4 and 501c3) increased from \$6.3 million in 2005 to \$13.4 million in 2006 but a level of volatility remained until the late 2000s. Common

Cause leaders' actions successfully staved off a second financial crisis. At about the same time, they added substantive issues to the agenda—another pathway away from Gardner's Rules.

b. Media and Democracy and Voting Integrity Reforms

After passage of the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002 and a subsequent constitutional challenge (see discussion of *McConnell v. Federal Election Commission* on p.149), resources were freed up to address other issues and political venues (see lobbying expenditure decrease from 2003 to 2004; FIGURE 8, p.109). A few months prior to Pingree's election the National Governing Board's Task Force on Agenda and Message issued their report with suggestions to add a substantive issue area that affected people in their everyday lives. Subsequently Pingree added Media and Democracy reforms to the Common Cause issue agenda.

The Media and Democracy issue area fit well within a mission to limit the influence of special, or economic, interests on the political process. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 enabled consolidation of local media stations. For example, after the act Clear Channel Communications amassed 1200 stations in all fifty states. In 2002 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced it was considering another rule change. Media conglomerates Viacom, General Electric, and Fox Entertainment Group filed comments with the Federal Communications Commission requesting that all ownership rules be eliminated. The salience of media consolidation rose with Senate Commerce Committee hearings, media forums, and published editorials. When the FCC issued new rules after only one hearing, opposing groups filed appeals with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit.

Common Cause had previously advocated for media reform but events around 2003 provided an opportunity for the organization to step into a new leadership role. At the time there were a number of small media organizations (most staffed by fewer than three people) addressing net neutrality and fighting media consolidation. Pingree instigated the Media and Democracy Coalition to coordinate advocacy efforts among about twenty-five organizations.

Foundation grants provided necessary funds for the Media and Democracy Coalition. In 2005 and 2006 the CCEF was awarded several grants. The ARCA foundation provided \$400,000; the Carnegie Foundation gave \$400,000; the Open Society Institute provided over \$500,000; and the Ford Foundation gave \$100,000 in funds. Foundation grants enabled the CCEF to produce reports shining a spotlight on media consolidation and corporate use of grassroots-type tactics to promote special interests.

Common Cause lobbyists then and now promote Media and Democracy issues by working with Members of Congress and other government entities (e.g. the FCC, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting board). Insider lobbyists were part of successful efforts in 2006 to restore money to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting budget by the U.S. House and Senate Appropriations Committees and to block relaxation of broadcast ownership rules by the FCC. Outside lobbying efforts included generating citizen comments to the FCC opposing a proposed rule that would relax cable ownership limits.

Common Cause led the Media and Democracy Coalition until 2007. At that time Common Cause was acquiring fewer foundation grants. Spinning off the Media and Democracy Coalition occurred under Robert Edgar's reorganization after Pingree stepped down. Subsequently Free Press became the coalition's leading organization.

Besides Media and Democracy, Common Cause turned its attention toward protecting voting integrity—a highly salient issue after the 2000 presidential election. Voting issues were also a way to shift organizational attention toward state programs. Prior to the 2004 election, the CCEF produced 23 state-specific voter advisories to give voters specific information (e.g. voting machine information, provisional ballots, absentee voting). A national guide to voting rights was produced, *What to Watch for at the Polls*. After the election, the CCEF produced *Report from the Voters*, with analysis of exit poll data collected on Election Day.

In 2014, a Common Cause leader commented that “presidents beginning with Chellie opened the door to returning to Gardner’s original vision” and noted “campaign finance reform was an obsession in 1980s and 1990s.” Yet the extent to which the organization could return to Gardner’s vision is questionable. By the time Pingree was president a 501c3 arm had been added, something Gardner was adamantly against. Under her leadership Common Cause’s lobbying strategies continued to shift away from Congress and toward other political arenas (e.g. executive agencies, state arenas, and public education), thus destabilizing strategic focus.

The critical juncture in leadership added enough pressure to tip Common Cause away from the status quo and toward significant amendments to Gardner’s Rules. New pathways established from McBride to Pingree’s presidencies—grassroots mobilization, attention to state campaigns, the CCEF, Media and Democracy campaigns—changed Common Cause’s “brand” as a national government reform lobby. Leadership decisions continued in a sieve-like process (i.e. if one decision does not effectively address the problem, then another is tried; see Jones and Baumgartner, 2005, p.142-145) but were less constrained by Gardner’s Rules. Their decisions also changed representation processes set up by Gardner and early leaders.

E. Dual Representation Processes Dismantled

During Common Cause’s second phase characteristics of dual representation were dismantled. Common Cause leaders increasingly acted more like trustees than delegates when selecting what the organization represented. Linkages suggesting some level of representing members were suspended or compromised by environmental exigencies.

What Common Cause represented during the 1990s was mostly campaign finance reform (although the organization pursued a variety of other issues, campaign finance reform was prioritized at the national and state levels). Leaders focused on lobbying for campaign finance reform even as the organization slid toward insolvency. The national grassroots campaign, Project Independence, was run from the top-down in order to build support for Common Cause’s campaign finance reform program.

With success of campaign finance reform in the early 2000s leaders added two new issue areas—Media and Democracy and Voting and Elections. Unlike the first phase, members were not polled to discern their top issue concerns. Specific policies within the issue areas were also determined by top leaders.

Leaders walked a fine line in their public expressions of what Common Cause represented. Critical systemic problems had to be framed in way that conveyed urgency. They also had to navigate between “inspiring hope and inspiring moral outrage” (see Princeton Archives). Ann McBride wrote in 1998 that:

Common Cause is often in the role of being both a stern critic of the existing system, but also a voice of optimism and hope about the ability of citizens to prevail over entrenched interests to change the *status quo*. With increasing frequency the American people are succumbing to a sense of cynicism . . . We must constantly strive to counteract this frustration and cynicism.

In 2000 leaders were encouraged to use frames such as “Common Cause is a strong vehicle for taking on the special interests,” or applying countervailing pressure (see February 7, 2000 Memo to Scott Harshbarger Regarding Common Cause’s 2000 Message; Princeton Archives).

Governance integrity, the “what” the organization represented, remained consistent. But amending Gardner’s Rules destabilized how it was represented. New leaders established organizational pathways that compromised the organization’s reputation as a national government reform lobby.

During the second phase questions of survival became paramount. Leaders turned their attention toward major donors, bequest solicitations, and foundation grants. In their trustee roles, leaders sacrificed delegate processes to save the organization (e.g. suspending Board elections to cut costs). When compared to the first phase, who the organization represents is based less on members and their exit option and more on maintaining relationships with large donors and foundations.

Yet a mass membership-base (or member/supporter base) remained an important element of Common Cause leaders’ claim to represent a public interest even as large donors become more

important. A membership base spread across the country legitimated the organization. As members mobilized their actions gave credence to how leaders framed policy problems and solutions.

Leaders' decisions continued to be limited by membership preferences but in different ways. Decreasing levels of member resources (dues, contributions, and activism) exacerbated the need to cut expenses and cultivate other sources of income. Also there was a perceived lack of interest in subscribing to *Common Cause* magazine and participating in National Governing Board elections so both were suspended.

Membership issue surveys, once a key component of delegate-type representation, were returned at a low rate. In 1996 the number of surveys returned were approximately 12% of the total number mailed (surveys and Board election ballots were included in the same mailing, thus a similar return rate is unsurprising). Three survey questions were asked about Common Cause issues and all three received over 90 percent agree or strongly agree votes from members. Thus even though issue surveys continued, they became part of a marketing strategy.

Yet then and now leaders continue to pay attention to survey results in order to assess levels of support for issue areas. Membership dues and contributions comprise a major revenue stream for Common Cause. If member surveys indicate broad disapproval then the leaders notice. In this manner, members still exert influence through the exit option (although the influence is comprised by the addition of the CCEF and foundation grants).

Common Cause's image or "branding" as representative of a public interest was diminished by the loss of delegate representation processes. For example, members lost a very real connection to the organization with suspension of electing National Governing Board members. Even though members knew little about alternative candidates, the opportunity to vote in Board elections enhanced descriptive representation.

In addition, many state offices were affected by budget cuts as they operated with diminished funds or were forced to close. Fewer state offices and fewer members affected the number of

congressional district steering committees. In general there were fewer physical representations of the organization across the country.

The introduction of the Common Cause website in 1997 and its update in 2004 expanded communication to potential supporters. At the same time it enhanced top-down control of the organization's public image and framing of messages. The development of individuated activism forced leaders to attract "customers" (see Wilson, 1995, p.235) based on issues instead of organizational goals.

As in its first phase, Common Cause leaders prioritized acting-for over standing-for representation, or the "what before the who." Yet during the second phase dynamics between the "what" and the "who" changed. Agents (leaders and lobbyists) continued to make a representative claim but the composition of the principal accepting those claims now included individuated activists and foundations. Changing dynamics meant leaders' trustee roles strengthened as delegate processes were dismantled.

F. Campaign Finance Reform—Second Phase

Common Cause's reputation as a one-issue group grew during the 1990s as leaders, loyal to the rules, focused on lobbying Congress for campaign finance reform. Widening loopholes undermined FEC regulations and increased the salience of campaign finance reform. From 1995 to 2001 (104th to 107th Congress) Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Russ Feingold (D-WI) and Representatives Chris Shays (R-CT) and Martin Meehan (D-MA) introduced versions of what eventually became the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002. The bills sought to regulate issue advocacy advertisements and soft money contributions.

Common Cause Presidents Fred Wertheimer and Ann McBride focused on these versions of campaign finance reform. Both lobbied and worked on strategies with sponsors of the bills. State leaders supported national lobbying by mobilizing members and pressing for similar state level reforms.

The McCain-Feingold and Shays-Meehan campaign finance reform bills were designed to close regulatory loopholes created by "Stealth PACs" (organizations that are not regulated by the FEC

because they do not expressly advocate for the election or defeat of a candidate) and soft money. By 1996 “Stealth PACs” were proliferating. Even more concerning was the amount of soft money flowing to state political parties (see discussion of soft money in Chapter Three). Soft money spending shot up significantly in the 1996 and 2000 elections.

Also in 1996 political parties began using the express advocacy “magic words” loophole opened by the *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976) decision. That year party committees began running sham issue ads that avoided express advocacy words and that were funded by soft money contributions. Thus the parties avoided hard money regulations while in effect advocating for the election or defeat of candidates.

Following the 1996 elections, Common Cause’s Project Independence (PI) campaign was designed to build outsider lobbying in support of campaign finance reform (see *supra*). During the campaign, Common Cause collected over one million signatures from citizens supportive of reform. In the fall of 1997 Common Cause called on this “citizens’ army” to pressure Senators (e.g. contacting their Senator, writing letters to the editor) to pass S. 25 (the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 1997). The bill, sponsored by McCain and Feingold, reached the Senate floor. A counterpart bill introduced in the House by Representatives (H.R. 493) by Representatives Shays and Meehan did not make it to the floor that session.

Outsider Project Independence lobbying supplemented Common Cause’s ongoing insider lobbying with political officials. For example, in January 1997 Ann McBride was invited to the White House to meet with President Clinton, Senators McCain and Feingold, and U.S. Representatives Shays and Meehan to map out strategy for campaign finance reform. In President Clinton’s State of the Union Address the following month, he listed campaign finance reform as one of three pieces of unfinished business. He set a deadline of passing the McCain-Feingold bill by July 4, 1997 (which compares to the first PI objective—collect 1,776,000 signatures on a petition urging Congress to enact campaign finance reform legislation by July 4, 1997).

By July 4, 1997 seventy campaign finance reform bills had been introduced during the 105th Congress. President Clinton, and Common Cause, endorsed S. 25 (the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 1997) sponsored by McCain and Feingold and its House counterpart H.R. 493 sponsored by Shays and Meehan. A modified version of S. 25 made it to the Senate floor in the fall of 1997 but several Republican filibuster votes made it clear that even though all 45 Senate Democrats and at least four Republicans publicly favored reform there were not enough cloture votes (Gitell, 2003).

At about this time, there was some public criticism of Common Cause (see Victor, 1997). Critics wrongly suggested the organization had “failed to achieve anything in twenty-five years” and “become just another member of the Washington establishment” cutting backroom deals. Also Common Cause was condemned for pursuing an incremental reform strategy instead of “a grassroots campaign for a system of full public financing of primary and general elections.” Yet these complaints reveal Common Cause lobbyists continued to act according to Gardner’s Rules—developing relationships among Members of Congress and being willing to compromise to achieve reform.

In 1998, Common Cause mobilized its “citizens’ army” to press for passage of campaign finance reform (see Princeton Archives). Approximately 100,000 citizens in targeted congressional districts called their representative in support of Shays-Meehan. In general, 30 people per day called each target Member from late May to early August. In August 1998 the House voted on H.R. 2183 (or the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 1998), a bill sponsored by Shays and Meehan. The bill passed the House with significant support (a 252 to 179 vote, including 61 Republicans) but died in the Senate, although about 40,000 citizens were recruited to call their Senators in just one week.

Common Cause encouraged the “citizens’ army” to hold their Senators and Representatives accountable if they voted against campaign reform in the fall of 1998. An October 1998 memorandum to the National Governing Board stated:

It is critically important . . . that Members of Congress who opposed reform, particularly those Senators responsible for killing McCain-Feingold, go home this month and

encounter constituents who are both well-informed and displeased with the actions of their Members.

National staff developed and released a “Common Cause Public Integrity Report Card,” grading House and Senate Members on campaign finance reform legislation during the 105th Congress (1997-1999). The report card was distributed to the media, at candidate events, and in local communities. A letter-to-the-editor campaign was launched (see Princeton Archives).

Also, staff declared it “important to be able to identify for Representatives Shays and Meehan a group of pro-reform freshmen who are on record in support of . . . a real soft money ban.” In about fifty congressional districts there was a competitive race or an open seat. Activists were recruited to “pop the question” at candidate events, asking candidates to pledge support for a Shays-Meehan style soft money ban. Activists were recruited to visit campaign offices to deliver literature or demonstrate. Citizens were asked to call congressional campaign headquarters to urge support for a soft money ban.¹⁷

The national staff used the internet to forward the campaign. The Common Cause website included the only fully searchable source on the Internet for soft money contributions to the Democratic and Republican national party committees, or the “Soft Money Laundromat.” The database was updated after the 1998 elections and was one of the most-visited pages on the website.

Common Cause state offices achieved notable campaign finance reforms even as they joined national reform efforts. In the late 1990s almost half the states passed some type of campaign finance reform (see Dreyfuss, 1998). A report presented to the National Governing Board in October 1998 (and stored at the Princeton Archives) states:

Common Cause has been highly visible in the news over the past two years. This has come in part from our well received criticism of the fundraising practices in the 1996 election, in part from the ongoing congressional fight for campaign finance reform, in part from respectful attention accorded to our frequent money-in-politics studies, and in part from the successful ballot initiative campaigns conducted by the state organizations around the country.

¹⁷ More details about the development of the 1998 “citizens’ army” campaign are found in October 1998 Memorandums to the National Governing Board; Princeton Archives.

In addition Common Cause's legal staff supported state reforms as intervenor in several court cases.

During the 106th Congress (1999-2000) campaign finance reform legislation again passed in the House (HR. 417) but died in the Senate (S.1593). In the summer of 2000 Common Cause launched a "Contract for Reform" campaign. The campaign was loosely based on Speaker Newt Gingrich's "Contract with America." The contract asked candidates to sign a pledge indicating their support of: (1) banning soft money; (2) regulating campaign ads masquerading as issue discussion; and (3) providing public resources, like free TV time, to candidates. The goal was not to get a certain number of pledges but to use the Contract as a means to make sure that campaign finance reform was a high-profile issue during the campaign season. Washington Connection volunteers called key activists in targeted districts and states who would "hound" candidates regarding the Contract.

Around the same time Common Cause published the study "Under the Radar: The Attack of Stealth PACs on our Nation's Elections." Insider lobbyists used the report as they worked with Senators Carl Levin (D-MI) and Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) and Representatives Shays, Meehan, and Michael Castle (R-DE) to enact legislation requiring public disclosure for all 527 groups. On July 1, 2000 President Clinton signed the bill (Public Law No: 106-230), marking the first time in 21 years that a notable campaign finance proposal had been signed into law.

During the 107th Congress (2001-2003) Senators McCain and Feingold and Representatives Shays-Meehan introduced Bipartisan Campaign Reform bills (S. 27 and H.R. 380). After acquiring enough signatures for a discharge petition the bill passed the House 240-189 in February 2002. In the Senate, the McCain coalition finally won over enough Republican Senators to pass the bill (60-40). President George W. Bush signed the bill on March 27, 2002.

The *Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002* (BCRA) banned soft money contributions to candidates and political parties. It also addressed the proliferation of sham issue ads (advertisements paid for by independent expenditures that clearly identified federal candidates and which were aired to that candidate's constituency) by redefining them as "electioneering communications" when aired in the

30 days before a primary or 60 days prior to a general election. Electioneering communications had to be paid for with hard money thus fell under Federal Election Commission regulations. Corporations, labor unions, and non-profit organizations were prohibited from using general treasury funds for electioneering communications ads.

Passage of the *Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002* was a signal achievement for Common Cause. As the fight was nearing its end, Senator McCain said on the Senate floor “I am compelled to mention a few indispensable supporters . . . all the good folks at Common Cause: Scott Harshbarger, Meredith McGehee, Matt Keller, Don Simon, including Scott Harshbarger’s talented and wonderful predecessor Ann McBride” (Congressional Record, March 20, 2002, p. S2159). A celebratory press conference held by Common Cause on the day the bill passed was aired on CNN.

Pushback began immediately after passage of the BCRA as advocacy groups and corporate-backed political action committees (PACs) challenged financial reforms in court. In *McConnell v. Federal Election Commission* (540 U.S. 93, 2003), the Supreme Court upheld Congress’ authority to ban soft money contributions to candidates and political parties. In addition, the Court upheld limits on advertising by corporations, labor unions, and non-profit organizations, including distinctions between express and issue advocacy and if aired within sixty days of an election. Subsequent legal challenges to the BCRA met with more success (see Campaign Finance Reform discussion in Chapter Five) but in the meantime Common Cause shifted its attention to Media and Democracy at the national level and voting integrity within the states.

During Common Cause’s second phase the organization achieved notable campaign finance reforms at the national and state levels. Passage of the BCRA in 2002 was similar to the critical juncture in leadership. It created an opening for leaders to prioritize new issues and strategies. Their adaptations addressed the perception of Common Cause as a one-issue group but moved the organization further away from Gardner’s Rules.

G. Conclusion

Second phase leaders punctuated Common Cause's narrative. During the 1990s Gardner's Rules were increasingly mismatched with environmental characteristics. When Common Cause President Fred Wertheimer, a staunch defender of Gardner's Rules, stepped down it provided an opening for other leaders to amend the rules.

The combination of existential crises and a critical juncture in leadership comprised the tipping point at which incremental adaptations alone were no longer tenable. In the early 2000s leaders who were relative newcomers to Common Cause prioritized survival more than loyalty to the rules. Subsequently major shifts occurred as the CCEF was created, grassroots mobilization and state programs gained prominence, expenditures on lobbying plummeted, and a new issue area—Media and Democracy—was prioritized.

Collective action changed during the course of the second phase as lobbying Congress became less productive. Grassroots mobilization shifted organizational emphasis from professional lobbying supported by members to pressuring public officials from the outside. Introduction of the internet and individuated activism broadened collective reach but how much it improved action is unclear.

Common Cause survived as a public interest lobby by focusing more on resources than representation processes. The dismantling of National Governing Board elections and other forms of representation, even if limited, closed an avenue of member input into how the organization represented their interests. The who, or members, continued to hold some level of influence through the exit option. Yet the what of representation (advancing government integrity) fell even more under the control of top leaders. Without representation processes in place and with declining membership totals, the what was defined more by leaders' representative claim and the interests of major donors (e.g. Project Independence) and foundation preferences (e.g. civic engagement).

Gardner's Rules were the basic action principles set forth by John Gardner and early founders of Common Cause. Amending the rules destabilized the organization. More importantly, amending the

rules established pathways which diminished Common Cause's distinctiveness among government reform groups.

Yet the balanced tension between idealism and pragmatism (reflected in John Gardner's brand of charisma) continued to attract and retain a level of membership. In 2007 Robert Edgar was elected President of Common Cause. Edgar tapped into this balanced tension and laid the groundwork for pockets of revitalization.

IV. RENEWAL—PLAYING BY NEW RULES (2007-2017)

The Common Cause of today is not the Common Cause of 1970.

The volunteer structure has changed; as presently constituted, it is in danger of extinction.

Excerpts from 2014 interviews

A. **Pockets of Revitalization**

In 2014 Common Cause's national headquarters belie the fact that in the late 1990s and early 2000s the organization's survival was questionable. The headquarters consume most of the 9th floor of an office building near K Street in Washington D.C. As the elevator doors open on the 9th floor, one immediately steps into Common Cause's reception area. To either side of the reception area offices are filled with Common Cause staff. Expansion of the digital strategies office is underway. Regional directors work with staff and volunteers in 35 states. On Tuesdays, Washington Connection volunteers gather to advance issues at the national and state levels. Each Thursday new staff members or interns stop by each office with a candy tray, facilitating introductions and comradery (a tradition reaching back to Gardner's tenure). National headquarters hums with people meeting in offices, participating in conference calls, and going about the business of operating a public interest group.

Common Cause retains its quest to improve governance integrity but its action principles follow new pathways, contrary to Gardner's Rules. During the organization's second phase, leaders' resistance to amending the rules weakened with changes to the external environment and threats to the interest group's survival. Subsequent adaptations destabilized the organization yet opened space for new leaders and a renewed organization.

Chapter Five analyzes Common Cause's third phase, beginning around 2007 when new rules and norms took root. Media and Democracy and A Fair Economy substantive goals joined the issue agenda with structure and process goals. Accepting foundation grants led to new programs promoting civic engagement. As digital strategies strengthened, the insider-outsider lobbying strategies developed in the

1970s weakened. Leaders continued to frame advocacy as nonpartisan (which many members echoed) even as partisan polarization made this approach almost impossible.

The third phase is distinctive for state efforts' rise in importance and effectiveness. With an increasingly gridlocked Congress, battles for political influence raged at the state and local levels. Common Cause joined the fray by leading rowdy, and successful, protests in several states against corporate influence on state legislators (for this project, protests are defined as a face-to-face gathering as a demonstration of opposition). Leading a rowdy protest was out of the norm for the organization, a fact commented on by a *Washington Post* reporter (see *infra*). Several state offices organized action teams to educate and mobilize local members. State level achievements included moving redistricting responsibilities from state legislators to a citizens' commission in California and same day voter registration in Illinois.

New rules and norms changed dual representation. Although governance integrity remained the primary goal, what Common Cause represented expanded from lobbying specific issues to democracy reform. Leaders continued to act as trustees under the limitations of supporters' exit option. Individuated activism (facilitated by the internet) increased the fluidity of membership according to issue campaign. The who expanded to a more amorphous interpretation of issue- and Common Cause-supporters.

Campaign finance reform again rose in importance among Common Cause issues. Staff leaders acted to protect recently won reforms in a line of Supreme Court cases. Even more significant was the Court's decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (558 U.S. 310, 2010). The decision allowed corporations and labor unions to use general treasury funds for spending during elections. Subsequently Common Cause mobilized national, state, and local campaigns calling for a constitutional amendment to overturn the Court's decision. State and local efforts succeeded in nineteen states and numerous localities by 2017. Some leaders expressed doubt whether an amendment was actually

feasible and questioned using scarce resources on this issue. They also noted this particular advocacy tactic represented a new pathway outside Gardner's Rules.

Gardner's Rules and the organizational culture built on them no longer predominated. New pathways established in response to existential crises led toward different issues, strategic focus, and an emphasis on democracy reform. Most significantly, the pathways led to organizational renewal and pockets of revitalization within changing exogenous and endogenous circumstances.

Chapter Five extends analysis of the hypotheses and research questions: How do adaptations—whether incremental or major shifts—change an organization? And what can a public interest lobby tell us about citizen participation and representation? Also analysis of Common Cause's pockets of revitalization speaks to theories of interest groups (within a population and as an organization), the changing nature of collective action, lobbying tactics, and the process of representation in the U.S. political system.

H1: Large public interest groups tend to follow the rules and norms set up under the founding leadership and first years of success.

H2: Large, long-term public interest groups change their founding rules and norms only when there are changes to the external environment and under threats to the interest group's survival.

B. Playing by New Rules—Instability and Renewal

Common Cause's second phase was distinctive due to the combination of environmental changes, existential threats, and a critical juncture in leadership. Together these circumstances helped overcome resistance to amending Gardner's Rules, yet destabilized the organization. Returning stability and renewal marked Common Cause's third phase even as the external environment made it more difficult to pass reform legislation. The organization's financial situation stabilized as the Common Cause Education Fund acquired numerous grants. Moreover, membership totals reversed their decline and turned upward. Leaders after the critical juncture blazed new pathways signifying a new phase in

Common Cause's narrative. Improved finances, membership, and morale contributed to organizational renewal and pockets of revitalization.

1. Exogenous Circumstances

During Common Cause's third phase, the two major political parties' ideological divide widened which entrenched congressional gridlock and lessened chances for reform. Public opinion became increasingly mistrustful of government (see APPENDIX B: GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND PUBLIC TRUST). Egregious ethical violations in Congress met with coordinated pushback from Common Cause and other groups. Government reform groups continued to multiply and Common Cause became a convener of coalitions, advantaged by its longevity and network of political and activist connections. Internet providers used analytics to track users and assess interest (or Web 2.0), strategies adopted by many interest groups as a means to engage individuated activists (see Karpf, 2016).

a. Extreme Party Polarization

Ideological separation between Democrats and Republicans grew during Common Cause's third phase, as measured by Democrats and Republicans' roll-call votes in the U.S. House and Senate. Since the late 1970s (96th Congress) Senators more often used filibusters and holds in order to block debate on proposed legislation (Howard and Roberts, 2015). A hold is a parliamentary power whereby a Senator may prevent a motion from reaching a vote on the Senate floor, a legislative roadblock that, like a filibuster, may only be removed by sixty Senators willing to invoke cloture.

Common Cause campaigned for filibuster reform from a number of fronts. The organization filed an unsuccessful constitutional challenge to the filibuster in *Common Cause v. Biden* (2012) with seven other plaintiffs: Common Cause; four Members of the U.S. House of Representatives (John Lewis (D-GA), Michael Michaud (D-ME), Henry (Hank) Johnson (D-GA), and Keith Ellison (D-MN)); and three individuals whose lives were negatively affected by a filibuster regarding immigration reform (Ms. Erika Andiola, Mr. Celso Mireles and Mr. Caesar Vargas). The case was thrown out as an intrusion on the Senate's powers for the court to decide and because it presented a nonjusticiable

political question. The challenge is symbolic of increased identification of Common Cause with the Democratic Party.

In November 2013 the Democratic-led Senate voted to change cloture requirements for presidential nominations (except Supreme Court nominees). The threshold of votes necessary to invoke cloture for these nominations lowered from 60 to 51. Following the change, Republicans blocked unanimous consent requests to act on nominees, a tactic which stopped the process before a confirmation vote could be held. As a result, over 250 nominees to judicial and executive positions were pending on the Senate floor as of May 2014. At a comparable moment in George W. Bush's presidential administration, there were fewer than 50 nominations waiting for the Senate's approval.

Common Cause Policy Counsel, Stephen Spaulding, analyzed the situation in his report "The New Nullification at Work: Executive Branch Nominations and the Tactics of Obstruction" (the phrase "new nullification" was coined by Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein in 2012). After the report's publication, Common Cause hosted a well-attended panel discussion at the National Press Club which was subsequently uploaded on the YouTube website (but later removed).

Even in an increasingly gridlocked Congress, Common Cause lobbyists and leaders continued their efforts to avoid cooptation by ideological or partisan labels. In 2014 a leader commented that they find specific issues to connect with Republicans on and always reach out to sympathetic Republican offices and staff in Congress. Yet Republicans do not want to go out on a limb in a polarized environment.

The Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002 passed due to the support of moderate Republicans. Significantly fewer Republicans supported Common Cause efforts to pass additional campaign finance reforms such as public financing of congressional campaigns or redistricting reform. Common Cause continued to lobby Congress. Organizational resources shifted toward state campaigns where legislators were more sympathetic. However, some state legislatures appear to be following

Congress; for example, political scientist Mark Jones found a widening ideological gap between Democrats and Republicans in the Texas House of Representatives and Senate (Jones, 2013 and 2015).

Within states there continued to be instances of Common Cause working with both sides of the ideological spectrum. One leader commented, “we can bring citizens from left and right together . . . we are not written off as another left of center liberal organization but are known for being a nonpartisan and nonprofit organization.” Another leader recounted how there are limited opportunities for the two sides to unite but sometimes it happens and the two parties “circle back.” For example, Florida Common Cause and Tea Party activists joined forces in a coalition supporting creation of an ethics board for Tallahassee officials. Growing public alarm over governance integrity matters from both sides of the spectrum provided an opportunity for Common Cause to work with the Tea Party—a fact that many familiar with the organization would find amazing. It also enabled Common Cause to continue its claim to be a nonpartisan organization.

b. Public Opinion and Cynicism

In a 2014 interview with historian Pauline Peretz, Fred Wertheimer (Common Cause President from 1981 to 1995) assessed changes in public opinion. He observed in the late 1960s and early 1970s “people were angry and upset, but they were not cynical . . . [they thought something] could be done and did do something, as opposed to today.” He added now it is more difficult to get people to think something can be done. Congress is totally dysfunctional (“you can’t pass anything”) and the Supreme Court is very hostile.

Public opinion polls (see APPENDIX B: GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND PUBLIC TRUST) empirically support Wertheimer’s assessment. Recently the number of people who believe government operations is the most important problem rose to mid-1970s Watergate-era levels. Trust in the federal government to do what is right almost all of the time is lower than it has ever been in over fifty years of poll data.

A Common Cause leader recalled the organization's original vision was that everyone shares an interest in government operating in its proper arena (in line with governance integrity being a public quality; based on "Representing Public Qualities," Sultan Tepe and Andrew McFarland, typescript, University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Political Science), whatever their ideological perspective. Yet in 2014 "People have a sense government is rigged by the wealthy which leads to a toxic downturn in participation." Cynicism rose as increasing amounts of money were spent during elections, the Supreme Court undid campaign finance reforms, Presidents disappointed, and Congress was viewed as a "joke."

Congruence between Common Cause issues, public opinion, and political opportunities changed over the organization's history. Common Cause arose in conjunction with the social movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s and quickly attracted a national following. Forty years later its name is less well known. Leaders explained Common Cause's voice has been joined by many other groups' voices over the years, which tended to drown them out. In the early 2000s Common Cause issues, public opinion, and political opportunity coalesced around congressional ethics reform. However, by 2014 people were more concerned with economic issues, foreign policy, and immigration than structure and process issues.

c. Ethics Reform Achievements

In the spring of 2004, a string of scandals erupted around lobbyist Jack Abramoff and House majority leader Tom DeLay (R-TX), who served Texas 22nd Congressional District from the 99th to 109th Congress (1985-2006). Abramoff was a lobbyist who allegedly provided DeLay with trips, gifts, and political donations for favorable treatment for his clients in the late 1990s and early 2000s. A Justice Department investigation resulted in Abramoff's guilty plea to charges including conspiracy, fraud, and "corruptly providing things of value to public officials" with the intent to influence acts by those officials. The House Committee on Ethics' weak response illustrated what some believed to be

the futility of “asking the fox to guard the proverbial henhouse” (see Patten, 2007). Subsequently a national outcry arose for congressional ethics reform.

The Abramoff/DeLay scandals brought to light loopholes in the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 and the limited effectiveness of the House Committee on Ethics. Democrats and Republicans worked together on, and Common Cause lobbyists actively advocated for, changing lobbying disclosure requirements and House rules of conduct. Congress enacted reforms in the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007 and in 2008 the House created an independent Office of Congressional Ethics.

The purpose of the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007 was to amend and strengthen compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995. Amendments lowered the minimum disclosure amount to \$10,000 and increased restrictions on lobbyists’ gift giving to Members of Congress and their staff. The act also mandated disclosure of earmarks in spending bills.

Lobbying groups soon found loopholes in the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007. Groups circumvented many of the disclosure rules. Some would no longer classify themselves as lobbying organizations or might create a different corporate entity to conduct their lobbying affairs. Another loophole was lobbyists avoided disclosing bundled campaign contributions (anything over \$16,000 must be reported) by allocating collected funds among more lobbyists or, after the *Citizens United* decision by contributing to Super PACs instead (see *infra*).

In 2008, the Democratic-led U.S. House of Representatives (110th Congress) created an independent Office of Congressional Ethics. The office was an adjunct to the House Committee on Ethics, staffed by private citizens (the board of directors and professional staff may not serve as members of Congress or work for the federal government). The office lacked subpoena power but accepted public complaints of misconduct, reviewed allegations, and submitted recommendations to the House Ethics Committee. The office publicly released reports and findings with only a few exceptions (e.g. law enforcement officials requested deferral).

A Republican majority returned to the House in 2011 (112th Congress). Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) signaled a willingness to use rules procedures to eliminate or gut the powers of the Office of Congressional Ethics. The Tea Party of Ohio and Common Cause joined forces, successfully supporting continuance of the office. A similar Republican effort to undercut the Office of Congressional Ethics occurred January 2, 2017, the night before House members were sworn in as the 115th Congress. Subsequent public outcry and President-elect Donald Trump's tweets expressing skepticism waylaid the effort.

Fighting to keep the Office of Congressional Ethics in operation is another example of entities putatively at opposite ends of the political spectrum working together. It exemplifies Common Cause's ongoing commitment to a nonpartisan image and applying countervailing power to influence policy even with unlikely partners. It also suggests Common Cause is willing to partner with other organizations across a variety of programs.

d. Issue Networks and Coalitions

During Common Cause's third phase the field of government reform interest groups continued to expand. Subsequently issue networks included increasing numbers of entities and opportunities to form ad hoc coalitions. As the first national government reform lobby, Common Cause frequently led coalitions even throughout its crises years. Yet from the mid-2000s forward Common Cause was more often a joiner of coalitions. One leader stated in a 2014 interview that Common Cause "evolved to become convener of different groups (due to its range of issue areas)."

Common Cause played a leadership role in reaching out to supporters, lobbyists, and through them other organizations. Its well-established connections reached many decision makers. The lack of a steering committee in every congressional district was counterbalanced by combining efforts with other groups. With an expanded population of governance integrity groups, it was generally understood that no one organization had the capacity or outreach to respond to issues at hand.

During its third phase, Common Cause conducted several major campaigns with coalition partners. The Election Verification Network advocated a paper trail for all electronic ballots cast. The Election Protection Coalition educated voters about their rights and provided assistance at the polls, including a hotline run by the Lawyers Committee on Civil Rights. The Save our News coalition successfully opposed the Tribune Company selling its eight major newspapers—including the *Los Angeles Times* and *Chicago Tribune*—to the Koch brothers.

Although Common Cause frequently convened coalitions, around 2011 it led coalitional efforts to oppose Charles and David Koch's influence on the political process. The coalition successfully exposed the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), organized as a 501c3 nonprofit charitable entity and largely supported by the Koch brothers. ALEC distributed pro-business, limited government model legislation to state legislators that subsequently became proposed bills. The coalition mobilized public pressure against ALEC's corporate sponsors (see discussion *infra*).

Sometimes other groups received credit also due to Common Cause. For example, in 2012 Common Cause Florida, the League of Women Voters of Florida, and the National Council of La Raza formed a coalition and filed a suit contesting the state legislature's congressional redistricting map (*Romo et al. v. Detzner et al.*, case number 2012-CA-412, and *The League of Women Voters of Florida et al. v. Detzner et al.*, case number 2012-CA-490, in the Second Judicial Circuit Court of Florida). When Florida Judge Terry P. Lewis ruled the 2012 map unconstitutional, the League of Women Voters received credit in the national media because it was listed first on the complaint (see Alvarez's August 9, 2014 article in *The New York Times*) but Common Cause was recognized at the state level (see Klas' October 9, 2015 article in the *Miami Herald*).

In 2013 Common Cause organized protests at Sallie Mae's shareholders meeting. Students came from Delaware and surrounding states. Participants stood outside the grounds with signs and slogans in order to attract attention of shareholders arriving at the meeting as well as the media. They called for

change in student debt policy and chastised the company for its participation in the American Legislative Exchange Council.

The SavetheInternet.com coalition brought conservative and progressive organizations (e.g. the Christian Coalition and Common Cause) together in a successful fight for net neutrality in 2014. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) proposal to allow internet service providers to offer faster internet traffic for a fee (which would favor large businesses). Subsequently citizens filed millions of public comments in protest, and the proposal did not pass. Three years later, net neutrality is back on Common Cause's issue agenda as President Trump's administration wants to remove regulations on broadband internet suppliers, such as Verizon, AT&T, and Comcast (Lohr, 2017).

Fighting student debt is a means to reach out to youth and introduce how money and politics affect their lives. Common Cause works with the End Student Debt coalition to pressure Sallie Mae to disclose all lobbying expenditures. Sallie Mae is a publicly traded U.S. corporation holding about one-fifth of all student debt.

In the national office and across the states, Common Cause staff meet every day with other group leaders, resulting in many partnerships and ad hoc coalitions. The presence of many other groups within the same issue space forces Common Cause to take into consideration other groups' programs, coordinate efforts, and not become redundant. Also funders encourage coordination. A Common Cause leader remarked that this enhanced competition for funds "in a good way" as it improved accountability and made the organization fast on its feet.

In 2014 interviews, some leaders believed the presence of many groups enhances countervailing power in the policymaking process, in other words "no one organization is going to fix anything." Coalitions expand Common Cause's network, broaden its base, increase the mix of people—perhaps most importantly youth and other races—and enables cross training among groups. Common Cause needs other groups' expertise and efforts particularly when addressing controversial bills. In general, a crowded field means winning more fights. For example, Common Cause is part of a Redistricting

reform coalition including various civil rights groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, NALEO Educational Fund, Prison Policy Initiative, and Southern Coalition for Social Justice.

Leaders' perceptions of Common Cause's role in coalitions range from strategic planning to cheerleading. Common Cause is usually the oldest and most experienced organization in the coalition and as such is often the convener. Its expertise and established network enables it to reach out to members and lobbyists of other organizations. Its distinctive structure (local and largely autonomous staff in thirty-five states) encourages coalitional work according to national, state, and local opportunities. Common Cause lobbyists continue to offer technical expertise when bills are long and obtuse—in these instances, coalitions perform a cheerleader function.

Internet and social media platforms enhance communication across issue networks and coalitions. In addition, the internet helps mobilize public support for coalitional work. Common Cause updated its website and email capabilities in 2004 but as the online context continued to evolve it was necessary to keep up or be left behind.

e. Internet Activism

The internet facilitates individuated activism and organizational listening. During Common Cause's second phase internet capabilities transitioned from passive viewing to user-generated content (e.g. Wikipedia and social media websites). In its third phase websites and internet service providers used analytics to track users and assess interest in certain issues (Web 2.0).

Common Cause updated its website in 2014 and added analytics that tailored communications to its viewers according to levels of interest (e.g. contributors receive different communications than those who only pay membership dues or sign online petitions). Analytical measurements include the number

of website visits, “likes” on social media, and twitter followers. The measurements also provide passive democratic feedback as leaders empirically measure which appeals and/or campaigns attract the most interest and support (see Karpf, 2016).

Digital analytics helps grow supporter lists according to issue areas and across coalitions. Yet supporters of online campaigns often prefer smaller, more immediate, and more winnable goals. Common Cause’s founders knew government reform requires stamina and endurance, or as Max Weber wrote, “Politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards” (quoted by Karpf, 2016, p.165). Thus there is some level of disconnect between individuated activism and Common Cause goals that leaders must bridge.

In addition, supporter lists are a means to achieve crowdfunding—or, like John Gardner intended, a large and diffuse constituency contributing modest sums to fund professionalized lobbying. The unpredictable nature of crowdfunding is a concern for government reform groups. Thus effective leaders are critical to keeping the interest and support of individuated activists over the long-term.

Digital analytics is a way to target individuated activists and generate grassroots mobilization from the top-down. At the local level, sites such as www.meetup.com help coordinate supporters’ efforts. Yet evidence suggests that mobilization through the internet changed in kind (from postal mail to email) but did not increase in absolute participation rates (Bimber et al., 2012). Across Common Cause’s three phases, members and supporters are mainly contributors but five percent are more active.

2. Endogenous Renewal

Organizational renewal marked Common Cause’s third phase. Membership levels improved, financial stability returned, insider-outsider lobbying strategies altered with changing environments, state campaigns received focused attention, and digital strategies improved. The organization benefitted from an effective internal leader, Robert W. Edgar. Environmental characteristics and strong leadership helped stabilize Common Cause generally and reverse membership decline specifically.

a. Improving Membership Levels

Membership levels improved after the 2010 *Citizens United* decision (see FIGURE 3, p.54). At about the same time Common Cause started an online acquisition program that brought in almost 10,000 new members its first year. Membership totals improved each year beginning with 2011.

(1). From Members to Supporters

Common Cause defined members as individuals or families who financially supported the organization with dues and/or contributions. Although members' donations remained a key revenue stream, especially for the 501c4 lobbying arm, leaders more frequently used the term "supporters." Shifting from members to supporters encompassed contributors to the 501c4 lobbying arm and 501c3 Education Fund as well as individuated activists (whether they contributed or not). It also allowed leaders to claim over 400,000 supporters in 2010—and over 700,000 in 2017—that enhanced Common Cause's legitimacy as a public interest group.

Similarly, the understanding of dues changed during the third phase. In 2009 dues were raised to \$40 a year and tested against a control group. Increased dues led to fewer responses but larger average contributions. The control group had more responses but smaller average appeal contributions. Overall the control group gave more money so dues returned to its previous level of \$35 for an individual membership. Eventually the term gift replaced dues, better reflecting the organization's definition of a member as one who gives at least \$10 to the organization.

Common Cause leaders viewed the linguistic shift as necessary to the reality of the times and changes in the organization. In 2012 financial reports, supporters fell into various tracks:

- I. Members (anyone who gives \$10 or more a year)
 - A. Offline members
 - 1. Traditional—c4
 - 2. Donors—c4 and c3
 - B. Online members—c4 and c3
- II. Major Donors—c4 and c3
- III. Event Only Donors—c4 and c3
- IV. CauseNet Activists—those who respond to c4 alerts
- V. Social Media Followers

- A. Facebook
- B. Twitter
- C. Flickr

Even though a membership base remained critical to organizational efforts, leaders' understanding of Common Cause supporters changed. One leader explained that the meaning of being a member expanded to a change-making perspective rather than card-carrying membership (suggesting an effect of individuated activists' focus on issues instead of organizations). A 2015 survey explored membership characteristics.

(2). **2015 Membership Survey**

In 2015, I conducted a Common Cause membership survey with the support of the national office. A randomly selected sample of 50,000 Common Cause email subscribers received invitations to take the survey. The survey was open for two weeks, was composed of 29 questions, and took about 15 minutes to complete. It drew 1,265 responses, a sufficient size to make general inferences about Common Cause email subscribers (which included members and supporters).

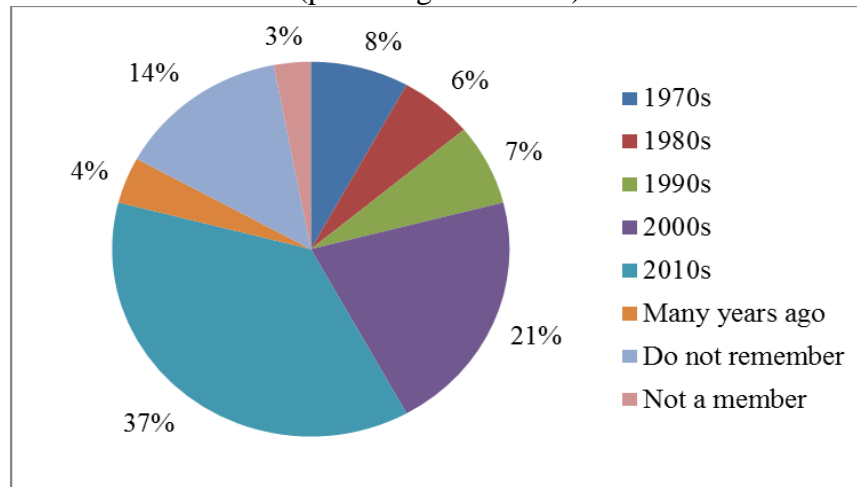
It must be noted the survey probably oversampled activists. Email subscribers included individuated activists whose names were added to the list because they joined a Common Cause issue campaign. Also results may include self-selection bias, with those most active in the organization being more likely to participate in the survey.

The term members or membership were general designations in this survey as the population was email subscribers instead of those who financially supported the organization with dues and/or contributions (i.e. how Common Cause defines its members). An expanded definition of members was necessary in order to include retirees on fixed incomes and individuated activists who supported Common Cause but did not contribute. Including individuated activists in the 2015 Membership Survey provided a snapshot of Common Cause's constituency across its various tracks. Survey results paint a portrait of members in time and are useful as a comparison with prior scientific surveys.

The age of Common Cause members increased over time (see TABLE 3.1 AGE DISTRIBUTION OF COMMON CAUSE MEMBERS). In 1981, about 68% of the members were 50 years old or younger. By 2008 the percentage of was about 16%. Those below the half-century mark in age further reduced to only 12% in 2015. Thus a significant majority of Common Cause email subscribers were over 50 years old. Building a base among young people was an important challenge throughout the organization's history but particularly during the third phase as stability returned and pockets of revitalization appeared.

FIGURE 9 illustrates the decade members joined Common Cause. Fifty-eight percent reported joining between 2000 and 2015. This number includes the 37% who joined just in the five years between 2010 and 2015, substantiating the 2011 turnaround in membership totals. Remarkably eight percent of respondents joined Common Cause in the 1970s. The percentage is probably an underestimate as some of the fourteen percent who do not remember and four percent stating many years ago may have joined in the 1970s. Several members mentioned joining prior to 1970 (presumably when John Gardner led the Urban Coalition) while others mentioned Gardner as the reason they joined. Percentages of members joining in the 1980s and 1990s are lowest (6% and 7%, respectively) suggesting causes and costs of the crises years.

FIGURE 9
DECADE COMMON CAUSE MEMBERS JOINED ORGANIZATION
 (percentages rounded)



Source: Common Cause 2015 Membership Survey.

In the founding years, Common Cause members were a nation-wide constituency of mostly white, middle and upper-middle class professionals, male, who lived in northeast and west coast states. Jonathan W. Siegel's 1981 survey verified these characteristics, which were discussed by McFarland (1984, Chapter 3) and Rothenberg (1992, Chapter 3). The 2015 membership survey found the demographics mostly unchanged. Over ninety percent of the members identify as white. Education levels remain high, with over fifty percent educated in graduate or professional schools (Medical, Law, Dental Schools, etc.). As in 1981, the majority of members are male. State distributions are also similar as the percentage of Common Cause members per capita is highest in the northeast states Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island; west coast states California, Washington, Oregon, and Colorado; and Midwest states Minnesota and Wisconsin. The highest per capita percentage of members (22%) live in California, with New York, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Florida following with five or six percent of members each. Survey respondents represented all states (except Wyoming) and the District of Columbia, indicating a nation-wide constituency remains.

More members identify with a liberal political ideology and the Democratic Party. In 1981 nearly a third of members reported being middle of the road or conservative, a percentage that decreased

to one-tenth by 2015. Similarly, the percentage of members self-identifying as Independent, Close to Neither Party or Republican dropped from a third to less than one-tenth.

Leaders and members agree governance integrity goals transcend personal political leanings or partisan identification. For example, in his 2014 interview with Pauline Peretz, James Banner recounted his initial involvement with Common Cause:

I simply wrote a letter to John Gardner and soon got a reply from Common Cause's growing staff. I suspect that that's what thousands of others did. Was I typical of most other Common Causers at the time? I think so. They were liberals. They, like I, had ardently supported the Civil Rights Movement, as we/they would back the women's movement, efforts to establish gay and lesbian rights, and the rest. We were . . . social and political liberals, although, as it turned out, firm in our commitments to non-partisan work.

Fred Wertheimer told Peretz:

. . . our members were much more like the general public than the framework of our organization. They were not only interested in process issues. We did not support the impeachment of [President] Nixon. We had a full board debate to know what to do. We were concerned Common Cause would look like a partisan organization if we got into it—it was a completely partisan battle in the beginning. But we decided to make sure that the process would be fair and even-handed. Same kind of issue with Robert Bork (the person who fired Archie Cox as special investigator and later was a controversial [failed] appointment to the Supreme Court). Cox refused to take a position whether Common Cause should get involved or not. In the end Common Cause opposed the nomination.

State leaders, particularly in conservative-leaning states, continue to emphasize their non-partisan mission. Almost 60 percent of survey respondents agree with the description of Common Cause as a nonpartisan organization.

A shift occurred in members' age and income levels between 1981 and 2015. The skew toward older citizens suggested more members living in retirement (see TABLE 3.1). Several members commented their limited income precluded giving to the organization. One wrote, "I wish I could offer financial support, but Common Cause has my respect and trust, and now retired, hope to be more active."

As the age of members increased, income levels shifted downward. TABLE II compares 1981 and 2015 data on members' family income levels.

TABLE II
COMMON CAUSE MEMBERS' FAMILY INCOME LEVELS
1981 AND 2015 COMPARISON

(levels adjusted for inflation; percentages rounded)

Family Income Level	1981	2015
Less than \$25,000	5	14
\$25,000-\$50,000	17	22
\$50,000-\$64,000	15	14
\$64,000-\$90,000	20	15
\$90,000-\$130,000	22	19
More than \$130,000	21	16

Sources: 1981 data analysis from Rothenberg (1992, 32); Common Cause 2015 Membership Survey.

Members living in retirement may be one reason for the income shift. Other possible reasons include stagnating wages and increasing income inequality pulling down real income levels. Members' decreasing disposable income intensified the need to broaden the membership base as well as attract large donors and foundation grants.

Common Cause's website reflects the changing definition of membership. The join or renew pages offer various gift levels instead of types of membership (e.g. individual, family, student). Thus, there may be some double counting between paying dues and making occasional contributions (see TABLE III). The data suggests more members contributed than paid dues, substantiating an individuated activist approach and one leader's claim that now people join movements not organizations.

TABLE III
MEMBERS FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF COMMON CAUSE
(percentages total over 100 due to respondents selecting more than one option)

Type of Contribution	Percent
Make Occasional Contributions	41
Pay Annual Membership Dues	21
Make Regular Contributions	7
Do Not Give Financial Support	39

Source: Common Cause 2015 Membership Survey.

Offline membership acquisition and renewal letters ask for contributions instead of dues. According to the 2015 survey, almost forty percent of email subscribers did not financially support the organization. Yet during its third phase Common Cause regained financial stability after years of existential crises.

b. Financial Stability

From 2009 to 2014, total revenue and reserves/net assets improved (compare totals in FIGURES 4 and 5 with disaggregated amounts in FIGURES 6 and 7, p.51-52 and 99-101). Total revenue increased by almost \$3 million largely due to grant acquisitions by the Common Cause Education Fund. Membership dues supported the 501c4 lobbying arm—as their rolls grew after 2010 revenue rose by about \$1 million. Reserves/net assets remained over \$1 million over these five years—the longest stretch in three decades.

Direct mail continued in its role as the “workhorse of membership recruitment efforts” even as its effectiveness declined. In 1982 direct mail was the source of over 95% of the organization’s income (see FIGURE 4.1 in McFarland 1984, p.77). About twenty-five years later, and after formation of the 501c3 Common Cause Education Fund, direct mail accounted for approximately 70% of total revenue. By 2012 direct mail was the source of about 29 percent of budgeted revenue (see TABLE IV).

TABLE IV
COMMON CAUSE 2012 BUDGETED REVENUE
(in dollars and percentages)

Revenue Source	National Programs	State Programs	Total Budgeted Revenue	Percent of Total Budgeted Revenue
Direct Mail	2,490,035	619,120	3,109,155	29%
Major Donor	2,585,000	625,450	3,210,450	29%
Events	--	640,246	640,246	6%
Bequests	400,000	18,000	418,000	4%
Internet	752,650	39,050	791,700	7%
Foundations	1,355,000	1,108,000	2,463,000	23%
Miscellaneous	250,320	9,000	259,320	2%
Total	\$7,833,005/72%	\$3,058,866/28%	\$10,891,871	100%

Source: Common Cause National Headquarters.

Interestingly as direct mail fundraising became a smaller part of the total revenue stream, the rate of return improved. As noted in Chapter Three, the return rate of direct mail acquisition was less than

.99% in 1998. In 2008 the return rate was even lower at 0.37%; but in 2011 direct mail response rates ranged from 2.89% to 6.85%.¹⁸ Most direct mail acquisitions went to the 501c4 lobbying arm.

Foundation grants comprise about one-fourth of budgeted revenue in 2012. When contributions from other donors are added, about 44 percent of Common Cause's revenue flows into the Common Cause Education Fund. Common Cause's 2012 Form 990 I.R.S. tax documents indicate 501c4 revenue was \$6,028,165 and 501c3 revenue \$4,732,977 (the tax form combines contributions and grants). Adding a 501c3 arm significantly widened the revenue stream but at the same time nourished new pathways outside of Gardner's Rules, such as focusing on education and improving civic engagement.

An increasing share of Common Cause's total revenue relied on 501c3 funds (see FIGURE 6, p.106). As earlier leaders anticipated, this changed Common Cause's mission. Initially the organization's purpose was mass-supported professionalized lobbying of Congress. Second phase adaptations resulted in greater financial stability but bifurcated the organization's mission to include lobbying and education (opposite of Gardner's intent; see Gardner's Rules discussion in Chapter Two). Over time Common Cause became more adept in its role as educator and advancing issues with foundation support.

c. Common Cause Education Fund

The Common Cause Education Fund (CCEF) structure was distinctive among similar groups. Common Cause was one organization with two entities—a 501c4 and 501c3. State offices, once largely autonomous, unified with the national office during the third phase (a process started under Ann McBride's reorganization in the late 1990s). In contrast, the League of Women Voters' chapters each have their own 501c3 arm.

The organization's approach to the CCEF evolved between 2000 and 2014. At first national staff was in charge of writing most of the letters of interest and grant requests in order to receive foundation

¹⁸ Anything above a 1.5-2% response rate in direct mail is considered excellent by industry standards.

funding. Gradually states became more involved in foundation fundraising, partly due to national office requirements. State Executive Directors reported to Jenny Flanagan, Vice President for State Operations, and were responsible for raising operating support, including foundation grants.

The CCEF proved to be a qualified boon for national and state offices with about sixty active grants a year, two-thirds of which were dedicated to state efforts (in June 2014 grants booked for the national office totaled \$885,000 while state offices received almost \$2,000,000). Much of Common Cause's research and education expenses, in all issues areas, were charged to the CCEF. Leaders credited the work of Common Cause and national staff with acquiring significant foundation grants.

Foundation grants added resources to all issues in Common Cause's agenda. Table V lists fiscal year 2014 (July 2013 to June 2014) awards of \$100,000 or more plus totals.

TABLE V
COMMON CAUSE EDUCATION FUND GRANTS BOOKED
FISCAL YEAR 2014

Issues	Foundation	Amount Booked
Voting and Elections	Lisa and Douglas Goldman Fund	\$375,000
Voting and Elections—California	Irvine Foundation	\$700,000
Voting and Elections—New York	Hagedorn Foundation	\$102,000
Media and Democracy	Park Foundation	\$100,000
Money in Politics—Wisconsin	Joyce Foundation	\$100,000
General Support		
New Mexico	Thornberg Foundation	\$100,000
Total National		\$885,000
Total States		\$1,950,175
Grand Total		\$2,835,175

Source: Common Cause National Headquarters.

Sixteen booked grants comprise the national total while over 90 separate grants combine for the state office total. The large disparity between national and state totals is consistent with the shift in resources and attention toward state offices.

The Education Fund's total revenue included foundation grants and individual contributions. Beginning around 2008, the CCEF provided almost half the total revenue for the Common Cause organization (see FIGURE 6, p.106). After 2014, Education Fund revenue outpaced that of the lobbying

arm. I.R.S. 990 tax forms indicated that in 2015 the fund's revenue was \$8.5 million as opposed to \$5.1 million in contributions to the lobbying arm.

Revenue from the CCEF advanced a number of Common Cause campaigns. Common Cause provided research and expertise for Bill Moyers & Company's September 2012 broadcast *The United States of ALEC* in order to expose the American Legislative Exchange Council's "efforts to exert corporate influence over the legislative process at the state level" (excerpt from documents stored at national headquarters). The national staff, working with an ad hoc coalition, researched and published analyses of states' election technology prior to the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. In addition, the staff produced a 2010 report on voter intimidation in ten swing states.

Interviews suggested increasing reliance on foundation funds, many with corporate ties, was problematic for some state leaders. At times the number of grants accepted was purposefully limited in order to fit in with the idea of a citizen's lobby. In a 2014 interview, one leader explained, "Increasingly the organization operates at 30,000 feet without relation to members—it exists on grants, and is not a membership organization." These comments suggested ongoing tension between the state and national office as well as between Gardner's Rules and new pathways laid by leaders' adaptations to existential crises.

Conflicting organizational visions ran up against practicalities. Almost half of Common Cause's total revenue belongs to the CCEF, which limited the amount available for 501c4 lobbying operations. FIGURE 6 (p.106) illustrates improving prospects for 501c3 revenue, especially from 2007 to 2014. During the same years, revenue declined for the 501c4 lobbying arm by about \$2 million with some improvement in 2014.

After 2003 Common Cause decreased its spending on lobbying. The number of lobbyists on staff fell from eleven to three (see FIGURE 8, p.109). Even with a severely reduced lobbying staff, the organization worked to maintain its image and reputation as a national government reform lobby.

d. **Insider-Outsider Lobbying**

A Common Cause leader stated that in the mid-2000s the organization remained federally focused and had many allies in Congress. The organization benefitted from the expertise of its president Robert Edgar, a former Democratic U.S. Representative from Pennsylvania (94th-99th Congress; 1975-1987), and its chief lobbyist Sarah Dufendach who worked for Common Cause from 2002 to 2012. Dufendach had twenty years of experience on the Hill including Chief of Staff for Rep. David Bonior (D-MI) when he served as the House Majority and Minority Whip (102nd-108th Congress; 1991-2002).

Yet in 2014 there were fewer allies in Congress and Common Cause lost Edgar and Dufendach. Robert Edgar unexpectedly passed away in 2013 and Dufendach stepped down in 2012. Three national staff—including two newcomers—worked to build and maintain relationships among Members of Congress and their staff.

Less action on reform issues in Congress meant Common Cause acted more often as a watchdog, especially at the national level. National staff produced expert research (e.g. “Fix the Filibuster” campaign). Lobbyists used the information to provide third party validation by testifying and filing reports during hearings and speaking at media events. For example, Common Cause’s Policy Counsel, Stephen Spaulding, testified at a July 29, 2015 hearing of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Oversight, Agency Action, Federal Rights and Federal Courts. He argued Congress should clarify I.R.S. standards for 501c4 groups (which are not required to disclose donors), based on research finding the number of such groups almost doubled in the two years after the *Citizens United* decision.

A leader commented during a 2014 interview that “There is no question that Common Cause continues to look for inside allies—no ‘lobbing shells from outside to change things’ like apocalyptic protests.” This form of outsider lobbying was never Common Cause’s style. Instead the organization focused on systemic issues and working with Members of Congress. As partisan dynamics changed, Republicans who supported Common Cause issues lost elections or became isolated by the Republican

Party. Subsequently Common Cause lobbyists tended to build relationships with Democrats such as Representatives Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and David Price (D-NC) as well as Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL).

Robert Edgar, President of Common Cause (2007-2013) moved beyond established rules and norms with his use of protests as an outsider lobbying tactic. External environmental changes made national level reform almost impossible. Existential threats negatively affected resources available to expend on lobbying efforts. Engaging in protests was a means to press issues, increase media attention, and attract or energize Common Cause supporters. Protests were not completely out of the norm for Common Cause. As the BCRA drew nearer to its passage in 2002 there were four to six protests while Congress was in session. Common Cause staff and volunteers participated in order to help draw media attention and bolster the legitimacy of the cause.

Results from the 2015 membership survey highlight grassroots mobilization strategies employed by Edgar. About seventeen percent of respondents participated in protests and rallies, suggesting mobilization of secondary activists (see TABLE VI). When correlated with age of respondent, approximately six out of ten of the protest attendees were 51 to 70 years old. These numbers suggest the critical role played by older members in advancing the organization's legitimacy. It also indirectly implies the ongoing struggle to attract younger members.

TABLE VI
MEMBER ACTIVISM
 (rounded percentages)

Form of Activism	Percentage
Active in a Common Cause State Office	4%
Active in a Common Cause Local Office	2%
Active in the Common Cause National Organization	5%
Active in Signing Petition Drives Organized by Common Cause	76%
Active as an Attendant or Participant in Fundraising Events	7%
Active as a Participant in Formal Strategic Efforts Organized by Common Cause (such as attending/speaking at legislative hearings; administrative rule-making hearings; or National Press Club Events)	6%
Active as a Participant in Informal Strategic Efforts Organized by Common Cause (such as rallies or protests)	17%
Other ¹⁹	20%

Source: Common Cause 2015 Membership Survey; generalizability of results is limited due to an oversampling of activists.

Consistent with prior findings by McFarland (1983, p.62) and Rothenberg (1994, p.26), the 2015 survey showed around five percent of the members actively worked with national, state, or local offices. An active membership cadre continues to distinguish Common Cause as many newer public interest groups consist of a few staff and are financed by foundations or wealthy patrons (see Skocpol, 2004, p.11). Yet with decreased total numbers of members, the real number of activists is much less than in the results analyzed by McFarland or Rothenberg. Although pockets of revitalization are appearing where activists are concentrated, funds from the CCEF and wealthy donors are important to sustain the organization.

Over seventy-six percent of survey respondents signed petitions, the most frequent form of activism. Historical and contemporary organizational characteristics help explain the surprising figure. Historically, an emphasis on telephoning and writing letters distinguished Common Cause's brand of activism (see Rothenberg, 1992, p.137). Activists across the country received timely political information by memos from the national staff and telephone calls from Washington Connection

¹⁹ Survey respondents were allowed to positively answer more than one participation category. Various open-ended responses in the Other category included promoting Common Cause through social media, talking to friends, showing Robert Reich's film *Inequality for All* (2013) in their communities, distributing literature at train stops, etc.

volunteers. Convenient indirect communications distinguished Common Cause activism, a comparative cost advantage as gathering members spread across the country would require significant resource expenditures. Signing online petitions is an updated outsider lobbying tactic—a means to communicate with officials in addition to telephoning and writing letters.

In the contemporary era of online activism, petitions serve a variety of functions. Signing an online petition melds a relatively easy form of activism with internet metrics. Rothenberg's analysis of pre-internet era data found over 60% of Common Cause members were checkbook activists, contributing to specific issues without spending a lot of time volunteering (1994, p.131). David Karpf (2012, p.8) argues digital activism replaced what he terms the “armchair activism” of interest groups that arose in the 1970s. Thus Common Cause's level of online petition signing should not be surprising if considered an extension of earlier forms of activism.

For the organization, online petitions are a form of insurance for the future. Members and supporters who sign online petitions are categorized according to issue interest. Subsequently they receive additional invitations to move up the ladder of engagement (see Karpf, 2014, p.133), a goal critical to organizational survival. David Karpf (2016) differentiates between mobilizing and organizing supporters. Mobilization is shallow but broad participation, including strategies such as signing online petitions and forwarding emails to officials. Organizing is time-consuming but deep participation that builds skills of volunteer leaders committed to the organization's mission.

In 2014 Chang Park, a National Governing Board member and CEO of Universal Remote Control Inc. gave over \$1 million to improve Common Cause's digital strategies capabilities. Advanced technologies were to be used to build activist lists in every congressional district—a campaign beneficial to national and state offices alike. Park's grant helped launch a new Common Cause Web 2.0 website conducive to individuated activism (e.g. blogs, appeals based on prior expressed interests, opportunities for meet-ups).

Increasing reliance on the internet for communication, education, and activation affected the Washington Connection, linchpin of the insider-outsider lobbying strategy. An inverse relationship existed as the digital strategies team grew and the Washington Connection decreased in size. The number of volunteers, around 25 in 2004, became fewer than 10 in 2014 when the Washington Connection coordinator was let go.

Protests occurred more frequently during Robert Edgar's presidency (2007-2013) but did not signify a departure in overall strategy as the organization continued to look for inside allies. Instead, they were part of a multidimensional approach to advocacy and political action. In a 2014 interview, a leader commented political advocacy is not like a sprinter but a long-distance runner. It is very important to "stick with it" and recognize one will have to find a way back when thwarted, which will happen often. Applying countervailing pressure "is long and slow and requires patience, creativity, perseverance." During its third phase, sustained issue advocacy more often meant building support within states and localities.

e. Increasing Importance of State Campaigns

An action principle of Gardner's Rules was heavy priority on lobbying Congress; not states, not courts. As exogenous circumstances changed, it became less effective to use limited resources to lobby an increasingly polarized Congress. State programmatic successes were perceived as building blocks to achieve national reforms. National and state leaders unified and worked together on issue selection and campaigns as well as fundraising.

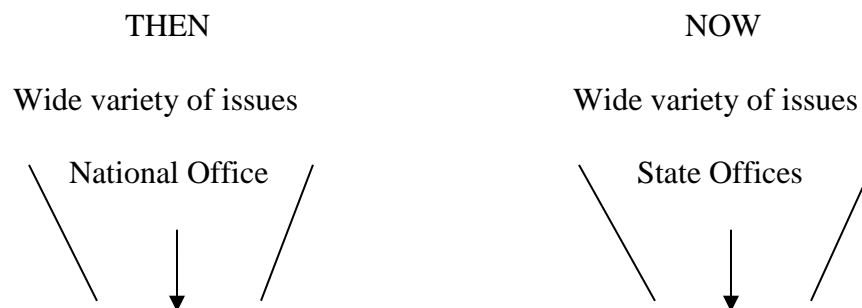
As national and state staff joined forces, pockets of revitalization appeared. The pockets were located in states with a history of political reform. Common Cause struggled with revival in the traditional South, as suggested by Daniel Elazar's (1972 and 1994) theory of state political subcultures (see Chapter Five). As one leader succinctly stated, "Common Cause is now more active in states where one can see concrete signs of progress."

(1). Issue Selection

After the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002, states were more often the arena for Common Cause’s political fights. National and state campaigns conjoined, such as Chellie Pingree’s pursuit of state election systems reform and Robert Edgar’s attacks on the American Legislative Exchange Council’s influence on state legislators. A unified staff worked together on issue selection.

A Common Cause leader summarized a shift in national-state program dynamics. In the past, action flowed from the top down. The national office set priorities, decided on specific legislation, and would ask states to get behind their efforts. During the third phase, the national office more often assisted state leaders with fundraising, lobbying officials, and activating local supporters, among other duties. According to a 2014 interview with a Common Cause leader, Robert Edgar was perceived as “trying to take the organization in a different direction and the states were thrilled.” In 2015, states generated action and got the national office to provide support for their programs. FIGURE 10 illustrates the transition.

FIGURE 10
CHANGING NATIONAL-STATE OFFICE DYNAMICS
(based on 2014 interview with Common Cause leader)



By 2014, a lot of Common Cause’s work occurred in the states. Thirty-five states were led by an executive director. In twenty-two states, executive directors were assisted by full-time staff plus part-time interns. State staff included democracy advocates and organizers from a variety of demographic groups. State executive directors were responsible for funding their programs, although the national office paid their salaries and those of their staff.

Leaders understood state legislatures were important in setting the direction of the country. In a 2014 interview, one explained “members of Congress don’t spring out of nowhere like Athena out of Zeus’ head, they start at the local level winning elections to school boards, state legislative offices,” indeed “all politics is local.” In addition, state legislators could be vehicles for organizations—like the Koch brothers’ funded American Legislative Exchange Council—to get control of local offices and gradually overtake congressional districts.

Much of Common Cause’s Youth Outreach Program occurred in the states. The goal was to engage individuals born between 1980 and 2000, or Millennials. State leaders recruited youth to become poll workers and poll monitors as part of the organization’s voter protection work. For example, the Common Cause North Carolina office, including two campus outreach coordinators, successfully mobilized students at seven Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in the state, including: Shaw University; St. Augustine’s University; North Carolina Central University; Fayetteville State University; Winston-Salem State University; Bennett College; and North Carolina A&T State University. In addition, a Common Cause chapter opened at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 2017.

Common Cause state offices participated in various successful campaigns within ad hoc coalitions. The California office pressed for creation of an independent citizens’ commission to draw legislative districts, passed in 2008. Subsequently the California Common Cause Executive Director, Kathay Feng, became Common Cause’s National Redistricting Director leading efforts in ten other states. In addition, Common Cause efforts contributed to election day registration enactments in several states (e.g. California, Illinois, and North Carolina). Common Cause Ohio and the League of Women Voters of Ohio filed an amicus brief in the case *Service Employees International Union, Local 1 v. Husted*, 12-4069 (6th Cir. 2012), in which the Sixth Circuit ruled that Ohio was required to count ballots cast in the wrong precinct (but right location) due to poll worker error.

State leaders focused on issues where they could apply countervailing pressure in the policymaking process. They used grasstops lobbying to build relationships with friendly state legislators. They also organized outsider lobbying, often with the support of the national office.

(2). Grasstops and Grassroots

State offices had limited capacity to mobilize grassroots protests. More often advocacy occurred through grasstops lobbying focused on maintaining relationships with officials and other decision makers. Some legislative bills, usually those that were long and technical, were “pure insider baseball” that needed technical expertise more than grassroots support. State leaders worked to provide the expertise and would “come to the table” with solutions (quotes taken from 2014 interview with Common Cause leader).

Some state leaders used community organizing techniques to form action teams to advance their lobbying efforts. Action teams, as described by McFarland (1984, p.136-137), are composed of about a dozen Common Cause constituents who receive a considerable amount of information by leaders and then act upon this information. In the mid-1980s action teams targeted Members of Congress by personal, continual, informed, and lengthy outsider lobbying. In its latest iteration, action teams are educated by and work with Common Cause leaders to influence local and state officials (e.g. Common Cause Illinois educated its members to push for policies such as Election Day Registration and public financing of Chicago aldermanic campaigns).

At times, state leaders use grassroots strategies to garner good press coverage of issues that hold public officials accountable. For example, in 2014 Common Cause Maryland worked with other groups on “The Gerrymander Meander,” an event featuring a 225-mile relay held by foot, bike, kayak, and motorboat around Maryland’s 3rd Congressional District. The event increased media attention to one of the most gerrymandered districts in the U.S. (see Johnson, 2014).

State leaders use protests as a way to demonstrate constituent support. One such leader commented that protests are considered an “essential arrow in quiver” but must be used intelligently

weighing resources against effectiveness. Town meetings and picketing legislators' offices can be effective if around twenty people show up.

A leader mentioned there is a cyclical nature to protests' effectiveness. A distinctive role of Common Cause is to get people engaged in protests. Their voices are heard if legislators are responsive. Or it can cycle the other way when legislators are not responsive, which diminishes participants' efficacy and turnout.

Another strategic arrow that must be used intelligently is sending emails to state legislators. Ten or fifteen emails to a certain group of representatives are not so effective especially if the emails are not from constituents. Most legislators will not look at emails; instead, they ask staff for the number received. Legislators assume mass emails are a manufactured campaign and do not reveal the nuances of concern.

A committed cadre of volunteer activists is critical to the success of state programs. Their time and efforts are important resources to state leaders. Financial resources are also critical. State funds are raised by two windows for state direct mail solicitations and state leaders' fundraising prowess.

(3). Fundraising

Efforts to unify Common Cause in the late 1990s bore fruit in 2014 when the National Governing Board voted to unify the entire organization. After unification, two regional state directors head state programs. Thirty-five state Executive Directors and their staff are employees of the national office. State efforts are one operation that is part of a larger operation.

The national office consolidates many functions once conducted at the state level. The organization's one bank account is under national staff control. All grants flow to the national office and then to the intended states. For example, Joyce Family Foundation awards go to six states in the Great Lakes region only. The national staff submits one grant proposal to the foundation then distributes to the six states based on proportions of Common Cause members. Each state receives between \$20,000 and \$80,000.

The national office oversees human resources and other duties such as liability insurance, leases, and rentals. Direct mail originates in the national office (with the exception of states sending direct mail twice a year in April and late August). Membership services, general accounting, program supports, legal counsel, and corporate accountability are the responsibility of the national office.

Although state leaders are employees, they are still responsible for raising money for state campaigns. In a 2014 interview, a state leader commented, “State offices need to pull their own weight and to grow and hire more staff.” The national office is a backstop if necessary, a significant departure from the allocation system used during the first and second phases (states received allocations based on a formula but could raise additional money if they wanted to).

In general states are financed by individual contributions instead of allocations from the national office. Prior to unification the national staff did not share names of big funders with the states. But in 2014 the national office helped states find funders and organize fundraisers.

On one hand, consolidation of financial accounts created some tension between national and state offices. If a bequest went to a state office that no longer existed, then most of the money went to the national office. This negatively affected state advisory boards’ autonomy and resources (every state maintains an advisory board even without a Common Cause office).

On the other hand, consolidation of financial accounts signified the conjoining of efforts. One goal of the national office was to hire more staff to assist state executive directors who lobbied officials, organized fundraisers, and mobilized supporters, among other tasks. A leader remarked that Common Cause’s structure in 2014 emphasized team-building, trust, and working together.

(4). State Office Influence

State political subculture, the size of the Common Cause constituency, and quality leadership are important elements of a state office’s influence (see McFarland, 1984, p.71). When these elements combine with political opportunity, pockets of revitalization arise. The following examples illustrate Common Cause successes even in the midst of national office crises and reorganizations.

In the mid-2000s, Connecticut Governor John Rowland resigned and served a prison sentence for accepting gifts from contractors that were doing business with the state (Barron, 2014). Subsequently Common Cause Connecticut helped champion passage of the Citizens' Election Program by the state General Assembly in 2005. The voluntary program provides full public financing to candidates who agree to contribution and expenditure limits and disclosure requirements.

Common Cause California leaders and activists joined a large coalition pursuing redistricting reform. Three years of fruitless insider lobbying led to the assumption that state legislators had no real intent to pass such legislation. Subsequent efforts focused on the initiative process, supported by groups from various ideological sides working together (e.g. the Chamber of Commerce, NAACP, and ACLU). A successful 2008 ballot initiative created the California Citizens Redistricting Commission.

After the Supreme Court's 2010 *Citizens United* decision, support rose for campaign finance reform across the nation. As part of the "Amend 2012" campaign, Common Cause state and local chapters across the country participated in demonstrations and rallies protesting the decision. Amend 2012 focused on securing voter initiative and referenda calling for a constitutional amendment to overturn the decision. As of 2017, nineteen states and numerous localities voted to support the amendment.

Part of the reaction to the *Citizens United* decision was creation of the Fair Elections Maryland coalition, created and led by Common Cause Maryland and Progressive Maryland. The two groups successfully pushed for a small donor matching funds system in Montgomery County (the most populous county in the state with over one million residents). In 2014 county commissioners enacted the system which allows candidates who rely on small donations to qualify for matching public funds (based on the New York City program in place since the late 1990s). The coalition continues to work for campaign finance reform across the state.

Common Cause Illinois formed action teams around issues such as Voting Rights and Money in Politics. State leaders disseminate information about action teams through social media, emails, and

visits to college campuses. Common Cause supporters, activists, and students volunteer to serve on the team and are subsequently educated about specific political opportunities and advocacy strategies.

The Voting Rights Action Team successfully advocated for same day voter registration (2014), electronic registration (2013), and early voting reforms (2015; e.g. polls are open Saturday, Sunday, and Monday before elections; eligible students register and vote on public university campuses). The Money in Politics Action Team advanced a small donor program for Chicago aldermanic elections. The team worked with aldermen supportive of reform, wrote legislation based on New York City's small donor program, and collected signatures to place a question on the 2014 Chicago election ballot.²⁰ The question received support from over eighty percent of the voters. In 2015, the action team continued its efforts to reform aldermanic elections.

f. Digital Strategies

During its third phase, Common Cause was in the process of catching up to evolving digital capacities. The need to catch up was due to being a "little late" to the internet. By 2001 the internet was at "full blast" for Common Cause, even if lacking Web 2.0 capabilities which the organization needed to adopt or risk being left behind. The transition pace was slowed by existential crises, resources dedicated to promoting campaign finance reform, and the time and effort required to reconfigure a website.

Adapting to technological changes is perhaps easier early in the life of an organization (e.g. Common Cause adapting to the WATS-long distance phone lines and developing the Washington Connection outsider lobbying infrastructure). Over time, pathways become entrenched and are difficult to change. Translating data stored on punch cards and floppy disks to new software incurs costs of time and resources. In addition, pressure points accumulate over time so leaders must respond to many organizational problems that did not exist early on.

²⁰ The 2014 ballot question read, "Should the City of Chicago empower voters and reduce the corruptive influence of big special interest money in our elections by financing campaigns using small contributions from voters and a limited amount of public funds?"

Yet keeping current with internet metrics enhanced Common Causes' financial prospects. The internet facilitated expanding supporter lists within issue areas. Issue alerts targeted those who expressed interest in a certain topic by previous contributions, completed surveys, or signed petitions, among other examples.

For many years, Common Cause's outsider lobbying infrastructure relied upon crusading newspaper editorials and broadcast television reports to express public dissatisfaction with government. In the twenty-first century, many citizens received their political news from internet sources. They expressed dissatisfaction with government through social media. Thus it was essential for Common Cause to use social media and emails to communicate and mobilize supporters.

In 2009 Common Cause hired a Social Media Consultant and expanded its social media presence, including hiring communications directors in state offices. Then-president Robert Edgar was a prolific tweeter. A leader stated, "Edgar cranked up the internet, Facebook, twitter" and used social media to move the agenda. Prior to 2009 there were fewer than 5,000 Common Cause Facebook followers online. In 2014 there were over 55,000 followers and Twitter feeds were a communication staple. After the election of President Donald Trump in 2016 the number of followers jumped to almost 100,000 on Facebook and 34,000 on Twitter.

The use of email is an evolving strategy for Common Cause leaders. Routine emails connect supporters to the organization and provide updates when Congress and state legislatures are in session. Leaders argue Common Cause is distinctive because its communications do not "throw meat out there" as a ploy for attention. Nor is the organization involved in "new journalism" (i.e. subjective reporting). Instead it seeks to educate citizens.

Emails are useful for mobilizing supporters of various causes. Aaron Scherb, Director of Legislative Affairs, sends emails every few weeks while Congress is in session with a list of hearings and events specific to Common Cause issues. The list is a convenient resource for leaders, activists, and interested members.

Sprinkled in many Common Cause emails are “calls to action,” prompting recipients to sign a petition, call a legislator’s office, attend a webinar or rally, etc. For example, calls to action recruited 2012 U.S. presidential election poll watchers. Volunteers attended a webinar for their training.

Email is also useful for disseminating in-house research and presenting thoughtful analyses of issues. After filing a constitutional challenge to the filibuster in *Common Cause v. Biden* (2012) members received emails asking them to sign a petition to the Senate to “get America moving again,” email and call their Senator, donate to the “Fix the Filibuster” campaign, and celebrate success as the Senate voted to end the filibuster for judicial nominees in November 2013.

A leader stressed that emails are one way to get the word out; they do not “cover the waterfront.” An ongoing concern was too many emails could result in supporters ignoring or deleting them. Yet results from the 2015 survey indicate most members (82%) believe they receive about the right amount of information from Common Cause. In-house surveys in 2012 and 2013 resulted in similar returns with more than eight out of ten respondents believing the amount of communications from Common Cause is “about right.”

In the 2015 survey, members used an open-ended question to comment on Common Cause emails. Some members were mobilized by emails; one respondent wrote, “emails from Common Cause are my link to activism.” Another was concerned about the loss of Edgar, but noted “Robert Reich has done a HEROIC job of stepping up to send emails to us.” Yet members who had been with the organization some time missed the personal contact of periodic meetings “that had the advantage of permitting a kind of esprit de corps to fuel our efforts.” Criticisms included emails seeming like “poorly disguised fund-raising efforts.” Also communication seemed to be all one-way, substantiated by a lack of feedback from the in-house survey emailed to members each year.

Almost eight out of ten members agreed that the biggest impact of the internet has been how it changes members’ participation. A little over half (53%) believed it positively affected how leaders represent members’ concerns. There was less agreement regarding negative impacts of the internet.

The most frequent responses were the internet changed organizational structure (48%) and identity (40%).

Structurally the internet weakened the linchpin role played by the Washington Connection, a characteristic that made Common Cause unique in its field. The Washington Connection no longer used 3x5 cards with activists' names whom they called and informed of the latest happenings in federal government. Instead volunteers often received print-outs of supporters to call to invite to hearings, press conferences, and other Common Cause activities. Yet in 2014 the Washington Connection continued to provide an invaluable service—a human connection for the organization's supporters—in line with an identity established in the organization's early years.

Internet communication and mobilization strategies took root during the punctuated equilibrium and instability of Common Cause's crises years. Some interpreted the punctuation as a sharp, abrupt severing of the organization from its history and identity. Relative newcomers to Common Cause led the organization away from Gardner's Rules to improve financial solvency. Adaptations to technological advances threatened and began to overtake established lobbying infrastructure. Strong Board Chairs and Presidents were needed as Common Cause started to play by new rules.

C. Common Cause Leadership (2007-2015)

A timeline of National Governing Board Chairs and Presidents is separated by a critical juncture in 1999. The juncture contributed to an organizational punctuation when allegiance to Gardner's Rules and disproportionate information processing were overcome by existential crises. Top leaders relatively new to Common Cause established pathways leading away from long-held organizational norms. Most of the "old guard" who had worked with Gardner left the organization (according to a 2014 interview with a Common Cause leader). Although Common Cause survived through its second phase crises, it did so by becoming a different type of public interest group.

Leaders no longer adhered to Gardner's Rules in their decision making. New pathways included the CCEF, a turn toward states and grassroots lobbying, and internet-based mobilization. Issue

expansion beyond campaign finance reform started under Pingree (e.g. fighting media conglomeration; becoming an elections and voting “watchdog”) and continued with third-phase presidents Edgar (e.g. fighting ALEC; opening an international program) and Rapoport (e.g. income inequality; protecting voting rights).

Between 2007 and 2008 Common Cause’s President and Board Chair stepped down. In 2007 Chellie Pingree resigned to campaign for, and ultimately win, Maine’s 1st Congressional District seat. Jim Leach, a Republican and former U.S. Representative from Iowa (1976-2007), was elected Chair in 2007. The following year Leach left to support Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign.

Top leadership gaps were filled by two highly regarded national figures—Robert Edgar who became President in 2007 and Robert Reich who was elected Board Chair in 2010. Both men had previous experience serving Common Cause. Edgar sat on the Board two years before becoming President, thus his experience drew from new organizational rules and norms. Reich previously served on the Board with Archibald Cox and Fred Wertheimer, when Gardner’s Rules held sway.

Top leaders after the critical juncture in 1999 often had prior experience as elected officials. For some, their leadership represented a shift away from the nonpartisan image cultivated by early founders and leaders. The elevation of Edgar and Reich returned leadership to those not seeking political office, more consistent with the founders’ intent.

1. National Governing Board Chair

When Jim Leach stepped down from Board Chair in 2008, then-president Robert Edgar and the Board reviewed and reaffirmed their nonpartisan policy that those who speak for Common Cause will not endorse a candidate or serve in an official capacity on a campaign. Martha Tierney, an attorney and expert in election law, Board Vice Chair, and Chair of Colorado Common Cause, became acting Board Chair until the election of Robert Reich in 2010.

Robert Reich was a national figure due to service in three national administrations, including Secretary of Labor under President Clinton (1993-1997). In 2010 he was, and currently remains, a

Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley. He is a well-respected economist, author, and national speaker. His leadership gave Common Cause extra weight, heft, and legitimacy.

Robert Reich's experience with Common Cause spans its three phases. In the 1970s he served as an intern. He was a National Governing Board member in the 1980s and became Board Chair in 2010. Thus his leadership symbolizes both stability and renewal. Results of the 2015 membership survey included the comment, Reich is "exactly what is needed."

According to Reich, Common Cause finds leverage points in order to influence public policy. One means is to equip the public, through the media, to be a vigilant safeguard. In a 1913 *Harper's Weekly* article Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis stated "Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants." True to its founding mission, Common Cause acts to apply sunlight, influence policy, and during elections get candidates in line on governance integrity issues. In this manner, Common Cause helps promote democracy, or our "common cause."

In 2013 Reich narrated the documentary *Inequality for All*, a film about widening income inequality in the U.S. Common Cause supporters hosted house parties to watch the film. House parties to view Reich's *Inequality for All* and Bill Moyers' *United States of ALEC* promoted Common Cause to new audiences and provided additional resources.

Under Reich's leadership, economic issues became more prominent. Newly elected president Miles Rapoport's 2014 reorganization added an economic-based issue area, "A Fair Economy" to the issue agenda. These types of issues were never previously a part of Common Cause's core agenda although they may have been a subtext. Some leaders perceived adding economic issues to the agenda as a revolutionary change, and partly due to the influence of Robert Reich.

Three years prior to Reich's election to Board Chair, Robert Edgar became president of Common Cause. His reorganization helped renew the organization, eventually leading to pockets of revitalization. Thus Edgar's presidency marks the beginning of Common Cause's third phase.

2. **President**

Robert W. “Bob” Edgar became Common Cause President in 2007 after serving two years on the National Governing Board. Edgar previously served as a member of the House of Representatives from Pennsylvania (1975 to 1987), President of Claremont School of Theology (1990-2000), and Chief Executive of the National Council of Churches (2000-2007). His leadership of Common Cause was cut short prematurely when he passed away in April 2013.

Leaders credited Edgar with reviving Common Cause. Edgar was an active, vocal president with energy and commitment. Indeed, the word energetic often appears in descriptions of Bob Edgar. He traveled broadly to promote renewal of state offices and cultivate leadership among members. Edgar made state programs a larger priority (building on similar efforts by the previous president, Chellie Pingree).

Robert Edgar promoted unification of Common Cause. He made clear everyone was part of the same organization and focused on building staff morale, the most important activity of an organizational leader according to John Gardner (Gardner, 1990). At the same time, he articulated lines of authority as Common Cause was one organization with state branches.

After Edgar’s untimely death in 2013, Miles Rapoport, Connecticut Secretary of State 1995-1999 and General Assembly member 1985-1995, moved from leadership of the Demos interest group to Common Cause President in 2014. Rapoport’s reorganization introduced a new issue area, A Fair Economy, to the Common Cause agenda. The new issue area was framed as fighting income inequality, an output of a dysfunctional democracy.

Pockets of revitalization occurred during Edgar and Rapoport’s presidencies. No longer bound by Gardner’s Rules, they successfully influenced the policy process by using different political arenas, issue selection, lobbying strategies, and representative frames. Their reorganizations solidified a changed organizational identity.

D. Third Phase Adaptations (2007-2015)

Third phase leaders helped stabilize Common Cause after years of crises. The organization's mission remained to improve governance integrity but the founding rules and norms were changed. Action principles were less tied to past successes and more dependent on leaders' interpretations of political opportunities.

1. Edgar Reorganization (2007-2013)

When Edgar became president, organizational focus was on paying bills. Total revenue was down again after a positive jump in 2006 (see FIGURE 4, p.56). The 2008 recession was just taking hold. One leader recalled in a 2014 interview that "Common Cause barely hung on" when Edgar became president. Within a few years, Edgar moved organizational focus from paying bills to democracy reform.

Edgar revived Common Cause as a commitment of faith and part of his personality. He was a strong internal leader. He also believed in cultivating the leadership of members. Edgar did not have as much of a national following as John Gardner but he was respected and well-regarded by the people who worked with him and those who supported Common Cause.

a. Grassroots Mobilization

Before Fred Wertheimer stepped down as president of the organization in 1996, a National Governing Board working group formed to draw up a reorganization plan. The reorganization plan consisted of four principles, but primary emphasis was placed on the first principle, "dramatically increasing our ability to engage in grassroots action . . . [which] occurs when we involve Common Cause members and others in a concerted effort to change government" (February 1, 1996 memo Working Group on Organizational Change; Princeton Archives).²¹ Grassroots mobilization grew in

²¹ The other principles were flexibility to respond to state and national political opportunities, an organized presence in every state, and unify and coordinate state and national staff; elements of Common Cause President Ann McBride's Reorganization Plan.

importance during Common Cause's second and third phases, especially as reform grew less likely in Congress.

Grassroots mobilization took many forms over Common Cause's history. Congressional district steering committees and the Washington Connection structured outsider lobbying for decades. Project Independence at the national level and Citizens' Armies in several states used petition signing to build activist lists and support for reform efforts. When the Board chair or one of its members spoke somewhere about issues important to the organization, it was considered a form of grassroots mobilization. Frequently used internet tactics included online petition signing, emails, and communications via social media.

Robert Edgar effectively used protests as a form of grassroots mobilization. Protests engaged more members than any other tactic except signing online petitions and reenergized the organization. Edgar noted this form of grassroots activism is "really getting back to our roots" like the social movement when Common Cause was formed.

A particularly successful grassroots campaign was national in scope but mostly waged at the state level. The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) registered with the I.R.S. as a 501c3 charitable organization but was funded by the Koch brothers and numerous corporations. ALEC distributed pro-business, limited government model legislation to state legislators that subsequently became proposed bills. Working with the Center for Media and Democracy, Common Cause leaders went to state governments and requested documents under the Freedom of Information Act. About two years later Common Cause submitted a whistleblower complaint to the IRS with over 4,000 pages of ALEC documents.

After filing the whistleblower complaint, Common Cause led protests to gain supporters and media attention. For example, it organized a 2011 protest against the Koch brothers as they were holding a retreat at a Rancho Mirage, California resort. Eleven busloads brought about 1000 people to the event, with media in tow. Common Cause set up a stage in a parking lot across the street from the

resort. Edgar and Jim Hightower (a political activist who served as Texas Agriculture Commissioner 1983-1991) spoke; then protesters moved into the street and up the resort's driveway. Police arrested over two dozen for trespassing (see Lovett and Lichtblau, 2011). Dan Eggen, a *Washington Post* reporter, described the event, "suddenly Common Cause is manning the barricades, leading a rowdy campaign by liberal groups decrying the outsized role of big money in U.S. politics" (February 10, 2011). Subsequently Common Cause led similar protests in various locations including Oklahoma City, Dallas, and outside ALEC's national headquarters in Washington, D.C. As the campaign continued over 44 corporations, six nonprofits, and 74 state legislators withdrew from ALEC.

Mobilizing large numbers of people was a challenge for organizers, especially at the national level. The internet made it easier to find people interested in attending but fewer people had time to participate. Declining real incomes led to people working two or more jobs. A greater percentage of women were in the workforce than at Common Cause's founding. Even in pockets of revitalization, coalitions pooled resources to enhance protests' salience and legitimacy.

During Edgar's presidency, grassroots mobilization more frequently included protests in order to draw media and public attention to certain issues and the organization itself. Thus it was a component of Common Cause's renewal. With a gridlocked Congress these types of tactics became an important means to apply countervailing pressure and signify an expanded vision for the organization.

b. An Expanded Vision

John Gardner and early founders had an expansive view of Common Cause's mission coupled with a pragmatic approach to lobbying Congress, as exemplified by the focus on structure and process issues. Robert Edgar, and Chellie Pingree before him, turned toward an expanded vision as influencing Members of Congress became increasingly difficult. Pingree turned organizational focus toward the states and added Media and Democracy issues. Edgar extended her work in the states and brought in Michael Copps, a member of the Federal Communications Commission from 2001-2011, as a special adviser to Media and Democracy reform. Edgar also added an international arm to the organization.

From its early years, Common Cause inspired activists around the globe. In 1980 H. D. Shourie founded Common Cause in India after reading about the U.S. Common Cause (see Shourie 2005). Shourie founded the organization because “The voice of the common man must rise” but there was no affiliation between the U.S. and India organizations. Yet there are some similarities. In 2003, the organization filed a petition with the Supreme Court of India protesting political officials’ use of public funds to advertise “personalities, parties, or particular governments.” Subsequently a Court-appointed committee created guidelines that applied to all government advertisements. An expatriate gathering in Paris organized a similar group around French issues, including public financing of campaigns and individual participation.

In 2008 Lauren Coletta, Director of Field Operations and Grassroots, initiated the Common Cause International Visitors Program with Edgar’s support. For about five years Common Cause collaborated with the National Democratic Institute to bring in international partners from around the globe (e.g. North Africa, Central Europe, Central America). Partners were trained in advocacy strategies and issue expertise.

Edgar’s expanded vision created tension among some members of the Board. Yet by 2012 membership numbers were up, total revenue was up, and net assets were at a desirable level. A new staff structure was in place which gave Edgar more time to travel to states and concentrate on fundraising. The organization was able to improve staff capacity and fill new positions in the national policy and program offices and in states. For example, Common Cause Illinois reopened in 2012 under the leadership of Rey López-Calderón (the state office was closed in 2001).

Changes to the external environment contributed to Common Cause’s turn away from a strategic focus on lobbying Members of Congress. Instead Edgar turned toward grassroots mobilization and greater attention to state programs. The idea of a government reform group, once manifested by professionals lobbying Congress, became more about democracy reform even as Miles Rapoport became president in 2014.

2. **Rapoport Reorganization (2014-2015)**

Miles Rapoport served for almost fifteen years as President of Demos before being elected to head Common Cause. On its website, Demos is described as “a public policy organization working for an America where we all have an equal say in our democracy and an equal chance in our economy.” When Rapoport took the helm at Common Cause, the Occupy Movement was in the news highlighting income inequality. The documentary *Inequality for All*, narrated by Robert Reich, was being shown across the country.

a. **A Fair Economy**

Rapoport’s reorganization included adding a new substantive issue area—A Fair Economy—to Common Cause’s agenda. Like Media and Democracy, the new issue area was a means to expand the potential resource base and range of coalition partners, as well as increase mobilization. Leaders’ reactions to the new issue area were mixed but mostly positive. One perspective was a direct economic issue was never part of the organization’s core mission, although it might have been a subtext. In the past, Common Cause’s work focused on inputs into a functional democracy (e.g. voting rights), then let the policy fall where it may. Income inequality was an outcome, a consequence of a dysfunctional democracy. Thus the organization’s new issue focus may have been revolutionary (in Bernie Sanders’ popular terminology) but it was also a sign of the political times.

Another perspective was Rapoport was not straying from Common Cause’s foundational purposes, but was bringing a different approach. Accountability and transparency still applied to income inequality, an area of expertise for Rapoport. Like Pingree and Edgar, Rapoport expanded organizational vision.

b. **Rapoport’s Vision**

Rapoport’s vision for Common Cause included programmatic and organizational goals. Economic inequality and economic justice issues were added to the agenda. Some state offices were already doing work in these areas, but adding them as national programs was a change for the entire

organization. In addition, he wanted to make Common Cause a more diverse organization—in its staff, Board, and membership.

Other goals built upon prior adaptations. Digital strategies were prioritized in order to attract individuated activists and get them to move up the ladder of engagement toward commitment. Under Rapoport's direction and with Chang Park's grant, Common Cause launched its Web 2.0 website in 2014. Besides attracting individuated activists, digital strategies promoted organizational visibility.

Like Edgar, Rapoport advanced a movement orientation yet he went even further. He wanted to build Common Cause not as a niche player but as part of a larger movement working with organizations and joint campaigns. Priorities included growing the number of supporters to a million and employing at least two staff in every state.

Rapoport continued to emphasize grassroots mobilization. He explained there are two key elements to consider: (1) build the list of supporters and mobilize them; and (2) try to have people speak up in their own voice instead of through a professional lobbying group (such as Common Cause when it operated under Gardner's Rules). Developing leadership skills among members was a priority. Thus he supported action teams which helped grow pockets of revitalization at the state and local levels. To Rapoport, protests were a sub-category of activism to be used and they need not be rowdy.

Leaders believed Rapoport enhanced Common Cause's reputation by moving the organization forward. One argued that John Gardner did not believe in "laying on laurels." An organization that does needs to look inward and determine why they are perpetuating itself—an evaluative process that is hard to do and can easily meet resistance. Edgar and Rapoport's reorganizations turned Common Cause away from specific lobbying of Congress and toward helping citizens strengthen their voices. Forms and processes of dual representation changed accordingly.

E. Dual Representation Infrastructure Recast

New rules and norms affected the "what" and the "who" of dual representation. Yet Common Cause's collective quest remained the public quality of governance integrity, an aspect of the normative

cohesion binding together the U.S. political system. Governance integrity was framed as “open, honest, and accountable government.” The quest was advanced by applying countervailing power in the policymaking process in Congress and other political arenas. Another consistency was Common Cause as a mode of political participation to overcome the collective action problem (e.g. forming volunteer-powered action teams in states).

Leaders changed their interpretation of what they represented as external and internal environments changed. Organizational characteristics that once made Common Cause distinctive—Gardner’s Rules, representative processes such as issue polls and Board elections—had been adopted by other groups or suspended. The internet changed principal-agent dynamics by facilitating individuated activism and an organization’s ability to listen to its members (Karpf, 2016) but fewer personal contacts. Comparing the 1995 and 2009 Common Cause Mission Statements (see FIGURES 11 and 12) suggests how leaders changed their approach to representation from the first to third phases.

FIGURE 11
MISSION STATEMENT—OCTOBER 13, 1995

Common Cause is a non-partisan citizens' organization whose goal is to ensure open, honest, accountable and effective government at the federal, state and local levels. Common Cause seeks by sustained and focused lobbying campaigns, grassroots activities, and other efforts: To strengthen public participation and public faith in our institutions of self-government; To ensure that government and the political process serve the general interest, rather than special interests; To curb the excessive influence of money on government decisions and elections; To promote fair and honest elections and high ethical standards for government officials; and to protect the civil rights and civil liberties of all Americans.

In 1995 Common Cause operated under Gardner’s Rules. The organization claimed to represent citizens’ interest (or “what”) in “open, honest, accountable and effective government at the federal, state and local levels.” Its role in the policymaking process was to *ensure* governance integrity (italics added). The interest would be represented primarily by sustained and focused lobbying campaigns, then grassroots activities and other efforts.

By 2009 Common Cause’s rules and norms were changed. Amending Gardner’s Rules breached a decision making framework, expanding leaders’ autonomy to decide what the organization represented

within its governance integrity mission. Common Cause Education Fund campaigns, state programs, and individuated activism were integral components of the organization’s work. Thus more attention was given to grant requirements, state-level political opportunities, and individuated activists’ interests.

Public opinion changed as well. The softening of attitudes toward federal government expressed during the 1990s was gone by 2009. In the 2000s, public trust in government dropped and remained low through 2015 (see APPENDIX B: GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND PUBLIC TRUST). The newer mission statement suggests growing concerns about dysfunctional democracy.

FIGURE 12
MISSION STATEMENT—MAY 8, 2009

Common Cause is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to restoring the core values of American democracy, reinventing an open, honest and accountable government that serves the public interest, and empowering ordinary people to make their voices heard in the political process.

From 1995 to 2009, Common Cause’s depiction changed from a non-partisan citizens’ organization to a nonpartisan, grassroots organization. The different wording implies significant differences. During its first phase, Common Cause was first and foremost a lobby supported by citizens (adding resources and legitimacy). By the third phase, the organization adopted the role of citizen mobilizer and organizer (moving supporters up the ladder of activism). In the most recent mission statement, grassroots supplanted lobbying campaigns suggesting how reforms would be achieved.

Democracy reforms—restoring values of democracy, reinventing government that serves the public interest, and empowering ordinary people—reflect a new perspective of governance integrity, or what Common Cause represents. Adding democracy to the mission statement reveals a different frame for the organization’s work. In 1995, Common Cause’s primary goal was “to *ensure* open, honest, accountable and effective government” (*italics added*), or an emphasis on government institutions. In 2009 it became “restoring the core values of American democracy,” or an emphasis on broad participatory processes.

During interviews conducted in 2014 and 2015, the word democracy was often used to describe what Common Cause does and who it represents. A few examples include:

The driver of Common Cause work is to “make democracy work for everyone.”

Common Cause’s role is to make democracy better, somewhat like the German chemical company BASF’s slogan, “We don’t make a lot of the products you buy. We make a lot of the products you buy better” (see Deutsch, 2004).

Common Cause was formed as a people’s lobby in 1970 to give people a voice in government. Now more organizations are working in the democracy space, even older organizations like LWV, NAACP, ACLU, and unions are working on democracy now. There has been a huge expansion of organizations into democracy space in last ten years, even since 2010; organizations not usually working on democracy issues are wanting to work on money in politics, voting rights, realizing they can’t win issues because democracy is broken.

Common Cause is unique because it focuses on democracy issues as whole—not only on voting rights or money in politics—its perspective on democracy agenda makes it unique.

Common Cause strength is providing leadership in reaching out to members, lobbyists, and through them other organizations. Reaches lots of decision makers. Common Cause finds other organizations that can enrich, strengthen overall goal of building a better democracy.

The current stance of the National Governing Board is more acceptance of taking on big issues, such as economic inequality and the racial divide that may be tied back to democracy. For example, the growing gap between rich and poor significantly affects democracy issues such as who is controlling legislation, influencing courts, or the emerging plutocracy.

Common Cause represents people who take the time to care about democracy . . . anyone who wants to see government open up, become more transparent, and lessen the influence of big money.

Leaders’ statements suggest what Common Cause represents shifted toward ideological (democracy reform) and substantive (addressing economic inequality) goals as means to enhance governance integrity.

Promoting democracy is a frame used by leaders in their mobilization and contribution appeals, especially after the election of Donald Trump in 2016. Two days after the election of Trump as well as Republican majorities in both chambers of Congress (November 10, 2016), Common Cause President

Karen Hobert Flynn wrote in an email to members, “This is a challenging moment for our work to strengthen our democracy . . .” Two days later Hobert Flynn wrote in another email:

. . .now we have our most challenging political climate since Watergate. Millions of Americans are worried that the **divisive and hateful rhetoric** President-elect Trump used in the campaign could become a reality and they’re counting on Common Cause to do what we’ve always done when democracy is under threat.

In a June 15, 2017 email, National Governing Board Chair Robert Reich wrote:

To say our democracy is in a state of emergency may be an understatement. . . I believe our democracy will emerge stronger from these trials—**but only if** We The People take a stand. . . this President’s recklessness is motivating millions to speak out for the rule of law. With your help we can channel this motivation into the persistent, sustainable momentum we need to prevail, beyond Donald Trump, and build a democracy that truly works for us all. . . There is a democracy movement growing in America right now, gaining speed and power at the grassroots level.

The use of democracy as a frame for what Common Cause represents infuses leaders’ perspectives and communications.

Several members echo democracy reform as what Common Cause represents in their answers to open-ended questions in the 2015 Membership Survey. A few examples are:

Democracy reform is Common Cause. Nothing else. Enough issue groups doing other issues.

We have some fundamental things to fix to protect our democracy and Common Cause has a fundamental, leading role to play.

We need Common Cause to keep fighting against anything that subverts democracy.

We need to maintain a defined nonpartisan democracy focus in our work.

In contrast, only one survey respondent mentioned Common Cause’s role as a lobbying organization.

Thus there is some evidence of a two-way correspondence between how the principal and agent interpret what the organization represents (see Saward, 2006 and Wilson, 1995).

Other changes in what is represented may be found in the 2009 statement. The use of the phrase “the public interest” was contrary to the founders’ goal of representing “a public interest” (see Chapter Two). An emphasis on educating the public outside of one’s organization (a characteristic of 501c3 groups) was implied by the phrase “empowering ordinary people to make their voices heard.”

A broader conceptualization of organizational mission—from ensuring integrity to reinventing government—fit within a changing political environment. During the third phase, public distrust of government rose as did populist sentiment, or rejecting establishment institutions (displayed at both ends of the political spectrum; e.g. the rise of the Tea Party and Occupy Movements). In 2009 Common Cause framed its mission more as a change-making perspective working to reinvent government than a pragmatic approach to structure and process issues.

Mission statement changes indicate a shift regarding what Common Cause represents. Leaders' framing of governance integrity goals expanded from working on the inside to reform government institutions to working on the outside to promote democracy. From 2009 to 2017 Common Cause portrayed itself as a more expansive instrument of collective action—a grassroots organization working to reinvent government (as stated in its 2009 Mission Statement).

New rules and norms similarly affected who Common Cause represented. The organization continued to represent a diffuse constituency across the country. But as representative processes were suspended, the “who” expanded. A Common Cause leader recounted in 2014 that Robert Edgar, president 2007-2013, used to say “We don’t have 400,000 members we have 300 million,” suggesting a representation of all American citizens, or the public interest.

Common Cause members supported a trustee form of representation. In the 2015 membership survey, over 60 percent ranked “Staff research and select issues” as a benefit of a traditional group like Common Cause (in contrast to an internet-based group such as MoveOn.org; see Karpf, 2012). It was the top-ranked benefit for over one-fourth of the respondents, beating other choices such as “Physical presence in national and/or state capitals” and “Development of networks among government officials and similarly-focused groups.” Perhaps most surprising it even beat “Insider influence, working within legislative offices, executive agencies, courtrooms”—the reason why the organization was initially founded.

The same survey question elicited another unexpected response. The traditional group characteristic “Lobbyists represent members” was ranked lower than any other possible benefit. Taken together, members prioritizing staff selection of issues as most beneficial and lobbyists representing members as least beneficial reflects environmental changes. Government reform lobbyists’ influence is limited by partisan polarization so individuated activists may be less interested in hiring a professional lobbyist than in grassroots organizing and building a movement.

In addition, the response suggests more facets than the “two-way street” Saward (2006) used to depict the representative claim, or agents (leaders and lobbyists) make claims accepted by the principal (members and supporters). The principal may look to agents to select issues but rank lobbyists’ efforts as less important. The oversampling of activist members is an important consideration when interpreting these results, which prompts the question of gradation in agent-principle dynamics.

When groups are funded by many small contributions from a diffuse group of members, the exit option means leaders are more sensitive to members’ expressed interests. If only a few patrons are relied upon for the bulk of its resources, then there is less incentive to follow members’ interests (see Rothenberg, 1992, p. 264). Diminished membership totals meant leaders relied more on large contributions—bequests, large donors, and the Common Cause Education Fund.

However, the exit option still exerted some pressure on leaders’ decision making. Evolving digital strategies enabled individuated activism and increased the fluidity of membership according to issue campaign. The “who” expanded to a more amorphous interpretation of issue- and Common Cause-supporters. Thus leaders still needed to attract and retain supporters to enhance organizational legitimacy among political officials and other reform groups, especially as grassroots mobilization became more important.

Defining the what as democracy reform necessitated an enlargement of the who. Although lobbyists continued to promote specific issues, it was no longer the primary means of representation. The loss of first phase delegate representation processes was replaced with third phase revitalization by

grassroots mobilization and action teams. Supporters remained essential to organizational survival. Although their financial contributions were not as large a percentage of revenue as in the past, their numbers expanded the real and potential pool of activists. In addition, they held the key to external and internal legitimacy, especially as recently-passed campaign finance reforms came under fire.

F. Campaign Finance Reform—Third Phase

With gridlock in Congress, Common Cause fought for campaign finance reform in other arenas, including federal courts. An anti-regulatory line of U.S. Supreme Court decisions chipped away at reforms enacted in the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002, even after most were upheld in *McConnell v. Federal Election Commission* (2003). Opposition to election reform was helped by the appointment of two new Justices to the Supreme Court. President George W. Bush appointed, and the Senate confirmed, Chief Justice John Roberts in 2005 and Justice Samuel Alito in 2006. Decisions after their arrival on the Supreme Court, Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Alito joined Justices Thomas and Scalia as four of the five most conservative voting justices since 1937 (Landes and Posner, 2008).

After 2005 several key campaign finance reform cases came before the Court and Common Cause acted to support enacted reforms by filing amicus briefs. Similar to the line of court cases challenging the 1976 *Buckley v. Valeo* decision, Common Cause's side lost in four major Supreme Court decisions as reforms enacted in the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002 were overturned: *Federal Election Commission v. Wisconsin Right to Life, Inc.* (551 US 449, 2007), *Davis v. Federal Election Commission* (554 US 724, 2008), *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (558 US ___, 2010), and *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission* (572 US ___, 2014). Yet Common Cause's efforts assured supporters of the organization's commitment to maintaining reforms, performing a watchdog function, and acting to apply countervailing power against the corrupting influence of money during election campaigns.

1. **Federal Election Commission v. Wisconsin Right to Life, Inc. (551 US 449, 2007)**

Common Cause, with several other groups, filed a brief of *amicus curiae* in support of the Federal Election Commission. At issue was the constitutionality of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act's (BCRA) ban on corporate-sponsored issue ads (advertisements that do not explicitly endorse or oppose a candidate) in the 60 days before an election. Chief Justice Roberts wrote the opinion for the 5-4 split Court. The Court's opinion struck down this part of the BCRA, arguing:

McConnell held that express advocacy of a candidate or his opponent by a corporation shortly before an election may be prohibited, . . . when it comes to defining what speech qualifies as the functional equivalent of express advocacy subject to such a ban—the issue we do have to decide—we give the benefit of the doubt to speech, not censorship.

In sum, the Court found that the ban on issue ads chilled free speech.

2. **Davis v. Federal Election Commission (554 US 724, 2008)**

Common Cause filed a brief of *amicus curiae* in support of the Federal Election Commission. At issue was the “Millionaires Amendment” section of the BCRA, intended to limit campaign spending disparities by raising the legal limit on contributions for a candidate substantially outspent by an opposing candidate who was using personal wealth. Again the Court split 5-4 in its decision. Justice Alito authored the opinion which struck down this section of the BCRA as not advancing an important governmental interest.

3. **Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (558 US __, 2010)**

Common Cause, with several other groups, filed an *amicus* brief in support of the Federal Election Commission. Citizens United, a nonprofit 501c3 corporation, challenged the BCRA's restriction on corporations using general treasury funds for independent expenditures and electioneering communications. The Federal Election Commission defines an independent expenditure as expressly advocating the election or defeat of a candidate that is not made in consultation with the candidate's committee. An electioneering communication is a communication that identifies a candidate for federal

office and is distributed publicly shortly before the election. Citizens United argued the restrictions limited political speech protections under the First Amendment.

In another 5-4 split, the Court overruled parts of the *McConnell v. Federal Election Commission* (2003) decision by striking down prohibitions against corporations and unions' use of general treasury funds for independent expenditures and electioneering communications in federal elections. Justice Anthony Kennedy, author of the Court's opinion, stated independent expenditures "do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption." Also such prohibitions interfered with the "open marketplace" of ideas, as corporations were nothing more than "associations of citizens." The First Amendment protects such speech, ruled the majority, and corporations cannot be singled out for special regulation.

The *Citizens United* opinion held out disclosure as a remedy available to the public and shareholders to constrain unlimited corporate political spending. Justice Kennedy wrote that disclosure requirements "provided shareholders and citizens with the information needed to hold corporations and elected officials accountable for their positions and supporters." Yet disclosure laws at the federal and state levels may insufficiently capture corporate political spending. In addition, most shareholders receive limited, if any, information on a corporation's political spending. Even if information was available, stockholders possess little effective control regarding how the money is spent. Creating a 501c4 tax-status social welfare organization, which is not required to reveal donors, is a means to avoid disclosure (Common Cause is distinctive in that it discloses its 501c4 donors).

The Supreme Court overturned the BCRA's prohibition on corporations and labor unions using general treasury funds for independent political expenditures. But it also overturned almost a century of legislation and Court decisions limiting corporations and unions' spending during elections. For Common Cause the decision imperiled more than three decades of lobbyists' efforts to achieve federal-level campaign finance reform.

The *Citizens United* decision helped reverse Common Cause's membership decline. In a 2015 Common Cause survey, members mentioned overturning *Citizens United* as a reason they joined the organization. It was also mentioned as one of the most important issues the organization pursues at the national and state levels.

It is ironic that the *Citizens United* decision imperiled the campaign reform efforts that were Common Cause's lifeblood for many years but served to revitalize the organization. Membership totals turned around as leaders promoted the "Amend 2012" campaign, kicked off by Robert Reich, Board Chair, in a www.YouTube.com video (attracting almost 200,000 views) and including a Twitter feed (at @CommonCause). A year later revenue and net assets turned upward for the 501c4 lobbying arm (see FIGURES 3, 6, and 7, p.49, 99-100). The turnaround is in line with the adversity theory, mentioned by Common Cause leaders during President Reagan's administration (see McFarland, 1983, p. 13) but at this time adversity was perceived in Supreme Court decisions (and in 2016 by the election of President Donald Trump).

Over the next few years, Common Cause led successful ballot initiatives in nineteen states and dozens of localities calling on Congress to adopt a Constitutional Amendment to overturn the *Citizens United* decision. From the 111th to the 115th Congress (2010-2017) resolutions for a constitutional amendment were introduced (by Senator Tom Udall D-NM and Representative Richard M. Nolan D-MN) as were proposals for the Fair Elections Now Act which if passed would create a public financing system for congressional elections (by Senator Richard J. Durbin D-IL and Representative John B. Larson D-CT). Common Cause lobbyists supported the proposed resolutions and laws. When an amendment resolution made its way to the U.S. Senate floor in 2014 (the 113th Congress), all Democrats present voted for it (plus the two Independents who caucused with the Democrats) while all Republicans present voted for the filibuster to block it.

Common Cause advocated disclosure requirements that would hold corporations accountable, in line with Justice Kennedy's *Citizens United* opinion. In 2013 Common Cause and other groups in the

Corporate Reform Coalition pressed the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to require publicly traded companies to disclose their political spending (SEC File No. 4-637). The coalition commissioned two research studies, wrote letters to the SEC, and held media events. After a rule-making petition was sent to the SEC urging disclosure, Common Cause sent an issue alert to its supporters, an effort that helped shatter SEC's record for the most comments received (over one million). Yet over three years later, the SEC had not acted on the numerous petitions it received.

4. McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission (572 US , 2014)

Shaun McCutcheon challenged the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act's limit on the aggregate amount an individual may contribute to candidates, political party committees, and political action committees during a two-year federal election cycle. McCutcheon argued that the regulation limited his free speech rights and did not further the government's interest in preventing corruption or the appearance of corruption. Chief Justice John Roberts wrote the plurality opinion for the 5-4 split Court that removed aggregate limits on contributions but maintained limits for federal candidate campaigns, political party committees, and political action committees. Common Cause joined the Campaign Legal Center's *amicus* brief asking the Court to uphold aggregate contribution limits. After the Court's ruling, Common Cause joined other groups in a rally held outside the Supreme Court building.

At the national level, campaign finance reform was imperiled by a line of conservative court decisions. At the same time, Common Cause state offices worked to enact or protect campaign finance reforms, including small-donor matching-funds programs. For example, in 2015 Common Cause Connecticut fought against the state Democratic committee's challenge to the Citizens' Election Program (voluntary full public financing to qualified state executive and legislative candidates), legislation both the national and state offices teamed up to promote in 2004.

For many years prioritizing campaign finance reform enabled some misidentification of Common Cause as a single-issue group. Yet throughout its history, the organization led or participated

in the charge for various approaches to campaign finance reform across levels of government (a leader stated during a 2014 interview that Common Cause was always the “go to” group for such reforms). In 2015 the charge had greater chances for success in pockets of revitalization at the state and local levels.

G. Conclusion

In the 1990s and later 2000s Common Cause was losing members and budget and a new approach was needed. The new approach took into account environmental changes as programmatic emphasis shifted from national reform toward state programs. Strategic focus moved from professionalized lobbying of Congress to grassroots mobilization and civic engagement. The issue agenda expanded to include substantive campaigns under A Fair Economy. The “what” and the “who” Common Cause represented broadened to democracy reforms in the public interest.

The new approach was introduced and developed by Robert Edgar, thus his presidency signals the beginning of Common Cause’s third phase. When Edgar became president, Common Cause still suffered the effects of crises and destabilization. His predecessor turned attention to the states, but Edgar and other leaders reorganized Common Cause to place more emphasis on the state level. Instead of members and state offices supporting national government reform efforts, a unified staff worked together to promote countervailing power at all levels of government.

The Common Cause Education Fund became a significant source of revenue, accounting for almost half the total revenue by 2014. In line with the new approach, most of the CCEF funds were distributed to state offices. Funds were used to enhance civic engagement through education and training citizen activists.

Instead of Gardner’s Rules, action principles became more dependent on leaders’ interpretations of political opportunities. Edgar’s use of grassroots mobilization tactics such as protests attracted supporters and media attention. Membership totals ratcheted upward after the *Citizens United* decision as Common Cause worked to overturn the decision. In 2014 Rapoport added a timely substantive issue to the agenda, A Fair Economy, and enhanced internet capabilities.

Leaders' perceptions of the new approach fell into two broad categories of loyalty to Gardner's vision. One interpretation was Gardner would have wanted a new approach. They point to his warning about following founding rules and norms, "How it is done becomes more important than whether it is done. . . Men become prisoners of their procedures, and organizations that were designed to achieve some goal become obstacles in the path to that goal" (1995 [1963], 47). Another interpretation was moving away from Gardner's Rules made the organization lose its coherent focus and become too diffuse.

Yet renewal did not change certain characteristics of Common Cause's identity. It remains committed to a nonpartisan image and sustained action on governance integrity issues. The range of issues and staff expertise at the national and state levels continued to set it apart from other established groups, such as the League of Women Voters and a number of government reform groups operating with a handful of staff. Volunteers were relied upon—as part of the organizational insider-outsider infrastructure and more recently as activists to mobilize in certain issue areas. Although not as well known as in the 1970s, its reputation and longevity enhanced credibility with coalition partners and the media.

Yet renewal changed the focus of Common Cause's identity. Under Gardner's Rules, strategic focus was lobbying Congress that became untenable with evolving environments. Subsequently political arenas, issue selection, lobbying strategies, and representative frames expanded. Common Cause became a grassroots organization working on inputs (structure and process) and outputs (substantive reforms) to promote democracy reform.

Essentially Common Cause continues to apply countervailing power to policymaking processes at the national, state, and local levels. It organizes and mobilizes interested individuals and thus helps overcome the collective action problem. These organizational endeavors are situated within specific times and places. Chapter Five, Pockets of Revitalization—State Comparison, analyzes Common Cause

efforts in Illinois and Texas, two state offices with similar organizational histories but differing political cultures.

V. POCKETS OF REVITALIZATION—ILLINOIS AND TEXAS COMPARISON

Contrary to Gardner's Rules, Common Cause's strategic focus moved from Congress to the states as government reform became almost impossible at the national level. Existential crises and a critical juncture overcame leaders' disproportionate information processing which held state offices to a secondary role. Common Cause presidents relatively new to the organization, such as Chellie Pingree and Robert Edgar, shifted attention and resources toward states.

In addition, the formation of the Common Cause Education Fund in 2000 introduced a need to promote civic education as well as fund professionalized lobbying of Congress. Gardner's Rules gave low priority to development of civic virtues or debating issues. Yet accepting grants intended to promote civic education meant that political entrepreneurs within Common Cause joined the solution of foundation funds to problems such as educating citizens about state election processes (particularly salient after the 2000 presidential election).

The increasing importance of state offices and attracting foundation grants heightened the need for effective state leaders. In the 2000s, the national office took over hiring state executive directors. Leaders experienced in advocacy work took over state offices, with some also assuming regional and national responsibilities within the organization.

A number of state offices received national attention and resources but not all became pockets of revitalization. In the early 2000s, Illinois and Texas received increased attention and support from national staff. Both offices struggled—Illinois with mismanagement and Texas with finances. The Illinois office shut its doors in 2001 while Texas maintained a presence even under financial constraints. Next, I explore why in 2015 Illinois is a pocket of revitalization while Texas lags behind.

This chapter analyzes Illinois and Texas Common Cause offices in order to solve the puzzle and to answer the research questions: How do adaptations—whether incremental or major shifts—change an organization? And what can a public interest lobby tell us about citizen participation and representation?

I begin my analysis with an overview of political subcultures in Illinois and Texas then turn to descriptive analysis of the two state offices.

B. Overview of Illinois and Texas

The U.S. federal structure promotes cultural fragmentation and diffusion across regions and states. Often states serve as “laboratories of democracy” and are important venues for advancing issues to prominence on the national agenda (e.g. Colorado was a laboratory for sunset legislation; see McFarland, 1984, p.180). Common Cause state office successes are increasingly vital to the organization, in part because they keep reform issues on the agenda when there is no action in Congress.

States differ according to broad political subcultures, which may affect mobilization and the likelihood of policy influence (Elazar, 1972 [1966]; 1970; 1994). Nownes, et al. (2008) found a state’s subculture affects its interest group population (e.g. New York’s environment is conducive to a vibrant interest group community whereas in Arkansas business interests dominate because many citizens choose not to participate). Recent demographic trends weaken dominant subcultures (Lieske, 2010), but institutional friction makes it difficult to alter status quo politics. Thus, these subcultures do not change quickly.

According to political scientist Daniel Elazar, state political subcultures are rooted in different migratory streams that settled regions of the United States. Elazar categorized state political cultures within three broad regions—the greater West, great Northeast, the greater South. The regions spatially differentiate Elazar’s three state political culture typologies—moralistic, individualistic, and traditionalistic. Illinois’ political subculture reflects individualistic state characteristics while Texas’ traditionalistic.

1. Moralistic States

Moralistic-dominated states are within the greater West migratory stream stretching from New England across the northern plains and down the Pacific coast. In a moralistic political culture, politics is a means to address social concerns regarding public goods and services. Since politics is perceived to

offer potential collective benefits, there is greater commitment to local governance goals and intervention—there is also less evidence of graft.

2. Individualistic States

States settled by the great Northeast migratory stream—from the Middle Atlantic and Midwest—are predominantly individualistic. Illinois sits within this stream but is unique in that it sits at the “geo-historical crossroads of the United States, where . . . all the migratory streams meet” (Elazar, 1994, p.33). Yet the state generally reflects its placement within the individualistic region. An individualistic political culture is one in which politics is a means to improve one’s economic and social position. This self-interested approach focuses on personal benefits more than collective concerns, giving some justification to the saying “politics is a dirty business” (Elazar, 1972, p.95-102).

Common Cause Illinois’ office is located in Chicago instead of Springfield, the state capital. Chicago is a one-party city, divided since the 1970s between the “machine regulars” (e.g. the two Daley mayors) and “reformers” (e.g. Aldermen Dick Simpson and Joe Moore). Democrats control patronage, including slating candidates for county judicial elections. Government reform groups must work with the elected reform officials in order to have much effect on most issues.

For much of Common Cause Illinois’ history, Democrats controlled the Illinois General Assembly. Michael J. Madigan (D-Chicago) has been Speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives since 1983 (except for 1995-1997 when Republicans controlled the Illinois House) and state chair of the Democratic Party of Illinois since 1998. John Cullerton (D-Chicago), appointed to the Illinois Senate in 1991, has served as its president since 2009.

In their book, *Corrupt Illinois: Patronage, Cronyism, and Criminality*, Thomas J. Gradel and Dick Simpson (2014, p.xii) conclude Illinois is one of the most corrupt states, and Chicago is one of the most corrupt cities, in our nation. Since 1976, federal courts have convicted more than two thousand Illinois political officials on corruption charges. The authors describe the political subculture as “a

marketplace in which government goods, services, jobs, and contracts are given out as payoffs and patronage” (p.11).

A notable example occurred in 2009 with Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich’s impeachment and subsequent conviction of public corruption, due to his attempts to sell former President Barack Obama’s vacated U.S. Senate seat. Even as the Great Recession wreaked economic havoc, a Joyce Foundation public opinion poll found more than 60 percent of Illinois residents listed corruption as a greater concern than the economy or jobs (Gradel & Simpson, 2014, p.3). Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn replaced Blagojevich, then created the Illinois Ethics Commission, a means to tame the “Wild West” of campaign finance regulations (i.e. there were almost no limits on who could contribute and how much they could give; see p. 203). The commission proposed limiting campaign contributions and more stringent contribution disclosures, measures enacted by the Illinois General Assembly the same year.

Illinois’ individualistic subculture helps and hinders Common Cause Illinois’ influence. On one hand, there is large public support for government reform. On the other hand, corruption may lead to loss of faith in government and decreased civic participation (Gradel & Simpson, 2014, p.196).

3. Traditionalistic States

The greater South is composed of traditionalistic states, ranging from the lower Atlantic across the Southwest. A traditionalistic political culture developed from hierarchical systems prevalent in preindustrial social orders. Social and family ties are paramount. Good government often means following the status quo and a custodial role for politicians. Like individualistic regions, politicians expect to benefit from their role and slating groups select local candidates (e.g. the Citizens’ Charter Association in Dallas; see Trounstone, 2008).

In Texas, the intersection of regional characteristics fuses western individualism with “abiding conservatism,” traditionalistic states’ most salient political characteristic (see Balz and Brownstein, 1996). A Common Cause leader observed, “In California government is perceived as good and helpful; in Texas people are suspicious of government.” When Common Cause Texas organized in the 1970s,

Democrats controlled state government. Yet, as one leader commented, state officials were “Democrats in name only.” The leader added that in 2015, Common Cause Texas members often register as Independents but are ideologically progressive Democrats. Yet in the past Republicans served on the Common Cause Texas state board; usually they were economic conservatives interested in structure and process issues.

An analysis of Texas legislators’ roll call votes from 1973 to 2010 illustrates the defection of conservatives from the Democratic to the Republican Party and increasing partisan polarization. When Common Cause Texas formed in 1973, 37 percent of Democratic House members were more conservative than the most liberal Republican in the House. After 1999, no Democratic House member has been more conservative than the most liberal Republican in the House. A similar pattern occurred in the Texas Senate (see Cunningham, 2010).

By 2004, the Republican Party took control of all Texas statewide offices and both houses of the Texas legislature. After the election of President Obama in 2008, the Texas Republican party split between an establishment pro-business side and ultra conservative dissidents within the Tea Party movement. Tea Party power and success rest largely on its strategy of challenging incumbent establishment Republicans during primary elections.

Two examples suggest how the Tea Party faction is changing Texas politics. In the 1980s, Jeff Wentworth, a Republican state legislator from San Antonio, sponsored many bills for Common Cause Texas and was a friend of the organization. Wentworth served from 1988 to 2013 but lost the 2012 primary to a Tea Party candidate. In the 2014 primary campaign, Dan Patrick (a Texas Senator from the Houston area since 2006 and creator of the state legislature’s Tea Party Caucus) ran against incumbent Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst (in office since 2003). Patrick accused Dewhurst of not being conservative enough, a strategy that helped Patrick win the primary run-off election with 65 percent of the vote.

The rise of the Tea Party in Texas coincides with a change in the general mood around 2010. Tea Party adherents push policy to the right (e.g. anti-immigration, anti-abortion, and anti-Washington). Their efforts advance an already business-friendly environment with corporations receiving large tax subsidies.

For the most part, “Wild West” election campaigns continue in Texas. State campaign contributions are unlimited, except in judicial races. According to a state leader, “Common Cause always tried to get limits on political contributions and [campaign] spending within limits. Now corporations have taken over and are buying the legislature.”

Texas’ political subculture helps and hinders Common Cause Texas’ influence. The University of Texas and Texas Tribune polled Texas voters in 2013. Results indicated political corruption is an important problem nationally (ranking third) and at the state level (ranking sixth) so popular support exists for reform. But increasing party polarization means Common Cause Texas mainly builds relationships with Democrats, an identification that limits opportunities to work with Republicans controlling Texas state government.

Common Cause Illinois and Cause Texas operate in political subcultures characterized by resistance to reform. Corruption and conservatism infuse their political environments. Yet since 2014 Illinois wages successful campaigns while Texas lags behind. Comparative analyses of the two offices affords insights into their varying fortunes.

B. Illinois and Texas State Offices

The late 1960s and early 1970s surge of support for reform meant that rising cynicism applied to state as well as federal government. The environment was conducive to states passing Open Up the System (OUTS) reforms (see McFarland, 1984, p.119). Fortuitously, Common Cause Texas opened as the national office was “riding the wave in” to achieve government reforms. Soon Common Cause Texas became well known among politicians and journalists in Austin, the state capital. When Common Cause Illinois opened in 1978 the reform wave was already ebbing.

After the early 1970s it became more difficult to achieve passage of reform legislation. Both state offices performed watchdog functions by scrutinizing implementation of enacted reforms or calling attention to perceived ethics violations (e.g. open meetings are still a problem in Texas as officials try to hold meetings in tiny rooms that will not hold the press; in 1999 an adviser to Illinois Governor George Ryan helped pick gaming board members).

A snapshot of the state offices uncovers similarities and differences over time. These characteristics illustrate how Common Cause's three phase narrative affected states.

TABLE VII
COMMON CAUSE ILLINOIS AND TEXAS STATE OFFICE COMPARISON

	Illinois	Texas
Political Subculture	Individualistic	Traditional
Year Organized	1978	1973
Membership	1983—25 th (11,134)	1983—41 st (6,518)
Ranking per Capita per State	2015—22 nd (~9,000 members and contributors)	2015—41 st (~3,500 members and contributors)
Crises	2001—State office ceases, national staff takes over operations 2002—Rebuilding state office becomes a national priority 2002-2005—Hugo Rojas, Regional Director, leads state office 2005-2012—No state executive director	2002—“Fighting financial woes” 2003—State office deficit 2004—Rebuilding state office becomes a national priority 2008-2015—All volunteer state leadership
Renewal	2012—Relaunch of office with hire of new executive director Rey López-Calderón 2014— Action Teams form (Money in Politics and Voting Rights) 2015—Brian Gladstein becomes executive director as López-Calderón joins national staff 2017—Common Cause at UIUC formed	2014—Dallas-area activists hold fundraiser 2015—National office holds fundraiser in Austin 2015—Anthony Gutierrez hired as new executive director
Successful State Campaigns	1993—Amendments to the Illinois Lobbyist Registration Act 2003—Illinois Ethics Act 2012—Illinois 15 th state to approve Constitutional amendment to overturn <i>Citizens United v. FEC</i> 2014—Same day registration, electronic registration, early voting reforms, students' right to vote on public university campuses 2015—Fair Elections ballot question supported by 80% of Chicagoans	1973—Texas Public Information Act; Texas Open Meetings Act; Lobby Control Act; Campaign Reporting and Disclosure Act 1976—Sunset Act 1983—Litigation against Houston Metro 1991—Texas Ethics Commission created 2013—Testified for Texas Ethics Commission

Sources: McFarland (1984, p.53); Reynolds 2015 Common Cause Membership Survey; Reynolds 2014 and 2014 interviews with Common Cause leaders; LexisNexis database search of Common Cause in *Chicago Sun Times* and *Austin American-Statesman* newspaper articles 1991-2014.

First phase membership declines at the national level affected both Illinois and Texas. Both states lost members but Illinois lost fewer in percentages (about 19 percent while Texas lost 46 percent of its members). Also, the size of the Common Cause constituency was significantly larger in Illinois in the

beginning than it was in Texas. Yet for many years the Texas office successfully pressed for reform even with fewer members and greater distances to cover than Illinois.

Second phase (mid-1990s to 2007) existential crises hit both state offices. Relative newcomers in Common Cause's top leadership positions (Board Chair Derek Bok; Presidents Scott Harshbarger and Chellie Pingree) took a hard look at state office conditions. Mismanaged offices closed (e.g. Illinois and Virginia) and those running deficits received heightened scrutiny (e.g. Texas and Montana).

Subsequently the national office dedicated resources to rebuilding in Illinois and Texas, assigning an executive director to Illinois and dedicating national staff to work with Common Cause Texas leaders.

During the third phase (2007-2015), the national office hired new executive directors in both states. In Illinois, Rey López-Calderón and Brian Gladstein brought their expertise with mobilizing reform groups. Together they created and built effective local action teams. Texas Common Cause activists worked as volunteers until 2015 when Anthony Gutierrez was hired as the new executive director.

A comparison of Illinois and Texas offices' state campaigns highlights diverging fortunes. During the organization's first phase (1970-1995), Common Cause Texas leaders could boast of several significant reforms. During the third phase, Illinois Common Cause's successes propelled the office back into play as an effective leader and coalition partner in reform efforts.

C. Trajectories of State Offices

Common Cause state offices in Illinois and Texas share a narrative trajectory with the national organization even though they work in dissimilar political cultures. In the first phase, state activists organized offices with popular support. In the second phase, both states struggled with adverse circumstances as crises shook the organization and eventually required infusion of resources from the national office to continue operations. In the third phase, organizational renewal spread to states as the national office hired executive directors and actively recruited support. Increased support reinvigorated Illinois while Texas slowly rebuilds.

1. Common Cause Illinois

In the summer of 1970, John Gardner appeared on television news programs and introduced a new citizen's lobby for national government reform. Also during those summer months, Illinois delegates met to create a revised state constitution. Organizers invited John Gardner to speak at the convention, but rescinded the invitation when they learned Gardner would speak out against the bombing of Cambodia.

A Common Cause Illinois state committee formed by the mid-1970s. In 1978 the office had in place an executive board, a full-time lobbyist, and established press relations. A few years later, the state staff included an executive director, field coordinator, and national issue coordinator.

Similar to the national office, an early membership highpoint occurred in 1974 with over 13,500 on the rolls. Total memberships gradually decreased in the late 1970s but rebounded in the mid-1980s. Throughout the 1990s, membership declined and by 2000 was about half the highpoint (around 6,600). When Common Cause established an online presence in 2004, Illinois membership rose to around 9,000 where it remained through 2015. Thus the state roughly follows the national organization's membership trajectory until the early 2000s when its membership leveled out even as national numbers declined and then turned a corner in 2011 (see FIGURE 3, p.54).

Common Cause Illinois worked for years to strengthen state regulation of lobbyists. In 1993 Governor George Ryan signed Amendments to the Illinois Lobbyist Registration Act (25 ILCS 170/1) (from Ch. 63, par. 171). The amendments required lobbyists to complete ethics training and report expenditures—much less regulation than Common Cause Illinois advocated, but it was still considered a win.

In July 2001 the Common Cause Illinois office was closed by the national office due to questionable management practices. National leaders assured the 6,600 or so Common Cause members in Illinois that the state office would be rebuilt. Within a few months enough local funding was secured for the national staff to “begin the process of hiring staff and rebuilding a weakened and dysfunctional

organization” (Meeting of the Common Cause National Governing Board and Education Fund Board, Archives; 2002 February 1—2002 February 2; Princeton Archives) .

In 2002 the Joyce Foundation awarded a \$160,000 grant to expand Common Cause Educational Fund activities in Illinois, Iowa, and Ohio. The national office hired Hugo Rojas to serve as acting executive director of Common Cause Illinois. Concurrently Rojas worked with activists in Iowa and Ohio to expand organizational activity in those states.

Also in 2002, the Deer Creek Foundation funded a pilot project to increase civic engagement especially among youth. Common Cause national staff designed and named the project the Democracy Action Corps (based on documents stored in Princeton Archives). The purpose of the project was to train activists and grow a youth democracy network (similar to activist lists built through Project Independence). Chicago was one of three cities selected to site a pilot project.

The Democracy Action Corps worked with local community organizations in southwest Chicago. Two staff were hired—a director and local student coordinator from the University of Illinois at Chicago. The goal was to encourage civic participation by educating Latino and Polish immigrants and youth about their rights but the pilot program was suspended within a few years.

From 2005 until 2012 Common Cause Illinois lacked an executive director yet its reform work continued. The State Board Chair led the organization through various campaigns and within coalitions. For example, Common Cause Illinois and Citizen Action Illinois led a coalition pressing for a voluntary public financing system. In 2009 Common Cause collaborated with the Illinois League of Women Voters and Republican-leaning organizations to discuss mounting a petition drive to place a redistricting referendum on the fall 2010 ballot. The Democratic Party was opposed to this effort and volunteers were unable to collect the required number of signatures.

Common Cause Illinois relaunched in 2012 when the national staff hired Rey López-Calderón as executive director and formed a new advisory board with an initial group of four members. Common Cause Illinois shared downtown Chicago office space with the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform

(ICPR), a 501c3 government reform group funded by the Joyce Foundation. The ICPR operates as a think tank and is one of the largest government reform groups working in Illinois.

The state office hosted a Good Government Awards ceremony in Chicago to celebrate the relaunch and raise start-up funds. Also, state leaders submitted foundation fund requests and in 2014 received grants from the Joyce Foundation (\$60,000), McCormick Tribune (\$30,000), Woods Foundation (\$20,000), and Field (\$10,000). Common Cause Illinois' operating budget increased from less than \$100,000 to almost \$500,000 in a few years.

In 2012, Brian Gladstein moved from leading the ICPR to become Common Cause Illinois' Director of Programs and Strategy. Gladstein organized community-based action teams while López-Calderón worked as the face of Common Cause to the press and officials. In 2015 Rey López-Calderón joined the national office and Brian Gladstein became Common Cause Illinois' Executive Director.

The Voting Rights and Money in Politics Action Teams were organized in 2014. The Voting Rights Action Team meets for updates and planning—in person and through webinars and phone briefings. Volunteers watch election polls to protect voters' rights and travel to Springfield for Lobby Day, among other activities.²² Working within a coalition, the action team successfully pressed for several reforms such as same day registration, electronic registration, early voting reforms, and a grace period for eligible students to register and vote on public university campuses.

In 2016, students from the Common Cause University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign chapter successfully protested the removal of eight of the nine polling places on campus. Common Cause Illinois helped collect over 560,000 signatures to add an initiative to the November 2016 ballot to create an independent citizens redistricting commission to draw Illinois General Assembly districts. In 2017 the state office partnered with Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. and the Operation PUSH organization to press for automatic voter registration which has since become law.

²² A lobby day is defined as a specific day for non-governmental organization members to meet with political officials in order to advocate for legislation important to their missions.

The Money in Politics Action Team mobilized to limit the influence of money on Chicago city council elections through a public funding option. Team volunteers across the city collected enough signatures to add a question on the February 2015 local election ballot. Before the election, volunteers made phone calls to inform citizens of the ballot question. Election results indicated approximately eight out of every ten voters supported public funding for aldermanic elections.

In 2017, Common Cause Illinois continues to fight for campaign finance reform in Chicago and Illinois as leader of the Fair Elections Illinois coalition. Although most Chicago voters supported the public funding option, there were no funds for this in Mayor Rahm Emanuel's 2016 city budget. Common Cause Illinois expanded its efforts by introducing a Fair Elections Act. Similar to New York City's system, candidates who choose to participate would receive a 6-to-1 matching grant. In other words, for every small donation up to \$175, will be matched six times for a total of \$1050. Leaders launched a social media campaign and mobilized supporters (e.g. online petitions, requests to contact state legislators' offices).

Common Cause Illinois is a pocket of revitalization within the organization. Even though the office operates within an individualistic state political subculture, committed supporters advance Common Cause issues with contributions and activism. Effective leaders blend internet activism with strategic thinking and organization (see Karpf, 2016, p.171).

2. Common Cause Texas

The Common Cause Texas office was up and running before Common Cause Illinois took shape. In the early 1970s, Milton Tobian, a Democratic activist in Dallas, convinced national headquarters to fund a state office in Texas. Tobian moved from Dallas to Austin where he contacted activists, raised money, hired an Executive Director, rented an office, and hired a lobbyist.

In January 1974 Common Cause Texas activists created a state-wide Program Action Committee (see McFarland, 1984, p.69-74) which grew to about 50 members, two from each Texas congressional district. The office operated with a \$75,000 budget and three staffers. State office staff researched

Texas congressional district profiles, including voting records for or against Common Cause issues, then alerted Program Action Committee members and the national office.

Like Illinois and the national office, Common Cause Texas' membership highpoint was in 1974 with over 7,400 on the rolls. The numbers waned in the late 1970s but rose again in the mid-1980s to about 7,300 in 1991. The national membership decline affected Texas with fewer than 5,000 members after 2000. When the Common Cause website launched in 2004, member numbers increased but then returned to a gradual decline to about 3,500 in 2015. Common Cause Texas' membership trajectory more closely follows the national office than Illinois but is struggling to take hold of the resurgence occurring since 2011.

An active local arm formed in the Houston area where about 1,500 Common Cause members resided. The Houston group met for years and worked on local reforms. In the mid-1990s, the group pressed the Harris County Commissioners Court's to replace the Metropolitan Transit Authority chair still in place nearly 19 months after his term expired (the chair helped funnel millions of dollars to the commissioners for road projects in their precincts; see Stinebaker, 1996).

In the early 1970s the political climate in Texas, as in the United States, was conducive to reform. In Texas, the Sharpstown stock fraud scandal broke in 1971 and 1972. The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission filed criminal charges against Frank Sharp, a Houston-area banker, who devised a scheme to loan money to state officials who would buy stock in his company. Sharp then pushed those state officials for legislation that would benefit the company, artificially inflating the company's value. Officials quickly resold their stock for a huge profit. Voters in 1972 replaced a majority of the state legislature members. Like the "Watergate Babies," freshmen legislators supported reforms, leading one reporter to write of the Sharpstown scandal, "no controversy before or since has had as much impact on Texas politics" (Root, 2013).

The Common Cause Texas lobbyist worked with the Texas Attorney General to push for passage of two companion sunshine reforms during the 1973 regular session of the 63rd Texas Legislature

(“government in the sunshine” was part of the national program in 1971; see Chapter Three p.35; and McFarland, 1983, p.171). One reform was the *Texas Public Information Act* (Act of May 19, 1973, 63rd Leg., R.S., ch. 424, 1973 Tex. Gen. Laws 1112), a series of laws guaranteeing public access to government information held by state agencies, analogous to the *U.S. Freedom of Information Act of 1966*. Its companion measure was a substantially tougher version of the *Texas Open Meetings Act*, originally passed in 1967. The law required government business to be conducted in the open, with public notice, and with limited exceptions (see Montgomery, 2015).

The same legislative session brought forth lobbyist regulation and a requirement that top elected officials and political appointees file public disclosure statements. The *Lobby Control Act* required lobbyists register, report expenditures, and publicly disclose client information. The *Campaign Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1973* required candidates to file reports but did not limit contribution amounts. The act created a state Ethics Advisory Commission but gave it little power and no funding or staff. Reporting requirements remained unenforced until 1991 legislation creating the Texas Ethics Commission (see *infra*).

In 1976, a Common Cause issues agenda poll reported 76 percent of the candidates for the Texas Legislature supported sunset legislation. Sunset laws specify a cutoff date for an agency or program; after that date it must be reauthorized. The 1977 Texas Legislature created the Sunset Advisory Commission to “identify and eliminate waste, duplication, and inefficiency in government agencies” (Weaver, 2011, p. 3). The Sunset Act established a 12-year life span for around 175 agencies, boards, and commissions.

Around 1990, two scandals drove additional reforms. During a special session of the Texas Legislature in 1989, chicken magnate Bo Pilgrim was seen passing out \$10,000 blank name checks to nine Texas Senators on the Senate floor. This occurred two days before the Senate voted on a workers compensation bill Pilgrim was lobbying for but the incident was not considered bribery nor was it illegal (see Root, 2013).

Subsequently the Common Cause Texas executive director reported to the National Governing Board about the need for major state ethics reforms. Particular needs were for increased disclosure of lobbying expenses and creation of an effective ethics enforcement commission. The executive director added, “The present state Ethics Advisory Commission [created by the 1973 public disclosure legislation] has little power and no funding or staff.”

A second ethics scandal erupted in 1991 around five-term Speaker of the Texas House Gibson “Gib” Lewis (D-Fort Worth). Allegedly, Lewis took an illegal gift from a law firm specializing in collecting delinquent taxes for local government. Lewis stepped down from the speakership in 1993 after pleading no contest to charges of accepting the gift and not disclosing it on official reports. Taken together, the Pilgrim and Lewis events created a political opportunity for reform.

Democratic Governor Ann Richards (in office 1991-1995) named ethics reform a top priority on the 1991 legislative agenda. Ethics reform legislation passed just before midnight on the final day of the legislative session (see Root, 2013). A few months later, Texas voters approved a state constitutional amendment creating the Texas Ethics Commission. The commission is an eight-member body appointed by the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and House Speaker. Commissioners recommend legislators’ salaries and per diem expenses, subject to approval by voters.

In its first years the Texas Ethics Commission adopted a set of lobby rules and issued opinions under the *Lobby Control Act*. The lobby community did not look favorably on some of these decisions and in 1993 the commission appointed a task force to work on a proposal for new lobby rules. Besides Ethics Commission members and staff, the task force included Common Cause members, a registered lobbyist, legislative staff, and press members (Texas Ethics Commission, 2007).

Legislation creating the Texas Ethics Commission included other reforms. One reform prohibited making donations inside the Capitol. Another required lobbyists and legislators to file financial disclosure forms and campaign contribution reports with the Texas Ethics Commission several times a year. Then the commission posts the reports on its website.

The Texas Ethics Commission came up for sunset review in 2003.²³ At the same time, legislators signaled an ethics overhaul was on the agenda. A Common Cause leader recounted during a 2014 interview that Texas activists worked with a coalition to prepare ethics legislation. Subsequently, legislation to make the Ethics Commission more effective and strengthen disclosure laws did pass (e.g. individuals who contribute \$500 or more to a campaign must be reported by occupation and employer), although less than those proposed by the coalition.

The Texas Ethics Commission again came up for sunset review in 2013. The Texas Senate subcommittee reviewing the commission invited five public interest groups—including Common Cause Texas—to testify for three minutes. The Common Cause Texas speaker testified that the day before the hearing, then-governor Rick Perry’s campaign finance report was nowhere to be found on the Ethics Commission website. Two days later the information was available on the website (information taken from a 2014 interview with a Common Cause Texas leader).

From its early years, Common Cause Texas benefits from a sympathetic press in the state. The executive director called press conferences and attended private meetings with the press. For example, editors of the Austin American-Statesman (the state capitol’s local newspaper) asked the director and another leader to meet and discuss issues.

Texas State Senator David Sibley (R-Waco, 1991-2002) was an outspoken critic of government reform groups. He described most as “some person with a fax machine and a computer at home.” Yet Sibley pointedly made an exception for Common Cause Texas, admitting the organization fully discloses its membership lists and reports in detail all financial contributors (see Hight, 2001).

In 2014, a Common Cause Texas leader described the state political environment during the organization’s first phase:

²³ The Texas Ethics Commission, like other executive agencies, comes up for review approximately every twelve years. But it is not subject to abolition as a constitutionally-created agency.

The state legislature was easier to work with in the late 1980s and 1990s. It was easy to lobby then, and Common Cause Texas held press conferences in the capital. They were able to use a room behind the Senate chambers. Common Cause leaders met with the Texas Lieutenant Governor in the private room—Archibald Cox [National Governing Board Chair from 1980 to 1991] was there and was impressed.

The leader added that since the 1990s the political climate in Texas changed and it is getting harder to lobby state officials. One reason is the rise of Tea Party activists who “dispirited lots of people so they don’t want to listen to anybody anymore.”

For many years, Common Cause Texas operated with one paid staff (the executive director). A contract lobbyist would be hired when the state legislature was in session (Texas’ legislature meets biannually for a 140-day regular session). Yet as existential crises arose within the organization, Common Cause Texas ran a deficit for three straight years and in 2004 the national staff suspended funds. The Common Cause Texas Board members kept the organization running by meeting three or four times a year and maintaining contact through emails. State board members volunteered to lobby political officials.

Even as funds stopped, the National Governing Board made Texas one of its priority states. National staff was dedicated to assisting state leaders’ efforts to rebuild. Five fundraising house parties were held on August 15, 2004. At about the same time scandals erupted in the state that kept Common Cause Texas in the news and working for reform.

In the spring of 2004 scandals swirled around lobbyist Jack Abramoff and U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-TX). The Texas Speaker of the House, Tom Craddick (R-Midland), who served as Speaker from 2003 to 2009 and as a state legislator since 1969, was also implicated in the scandal. A Travis County [Austin] grand jury investigated alleged campaign irregularities from the 2002 election. The allegations focused on DeLay’s political action committee, Texans for a Republican Majority, and the Texas Association of Business. At issue was corporate money, undisclosed to state regulators, being used to finance the business group’s ads and to subsidize DeLay’s political committee activities (Copelin, 2004).

Subsequently Common Cause Texas leaders used the political opportunity to press for reforms.

Suzy Woodford, Common Cause Texas Executive Director (1992-2004), wrote in an editorial for the *Austin American-Statesman* on October 12, 2004:

We know that more than \$600,000 in allegedly illegal corporate contributions were solicited and accepted by DeLay, Craddick, or their operatives. These contributions helped Republicans win a firm majority in both chambers of the state Legislature and allowed them to solidify their majority in the U.S. House . . .

We know that \$152,000 in non-corporate contributions from Texans for a Republican Majority Political Action Committee were sent to Craddick's Midland office and then sent back out to 14 Republican House candidates who were crucial to his election as speaker.²⁴

Common Cause Texas created an online petition asking House Speaker Tom Craddick to step down.

The petition drew more than 1000 signatures (see National Governing Board 2005 February meeting notes). But Craddick was never charged with a crime “although he picked up corporate dollars for DeLay's political committee and his staff routed campaign donations from the committee to Texas candidates” (Copelin, 2005).

In 2005, Common Cause Texas and Public Citizen filed a complaint with the Texas Ethics Commission about the Texas Republican Party using corporate donations for then-prohibited issue advertisements. A complaint sets in motion a process that may lead to hearing and imposition of a civil penalty (Texas Ethics Commission website). The *Houston Chronicle* article quoted Woodford, “there was a concerted, unprecedented use of money by the Republican Party during this [2002] election.” The state party committee agreed to limit how it spent corporation donations in exchange for not being prosecuted (see Ratcliffe, 2005).

Although Woodford and other leaders continued to advocate reforms, the sympathetic press moved on. From the early 1990s to the mid-2000s, the *Austin American-Statesmen* printed an average of at least one article a month that mentioned Common Cause or quoted its leaders. But from about

²⁴ Suzy Woodford, "Craddick is no longer able to serve effectively," *Austin American-Statesman* (TX), October 12, 2004.

2006 to 2016 the number of articles dropped sharply, with no mentions of the organization from 2013-2015 (based on a LexisNexis search).

According to the adversity theory, the 2008 election of a Democrat as President and Democratic majorities in both chambers of Congress may have worked against Common Cause membership and funding. In addition, effects of the Great Recession were being felt across the country. The election and recession created a “double knockout” as disposable income decreased, especially as most Common Cause Texas members are retired people and most funds come from individual small contributions.

During a 2014 interview, a leader explained why Common Cause Texas received little financial assistance from the national office. “The national office sends resources to help various state programs at politically opportune moments. Texas is not getting much money because it is politically so conservative, not because [the national office] stopped spending money. Sending money to Texas might not help because of the current mood. Good people are in office but the mood is very conservative.”

From 2007 until 2016 Common Cause Texas operated without a physical office and as an all-volunteer organization. It maintained a presence in state politics by making “our disgust known through press releases, emails, letters to editors, and contacting Congress members and state legislators.” It maintained an online presence with its website and social media, but did not have a webmaster. Even without paid leadership, Common Cause Texas continued to press for reform (e.g. testifying for the Texas Ethics Commission in 2013; see *supra*).

Around 2011 the Common Cause Texas board fought a new restrictive voter ID law, pressed for overturning the *Citizens United* decision, protested the American Legislative Exchange Council’s influence, and promoted state ethics enforcement. Several members testified before the state legislature regarding redistricting and the formation of a nonpartisan committee. In Houston, Common Cause supporters worked on protecting citizen’s rights to bilingual ballots.

Coalition members respect Common Cause Texas. For example, in 2013 a Texas Senate Committee invited six organizations to testify about open records. Prior to the hearing, the groups met

and discussed specific points each group would cover so two were not speaking on the same topic. During the hearing, the Common Cause leader spoke from the periphery but the other speakers urged her to go up front to the dais and let everybody know her views. The leader viewed this as a sign of the respect Common Cause maintains.

The Supreme Court decision *Shelby County v. Holder* (570 US __, 2013) overturned the preclearance requirement of the *Voting Rights Act of 1965*, Section 5. The section requires states with a history of discriminatory voting practices to obtain “preclearance” from certain federal officials before changing election laws. The federal officials must determine the new laws do not “deny or abridge the right to vote on account of race, color, or membership in a language minority group” (U.S. Department of Justice).

Texas’ voter ID law, as enacted in 2011, was one of the strictest in the nation. Registered voters were required to show specific forms of photo identification in order to vote. President Obama’s Department of Justice sued Texas to block the voter ID law, claiming legislators passed it with an intent to discriminate. The law was initially blocked by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit (*State of Texas v. Holder* Civil Action No. 12-cv-128 (DST, RMC, RLW), 2012), ruling that the law must be softened as it discriminated against minority voters. Texas revised its law allowing registered Texans to vote if they show a photo ID or sign an affidavit. Subsequently Common Cause Texas joined the VoteRiders Coalition to inform elected officials about effects of the law and train volunteers in voter outreach. In 2017 the Department of Justice dropped its suit, and then filed a brief in support of Texas’ revisions, under the leadership of President Trump’s Attorney General Jeff Sessions (Fernandez & Lichtblau, 2017).

Although board members continued to represent the organization before officials, without an executive director it was difficult to engage people in its work. This is a particular concern since many activists in the state organization were older (a number had been active since the 1970s). Yet a leader

commented that Common Cause does not use its members enough and needs to involve more people in its campaigns.

Common Cause national and state leaders are working for renewal in the Texas office. In 2014 a group of Dallas-based Common Cause supporters held a well-attended fundraiser to benefit the organization. The fundraiser was organized by a board member who recently moved from California—a moralistic state where two Common Cause offices operate—to Texas with no office and all volunteer leadership. The party received good press coverage partly due to the attendance of Jim Hightower—a syndicated columnist, progressive activist, and former Texas Agriculture Commissioner. The next year Board Chair Robert Reich and other leaders held fundraising events in Austin.

The Common Cause national office hired Anthony Gutierrez as Common Cause Texas Executive Director in 2016. Gutierrez brings with him experiences as a campaign manager, political consultant, and director of a Latino voter advocacy organization. His top priority is to ensure voting rights, especially for the growing Hispanic population that tends to favor Democrats.

Common Cause Texas leaders are rebuilding the organization's presence across the state, including reopening a physical office in Austin. Activists register in support of bills, mobilize supporters for rallies and marches (e.g. a march protesting President Trump's refusal to release his tax records and a rally for campaign finance reform). The state board continues its work in support of reforms.

In Texas, citizen mobilization and organization is hampered by a traditionalistic subculture and party polarization exacerbated by the Tea Party faction. A restrictive political environment limits reform efforts. Also fewer members present significant mobilization challenges. Common Cause Texas achieved success under effective leaders for many years but environmental changes and organizational crises affected reform efforts. In 2017 Common Cause Texas is gaining momentum as new leaders lobby on the inside and reach out to supporters across the state.

D. State Comparison Implications

In his 1984 book on Common Cause, Andrew McFarland wrote state political subculture, the size of the Common Cause constituency, and quality leadership are important elements of a state reform organization's influence (see McFarland, 1984, p.71). A comparison of Common Cause offices in Illinois and Texas offers empirical support of McFarland's theory. Yet it also reveals how organizational adaptations have disparate effects.

The political subcultures in Illinois and Texas facilitate barriers to reform (e.g. political machines and abiding conservatism) yet both Common Cause offices were successful. During Common Cause's third phase, organizational renewal occurred in Illinois. Action teams formed and significant reforms passed. But renewal was slow to reach Texas, especially as state politics moved further to the right with the Tea Party's influence.

In 2015, Common Cause Illinois maintains a stable membership base of around 9,000 members. Common Cause Texas membership, about 3,500, is half the size of its highpoint in 1974. Fewer members spread across a state as large as Texas creates more challenges to organizing public support.

There are a few caveats when comparing offices based on constituency size. In the age of internet activism, dues-paying members are but one of several categories of public support. Also as many other reform groups are active at the state and national levels, Common Cause indirectly gains supporters through its coalition work. Common Cause national press releases during the third phase (2007-2015) indicate the Illinois office participated in at least five coalitions while Texas was unmentioned.

Both states benefitted from quality leadership. For Illinois, third phase leadership rebuilt an effective state office. For Texas, effective leaders established and maintained Common Cause's presence before state officials and within press reports. Even through the crises years, the *Austin American-Statesman* frequently quoted Common Cause leaders. But when the leadership became all volunteer, there was less evidence of its presence in the capitol.

Political subcultures, membership, and effective leaders contributed to the varying fortunes of Common Cause offices in Illinois and Texas. The states' narrative trajectories were mostly similar until the third phase. Organizational adaptations—incremental and major shifts—that occurred at the national level changed state operations.

Incremental changes in the late 1990s set the stage for major adaptations during the crises years. At this time, Common Cause operated under Gardner's Rules yet leaders made decisions that established new organizational pathways. Increased emphases on grassroots mobilization and decreased allocations shifted state leaders' responsibilities from insider lobbying to fundraising and building member lists. Tension rose as state leaders were more responsible for funding yet expected to advance national goals, especially as campaign finance reform became more likely.

Creating the Common Cause Education Fund under I.R.S. tax code 501c3 enabled tax-deductible contributions. It also opened a revenue stream from foundation grants. The first years of writing grant proposals and receiving foundation funds were somewhat unsteady for Common Cause as national and state leaders worked out roles and responsibilities. State leaders applied for grants—Illinois was successful, Texas was not. Accepting foundation grants helped states balance their budgets. However, state leaders were careful not to accept too many grants and lose credibility as a publicly funded lobby.

Since the early 2000s, foundation grants helped Common Cause Illinois campaigns. Like the national office, grants became an important revenue source. Common Cause Texas has not been similarly advantaged.

Common Cause Illinois encourages face-to-face civic engagement. Since 2012, Common Cause Illinois has held an annual "Champions of Democracy" fundraiser in Chicago. If nothing else, it is an opportunity to network with fellow Common Cause supporters. Action team organizing meetings and events are similar to the civic engagement practices that built a widespread Common Cause constituency during the first phase.

Citizen participation and representation dynamics at the state level mirror the national level. In state reform campaigns, activists and volunteers often have a variety of ways to express support. Online activism, such as petition signing, is the most frequent form of participation among Common Cause members. This form of activism may be necessary in the digital age, but it is insufficient for representation process and sustained advocacy required by Common Cause issues.

Individuated activism means citizens are choosing specific issues to support but an organizational structure is critical to ongoing advocacy. David Karpf (2016) differentiates between revealed preferences (e.g. membership survey results) and metapreferences, or what supporters think the organization should be doing. Karpf's analysis of Avaaz (an international online advocacy organization) found members who answer polls do not intend for results to be binding, rather they should be regarded as a guide or a form of input. In other words, "membership also favors staffers using their own judgement" (p.44).

Similarly, the Common Cause 2015 survey found over 25 percent of respondents ranked "Staff research and select issues" as the most important benefit of traditional interest groups (with a central office and professional staff). An interesting contrast arose between Illinois and Texas respondents. In Illinois, only 14 percent ranked staff selecting issues as most important—twice as many chose organizational stability as the chief benefit. In Texas, 44 percent believed staff leadership on issues to be most important.

There could be several reasons for different results. Different histories of the two state organizations highlighted deficiencies. In Illinois, organizational stability would be prized due to a forced closure in 2001. In Texas, the state office did not officially close but lost funding. The Texas leadership remained active in state politics. Since it is likely a level of self-selection exists among respondents to the 2015 Membership Survey, there may be a heightened awareness of each state's history—with those in Illinois wanting to avoid past mistakes and those in Texas invested in an infrastructure in place for decades.

In addition, the results reflect distinctions based on Elazar's theory of political subcultures. Residents of a state with individualistic characteristics are likely to be less trusting of leaders. Common Cause members in Illinois may want a level of input and oversight into issue selection. Traditionalistic state residents are more accepting of hierarchical systems. Although this characteristic has been increasingly challenged since Elazar wrote in 1966, remnants remain as institutions are slow to change. In general, Common Cause members in Texas appear to be supportive of their leaders.

Common Cause Illinois relaunched when professional and experienced leaders took over. Opening an office in downtown Chicago, hosting gala fundraisers, acquiring foundation funds, and organizing action teams built momentum toward successful reform advocacy. Without professional leadership (i.e. paid, full-time) or a physical office in place, Common Cause Texas was less able to organize supporters and fell behind.

Dual representation characterizes Common Cause Illinois and Common Cause Texas offices. State leaders, often in collaboration with national staff, act as trustees determining issue priorities and advocacy strategies, or the "what." In the 2015 survey, one-out-of-four members indicated that staff researching and selecting issues to pursue is one of the benefits of an organization like Common Cause.

Common Cause Illinois and Common Cause Texas offices email issue and activism surveys to their supporters, a form of two-way communication. State leaders listen to their supporters through survey results and responses to issue appeals. State leaders then tailor subsequent communications and strategies to the recipient's interests. In this manner, the exit option limits state as well as national leaders.

E. Conclusion

State offices were not part of John Gardner's plan for the nation's first publicly funded national government reform lobby. Existential crises and a critical juncture in leadership became the tipping point toward amending Gardner's action principles. Part of the national office's fight to survive was closing the Common Cause Illinois office and disbanding the state board. In addition, national funds

going to Common Cause Texas were suspended, but volunteer leaders maintained the organization. Thus it is ironic that Illinois became a pocket of revitalization while Texas lagged behind.

A comparison of the two state offices suggests political subcultures, number of constituents, leadership, funding, and civic engagement variables interact to strengthen or weaken reform groups. State executive directors are key to mobilizing supporters and organizing ongoing advocacy efforts but other variables must also be conducive to reform efforts. In 2017 Common Cause Illinois is thriving while Common Cause Texas works toward renewal and resurgence.

VI. CONCLUSION

Common Cause is unique because it is the first, and oldest, national government reform lobby. Common Cause is distinctive because it was founded in 1970 by John Gardner, a man with a brand of charisma respected by many across the country. Implicit in his charisma was a balanced tension between idealism and pragmatism. Idealism was found in the reason for forming the organization—improved representation of citizens' interests before government officials (from one perspective) or, in David Cohen's (1999, p.82) words, move from what is to what ought to be. The goal was to improve governance integrity—a public quality or core aspect of the normative cohesion binding together the U.S. political system. Pragmatism was embodied in Gardner's Rules; action principles that helped the organization achieve political influence soon after its founding.

Early advocacy successes underscored the effectiveness of Gardner's Rules. In addition, they informed a level of expectation regarding the role and function of Common Cause. Yet adhering to the rules as environments changed threatened not only the rules' efficacy but the existence of the organization.

Gardner's Rules guided Common Cause leaders' decision making long after he stepped down in the late 1970s. Even as existential crises loomed, leaders remained loyal to the rules and the organizational culture that developed around them. Their incremental adaptations suggest disproportionate information processing—major changes were only made with the introduction of top leaders who had not worked with or for John Gardner.

Amending Gardner's Rules is the fulcrum of Common Cause's historical narrative. It turned leaders' focus away from a legacy built up over several decades toward recovering financial solvency. Subsequent instability and renewal set the groundwork for a revival of Gardner's Rules within a changed organization.

A Common Cause case study advances a longitudinal perspective to political entrepreneur theory. John W. Gardner was a particularly effective political entrepreneur. His reputation and brand of

charisma engendered widespread respect that lasted long after he stepped down in 1976. Even in the mid-2010s his brand of charisma inspires leaders and members (as recounted in 2014-2015 interviews and the 2015 member survey). Although John Gardner's interest group design has been significantly changed, his ideas continue to inspire Common Cause activists.

Common Cause's narrative from 1970 to 2017 is driven by the decisions of its leaders. Thus this project is also a study of leadership and the fate of a founder's view as environments change. More broadly, it suggests how a founder's influence extends well beyond their time with the organization.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, environmental and existential pressures pushed Common Cause's top leaders into two camps. Some wanted to remain loyal to Gardner's action principles and the organizational culture they supported. Amending the rules meant losing an element of what made Common Cause distinctive. A leader explained that Gardner's Rules gave Common Cause "a public sense of identity—a coherent focus that leads to its mission, purpose, operation." Internally, the rules structured intangible defining attributes that were absorbed over time and passed from one generation of staff to the next, such as how decisions were made.

Others wanted to amend the rules to secure other revenue streams and survive. They perceived the tipping point as a way to remain loyal to John Gardner, if not his rules. Gardner's book, *Self-Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society*, was first published in 1963 with a revised edition printed in 1995. In the book, Gardner warns about adhering to certain rules and norms at the cost of achieving a goal. His argument was used by leaders who wanted to amend the rules; implying loyalty based on Gardner's ideas more than his action principles.

In a sense, both camps advanced Gardner's vision, but with differing emphases. Common Cause leaders who remained loyal to Gardner's Rules exhibit idealism and pragmatism. Their idealism is reflected in a desire to perpetuate organizational rules and norms even as crises rose. At the same time, their pragmatism was based on Gardner's action principles.

Leaders who wanted to amend Gardner's Rules exhibited a type of idealism suggested in the 2009 Mission Statement's phrase "restoring the core values of American democracy" (see *supra*). In 2014 interviews and 2017 appeals, Common Cause leaders emphasize their work promoting democracy reforms. This frame still suggests structure and process issues, but is more ideological than pragmatic. Yet, their desire to amend Gardner's Rules was pragmatic as movement on reform issues in Congress became almost impossible and Common Cause faced existential crises. Amending Gardner's Rules represented the triumph of loyalty to Gardner's ideas over his action principles.

A Common Cause case study advances a longitudinal perspective to political entrepreneur theory. John W. Gardner was a particularly effective political entrepreneur. His reputation and brand of charisma engendered widespread respect that lasted long after he stepped down in 1976. Even in the mid-2010s his brand of charisma inspires leaders and members (as recounted in 2014-2015 interviews and the 2015 member survey). Although John Gardner's interest group design has been significantly amended, his ideas continue to inspire Common Cause activists.

Common Cause's narrative from 1970 to 2017 is driven by the decisions of its leaders. Thus this project is also a study of leadership and the fate of a founder's view as environments change. More broadly, it suggests how a founder's influence extends well beyond their time with the organization.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, political contextual and existential pressures pushed Common Cause's top leaders into two camps. Some wanted to remain loyal to Gardner's action principles and the organizational culture they supported. Amending the rules meant losing an element of what made Common Cause distinctive. A Common Cause leader, interviewed in 2014, explained that Gardner's Rules gave Common Cause "a public sense of identity—a coherent focus that leads to its mission, purpose, operation," explaining that the rules structured "intangible defining attributes that were absorbed over time and passed from one generation of staff to the next," such as rules for making organizational decisions.

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Leaders who wanted to amend Gardner's Rules exhibit a type of idealism suggested in the 2009 Mission Statement's phrase "restoring the core values of American democracy" (see *supra*). In 2014 interviews I conducted and 2017 appeals issued by Common Cause, leaders emphasized their work promoting democracy reforms. The democracy reform frame still suggests structure and process issues, but is more ideological than pragmatic. Yet, the desire to amend Gardner's Rules was pragmatic as movement on reform issues in Congress became almost impossible and Common Cause faced existential crises. In general, amending Gardner's Rules represented the triumph of loyalty to Gardner's ideas over his action principles.

A Common Cause case study offers a more expansive view of representation than is depicted in Hanna Pitkin's (1967) well-known category of descriptive representation. A significant body of research illustrates the lack of descriptive representation in public interest groups. Yet, at times representation begins with what is being represented, then who is making representative claims (Saward, 2006).

The concept of dual representation builds off of Hanna Pitkin's dyadic model (with influence flowing from principal to agent or "the who before the what") to consider "the what before the who." Placing the "what" before the "who" means that elite leaders can represent public interests.

Common Cause leaders claim to represent governance integrity, acting to promote the interests of American citizens. Their actions suggest a trustee form of representation when acting for a public interest. Thus their representation claims and decision making emphasize the "what" before the "who" (a preceding aggregation of individual preferences). Dual representation is particularly evident as representation processes in place since the organization's early years were suspended (e.g. members voting for Board members, annual issue polls distributed to members in the *Common Cause* magazine).

Dual representation should be part of the ongoing discussion about representation theory (Sultan Tepe and Andrew S. McFarland). Analyzing Common Cause from a dual representation perspective suggests a different idea of representation that needs to be considered. In sum, Common Cause provides a lens for studying how key aspects of the U.S. political system—interest groups, collective action, lobbying, and representation—work as the political environment changes.

The three-phase arc of Common Cause's narrative calls forth several research questions: What is the tipping point at which incremental adaptations alone are no longer tenable? How do adaptations—whether incremental or major shifts—change an organization? And what can a public interest lobby tell us about citizen participation and representation? The answers to the questions tested two hypotheses:

H1: Large public interest groups tend to follow the rules and norms set up under the founding leadership and first years of success.

H2: Large, long-term public interest groups change their founding rules and norms only when there are changes to the external environment and under threats to the interest group's survival.

At bottom, the answers speak to general theories of interest groups, collective action, lobbying, and representation in the U.S. political system.

A. **The Tipping Point**

What is the tipping point at which incremental adaptations alone are no longer tenable?

For almost thirty years, Common Cause leaders remained loyal to Gardner's Rules and the organizational culture they established. Over time the rules became increasingly mismatched with external and internal environmental changes. Even though leaders' incremental adaptations protected an organizational identity anchored by Gardner's Rules, by the mid-1990s there was growing concern about organizational survival.

Environmental and existential pressures pushed Common Cause's top leaders into two camps. Some wanted to amend the rules to secure other revenue streams and survive. They perceived the tipping point as a way to remain loyal to John Gardner, if not his rules. Gardner's book, *Self-Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society*, was first published in 1963 with a revised edition printed in 1995. In the book, Gardner warns about adhering to certain rules and norms at the cost of achieving a goal. His argument was used by leaders who wanted to amend the rules; implying loyalty based on Gardner's ideas more than his action principles.

Other leaders were loyal to the rules and the organizational culture they supported. Amending the rules meant losing an element of what made Common Cause distinctive. A leader explained that Gardner's Rules gave Common Cause "a public sense of identity—a coherent focus that leads to its mission, purpose, operation." Internally, the rules structured intangible defining attributes that were absorbed over time and passed from one generation of staff to the next, such as how decisions were made.

Amending Gardner's Rules represents the triumph of loyalty to Gardner's ideas over his action principles. Its outward manifestation punctuated organizational policy—adding an I.R.S. designated 501c3 arm in 2000, or the Common Cause Education Fund. Years of incremental decision making built up pressure towards this significant change.

Throughout the 1990s Common Cause leaders chose to focus on campaign finance reform. Congress' lack of attention to campaign finance reform was countered by the stamina and persistence of Common Cause lobbyists, acting according to Gardner's requirements for lobbying effectiveness. At the same time, growing partisan polarization meant lobbying Members of Congress to achieve reforms—a priority of Gardner's Rules—became almost impossible.

A focus on campaign finance reform contributed to some misidentification of the organization as a one-issue group. Although leaders promoted other issues, such as passage of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995, they were committed to campaign finance reform. This commitment may have led to the loss of membership, as some questioned the organization's effectiveness with limited movement on such reforms.

In addition, Common Cause's pragmatic approach may have exacerbated membership decline. After the 1970s, the population of interest groups addressing national government reform multiplied, with groups representing various sides of an issue. Probable examples of competing groups include Public Campaign, founded in 1997, was singularly focused on full public financing of campaigns in contrast to Common Cause's willingness to compromise in order to get legislation passed. Conservative groups—such as Institute for Justice (founded in 1991) and Center for Competitive Politics (founded in 2005)—focus on litigation and First Amendment free speech protections to overturn campaign finance regulations. Interestingly, in 2015 a Republican political consultant created the 501c3 interest group Take Back Our Republic to build “conservative support for reducing the influence of wealthy interests on politics” (Gold, 2015).

Some groups' missions may have drawn away members interested in more ideological goals. For example, television producer Norman Lear founded People For the American Way in 1981 to promote equality and counteract a growing religion-based conservatism. People for the American Way and Common Cause work as coalition partners on a variety of campaigns (e.g. voting rights, campaign finance disclosure, and protesting against the American Legislative Exchange Council).

At the same time, public opinion regarding government reform as the most important issue was much less supportive than in the early 1970s. Economic prosperity in the 1990s contributed to a more nuanced perspective of government's trustworthiness. The combination of fewer citizens deeply concerned about governance integrity and more advocacy options to choose from for those who were, contributed to membership decline, fewer dues and contributions flowing in, and building existential crises.

Membership and revenue decline across the 1990s put a great deal of pressure on leaders to do something. Incremental decisions included opening a Grassroots Lobbying and Communications office at headquarters to mobilize outsider support. Members were becoming an important resource, especially when compensating for financial deficits (see Schlozman, et.al, 2012, p.402). Subsequently Project Independence, a national grassroots campaign, was waged across the country. Although it garnered some public attention regarding campaign finance reform, the lists of potential members it generated were not enough to reverse diminishing resources.

Leaders battled revenue deficiencies by seeking alternative sources of income and cutting costs, adaptations that still fit within Gardner's Rules. Revenue improved with cultivating bequests and pressuring board members to raise funds. Cost savings occurred with national staff and office space cuts. The financial situation became so dire that leaders even voted to suspend direct mailings—the workhorse of membership recruitment efforts. All of these approaches were effective in the short term, but were insufficient to reverse a decline toward insolvency.

Nominal—if not actual—representation processes were suspended to save costs. The size of the National Governing Board was cut in half (from 60 to 30 seats), meaning fewer demographic categories would be represented on the board. Members no longer received ballots to elect board members. Publication of *Common Cause* magazine stopped, which ended members' access to issue poll results.

Common Cause presidents of the 1990s—Fred Wertheimer and Ann McBride—oversaw a line of incremental adaptations that failed to restore financial vitality. Board members and other leaders

remained resistant to changing long-held action principles. The election of a board chair and president relatively new to the organization in the late 1990s—Derek Bok and Scott Harshbarger—tipped the scale toward amending the rules in order to return financial health to the organization.

Bok and Harshbarger stressed economic pragmatism or prioritizing financial stability. For many years, a dependency on members for most of the revenue worked as Gardner had envisioned. But the organization's staying power, and ability to affect the policymaking process, was jeopardized by diminishing member rolls.

Financial exigencies built momentum and pressure for an organizational punctuation (see Wilson, 1995, p.210). The tipping point occurred with the introduction of leaders who wanted to improve solvency more than remain loyal to Gardner's Rules. One of their first decisions was to create the Common Cause Education Fund, enabling tax deductible contributions and foundation grants but introducing limits to the use of funds for lobbying purposes.

The tipping point at which incremental adaptations alone are no longer tenable occurred with the confluence of several factors. Changes in the political environment, existential crises, and introducing leaders not invested in the organizational culture built momentum for moving beyond the rules. Punctuating organizational policy changed Common Cause's structure and strategies. Subsequently it affected its public identity.

B. Adaptations and Organizational Change

How do adaptations—whether incremental or major shifts—change an organization?

For many years, Common Cause leaders used disproportionate information processing in their efforts to reverse diminishing resources. In other words, leaders looked around for incremental changes that would satisfy the perceived problem at hand. Organizational rules and norms acted as constraints that ruled out other options (e.g. accepting government grants or endorsing candidates).

Brian D. Jones and Frank R. Baumgartner's (2005) analysis of policy change found most often, lawmakers' decisions clustered around incremental change, or policy "drift." Although infrequent, a

policy “lurch” may occur with major policy shifts (illustrative of punctuated equilibrium; see Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Baumgartner et al. 2009). Amending Gardner’s Rules by adding the Common Cause Education Fund (CCEF) represents a lurch for an organization formed to be a national lobby. Generally 501c3 groups were seen as educating the public outside of one’s organization.

Leaders’ communications to members and the attentive public framed the CCEF as a minor change. For example, creating the CCEF facilitated research and keeping members up-to-date with political happenings—things the organization was already doing. Yet it represented a decision to change more than the rules as it affected Common Cause’s structure, strategies, and organizational culture. The lurch added to organizational instability as it took several years to establish an effective and efficient infrastructure to handle grant proposals, receipts, and distributions.

Recovering from, or benefiting from, the lurch took almost a decade, but eventually the 501c3 revenue stream helped stabilize and improve solvency. By 2009, foundation grants and tax-deductible contributions comprised about half the organization’s income. From 2010 to 2014, Common Cause’s total revenue roughly equaled that of the late 1980s, around \$11 million (before membership began its long-term decline). In 2015 contributions to the CCEF surpassed those given to the 501c4 lobbying arm. Over \$8.6 million dollars were raised by the education fund (about \$1.5 million more than the previous year), with the lobbying arm collecting over \$5 million.

During deliberations about creating a 501c3 arm, leaders loyal to Gardner’s vision presented two main arguments against the proposal. The first was foundation grant requirements would drive programs. Accepting grants meant greater emphasis on education and development of civic virtues, items of low priority in Gardner’s Rules. The second was offering contributors a tax-deductible alternative would cannibalize the 501c4 arm. Their fears appear to be substantiated by the growing percentage of income and agenda items dedicated to education and civic engagement programs.

For example, Voting and Elections issues receive more attention and resources from national staff as a means to use foundation grants for research. Common Cause publishes studies alerting states to electoral administration deficiencies and providing tactical information for state level efforts to address such problems. State offices then press for reforms such as same-day voter registration and electronic voting paper trails.

Arguments against the CCEF did not portend how important grants would become to state office success. As predicted, lobbying decreased when education and civic engagement were added to the Common Cause agenda. Yet about two-thirds of the CCEF revenue assists or is earmarked for various state offices.

Foundation grants strengthen Common Cause state offices. In addition, they help revive Gardner's Rules in state and local campaigns. In Illinois and other revitalization sites, state executive directors lobby legislators and city council members on the inside. They organize members and supporters into action teams to lobby from the outside. States without grants, like Texas, face greater challenges while reaching for renewal.

Growing importance of the CCEF revenue stream changes how Common Cause works within an overarching identity. The organization becomes a different type of national government reform lobby. Less attention is given to professional and expert lobbying of Congress. Instead reform is often approached at the state level with aspirations to build political pressure and influence across the country.

Less of a lurch, but not less dramatic in its effect, is the rising importance of state efforts. In the mid-1990s, President Ann McBride worked to unify national and state staff as well as improve flexibility to respond to political opportunities where and when they arose. President Scott Harshbarger closed mismanaged state offices (e.g. Illinois) and suspended funding but provided support for states with persistent deficits (e.g. Texas). Incremental adaptations by subsequent Presidents Chellie Pingree, Robert Edgar, and Miles Rapoport eventually unified national and state staff and assisted with reopening and rebuilding state offices.

Several characteristics comprise the main ingredients of Common Cause's unification. First, national staff are actively involved in helping state office's raise revenue, instead of allocating a certain amount in the budget. Top leaders fundraise for state efforts and some state executive directors also serve regional functions. Bookkeeping and foundation grant administration are centralized at national headquarters. Lines of authority are clarified—Common Cause is one organization that operates with state branches, instead of more autonomous operations as in a federated association (such as the League of Women Voters).

Common Cause is still led from the top-down but appears flatter as headquarters' attention and resources flow to political opportunities in states. Two campaigns illustrate how unified staff work to promote countervailing power at the state level. The specific examples were selected because they include shifts in grassroots tactics that were not part of Gardner's vision.

First, Common Cause waged war on the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) which organized under a 501c3 charitable organization designation but appeared to be lobbying state legislators. Common Cause led large crowds in rowdy protests that garnered media attention and subsequently negative publicity for ALEC's corporate sponsors. The tactic proved effective, along with actions by other groups, as many corporations pulled out (e.g. Google, Facebook, Microsoft, General Electric, and others). This was a far cry from speaking at town hall meetings, contacting political officials, or writing letters to the editor, strategies long-associated with Common Cause members.

Rowdy protests brought media attention back to Common Cause, signaled organizational strength, and may have attracted younger supporters. But they challenged Common Cause's prestigious identity among political officials and may have surprised the membership base, many of whom were older citizens and joined because of John Gardner's reputation. As renewal became more certain, leaders returned to more familiar tactics such as signing petitions and attending rallies.

Second, Common Cause assumed a leadership role in building a level of public support for a constitutional amendment to overturn the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* (2010) decision. Most

efforts occurred in localities and states. By 2017, nineteen states passed legislative resolutions calling on Congress to pass an amendment and send it to the states for ratification. At the same time, Common Cause lobbyists supported Members of Congress' efforts to limit the effect of the *Citizens United* decision, beginning with the 111th and continuing into the 115th Congress (2010-2017).

Building support for a constitutional amendment was another way to bring media attention back to Common Cause, especially at the state and local levels. Yet some leaders questioned its utility to the organization's influence. One interviewee commented that campaigning for a constitutional amendment that has a low probability of passing was like chasing a fad.

Rowdy protests and pressing for a constitutional amendment signify incremental adaptations after the lurch of amending Gardner's Rules. The tactics, like the CCEF, went beyond action principles that had been followed for years. Yet they could be easily suspended if not successful, unlike the CCEF.

Common Cause retains some elements of its role as a national government reform lobby, even with increased attention to states and unusual tactics. In 2017, two Common Cause insider lobbyists advocate national government reform with Members of Congress. Frequently their efforts fulfill a watchdog function or as supportive partners for Members advancing reforms (e.g. testifying or filling statements).

Common Cause took a rare stand against a presidential appointment during President-elect Donald Trump's transition phase. In January 2017, Common Cause took a public stand against Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL), President Donald Trump's nominee for Attorney General. Karen Hobert-Flynn explained the opposition was due to his "hostility to voting rights laws" (Blumenthal, 2017).

Outsider advocacy tactics targeted the executive branch. The 2016 election of President Donald Trump reinvigorated national grassroots campaigns. In these efforts, Common Cause acts as leader and coalition member. An example is Common Cause helped organize April 15, 2017 Tax Day Marches being held across the country to protest President Trump's refusal to release his tax returns (Hickey, 2017).

The election and presidency of Donald Trump inspired comparisons to Common Cause's founding years. Common Cause President Karen Hobert Flynn sent an email to members on Election Day, November 8, 2016 in which she stated, "Common Cause has been working for a stronger democracy since 1970, and besides the post-Watergate midterms of 1974, we've never seen an election as focused on our democracy as 2016."

In the first six months after Trump took office, Common Cause emails continued to reference Watergate, with indirect comparisons of Trump to Richard Nixon. When Trump fired FBI Director James Comey during the agency's investigation of Russia's involvement in the 2016 election, Karen Hobert Flynn wrote in a May 10, 2017 email:

We can't trust the Trump administration or partisans in Congress . . . Common Cause has been here before, during the Watergate scandal . . . We rallied Americans over President Nixon's cover-up, and his firing of Archibald Cox, the lead prosecutor on that case. And we kept fighting through Nixon's resignation. Today we must do no less.

Her appeal was effective. Within 24 hours of Comey's firing, Common Cause logged almost 3,000 calls to Members of Congress asking for an independent investigation.

Emails from National Governing Board Chair Robert Reich referenced Watergate and a larger push for reform. In a May 12, 2017 email Reich quoted several members, including one echoing Hobert Flynn's comparison of Trump to Nixon:

I watched the same thing happen when President Nixon fired the special prosecutor investigating the Watergate affair. This is a crisis in our government and demonstrates clear and present danger to our way of life in this country.

A few weeks later, Reich's email appeals contained a clear message about the need for immediate action by Common Cause members. An email dated June 11, 2017 focused on the need to be prepared to fight against "anti-democratic forces," or the threat Donald Trump and members of his administration pose to our democracy while Congress refuses to hold him accountable. Another email dated June 15, 2017 referred to building a movement for reform [emphasis in original]:

. . . this president's recklessness is motivating millions to speak out for the rule of law. With your help we can channel this motivation into the persistent, sustainable momentum

we need to prevail, beyond Donald Trump, and build a democracy that truly works for all of us. . . . So even though this moment looks bleak, **I believe we're on the cusp of another great wave of reform.** There is a democracy movement growing in America right now, gaining speed and power at the grassroots level. . . .

The email messages were matched by Common Cause's online publication of "State of the Swamp," a report of ethics abuses by the Trump administration.

The Common Cause website invites interested parties to join the "Sessions Watch" campaign, targeting Attorney General Jeff Sessions. Supporters are a line of grassroots defense against any perceived violations of voting rights or civil liberties. Similar to state action teams, supporters are self-selected individuated activists. Similar to Washington Connection calling trees, the campaign creates a network of activists to mobilize.

The growing number of individuated activists meant leaders needed to keep up with internet adaptations or be left behind. Existential crises took their toll when internet capabilities were not updated for a decade. But by 2014 a digital strategies team was in the process of securing Common Cause's placement within the Web 2.0 universe.

In 2017, the internet infuses Common Cause's structure, strategy, and representation. Somewhat symbolically, as the digital strategies team was being hired, the Washington Connection coordinator was let go. Online communication and mobilization are more efficient than mass mailings and telephone trees, but it is unclear if they improve Common Cause's survival or political influence.

Internet-based individuated activism enables Common Cause to claim many supporters—over 700,000 in 2017. But the increase in supporters does not necessarily mean improved financial status, especially for the lobbying arm. According to the organization's 2015 tax forms, the 501c4 lobbying collected about \$5 million, a relatively low amount (see FIGURE 6, p.106). The same year, more than half of the 501c3 education fund revenue came from major contributors (almost \$5 million), with about one-fourth from foundation grants (over \$2 million).

John Gardner intended for Common Cause to be funded by contributions from a diffuse constituency. In 2017, the diffuse constituency is more akin to a pool of potential supporters than the financial base. Over time, the base narrowed by loss of dues-paying members and growing importance of major contributors and foundation grants. The 501c4 lobbying arm still relies on supporters' contributions which have not greatly improved with an online presence.

The internet is a means to engage a greater and more diverse number of citizens in political discourse. Also it facilitates citizens' expression of support for certain issues (e.g. it is much easier to collect petition signatures online than by standing at train stations). Thus mobilization is enhanced by connective action. But moving supporters up the ladder of engagement requires leadership, organization, and incentives to act (easier to achieve with a handful of participants, such as an action team; see Karpf, 2016; Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; and Olson, 1971).

John Gardner's reputation and brand of charisma helped found a national organization. Leaders carrying Gardner's legacy into the twenty-first century possess skills to influence policy and mobilize supporters, including expertise as lobbyists and community organizers. Thus components of Common Cause's renewal are financial stability with education fund revenue and effective state leaders—acting beyond and, at the same time, reviving Gardner's action principles.

A longitudinal perspective suggests how leaders' incremental and major adaptations changed Common Cause. Although adding the Common Cause Education Fund had been discussed before, actually creating a 501c3 arm represented a lurch for the organization. It established an organizational pathway that became entrenched, making it almost impossible to forgo the revenue and return to a strategic focus on insider lobbying.

Other adaptations developed incrementally, such as shifting attention toward states, using different advocacy tactics, and an interactive online presence. They were responses to environmental changes and ways to keep Common Cause relevant, legitimate, and alive. Since President Trump's election, national level campaigns address citizens who are asking what they can do.

Leaders' incremental and major adaptations helped Common Cause survive, renew, and revitalize. They changed a public identity as a citizen's lobby acting according to Gardner's Rules. Instead the organization focused on its capability to act where opportunity arises. During a 2014 interview, a leader stated:

Internally, Common Cause has reached a place of strength with its structural characteristics and the balance between national and state offices. Externally, Common Cause is also strong in its adapting to changing environments. Macro characteristics may be compared to a playing field that is continually changing shape and shifting. Organizations that are internally strong run the risk of not being able to adapt to changing external characteristics which can make an organization obsolete. Common Cause is internally strong yet flexible.

Flexibility enables the organization to act beyond Gardner's Rules. Yet for some leaders too much flexibility dilutes a prestigious reputation that was built by professional and expert lobbying of Congress.

Darren Halpin and Anthony Nownes (2012, p.66) propose a hierarchy of organizational change. In their conceptualization, adaptation in structures, strategies, and technology are made within an overarching identity. When addressing how adaptations changed Common Cause, the key question is if they affected the organization's identity.

If Common Cause's identity is based on Gardner's Rules then the answer is "yes." The organization lost an important element of its distinctiveness when it amended the rules. The addition of a 501c3 arm made it more like other groups in the government reform population and less like the organization Gardner founded. Some question its believability as a nonpartisan organization when formerly elected officials from the Democratic Party took key leadership positions. Their decisions introduced new issue areas and advocacy tactics outside the structure and process and insider-outsider lobbying infrastructure developed under the rules. Although there is some revival of the rules, especially at the state level, they apply to a different type of organization.

If Common Cause's identity is based on John Gardner's ideas then the answer is "no." The idealism and pragmatism that informed his brand of charisma may be tracked throughout the

organization's history. Improving representation of citizens' interests before government officials applies to structure and process as well as substantive issues. Pragmatism includes moving toward arenas of potential influence whether at the national or state level.

Common Cause's organizational identity is based on more than Gardner's Rules or John Gardner's ideas. The actions of its leaders and supporters inform how the organization is perceived from the outside (for interest group identity multidimensionality, see Heaney, 2004). Over the course of its history, Common Cause earned and has kept a reputation for integrity and working to hold government accountable.

Leaders' adaptations changed many characteristics of Common Cause. Whether they changed its identity too depends on one's perspective. Gardner's Rules remain the foundation of the organization and his ideas infuse its operation. How long his influence will last is another question. Yet what the organization represents—governance integrity—is a public quality, a collective political quest unbounded by space or time, or even certain leaders' interpretations.

C. Citizen Participation and Representation in a Public Interest Lobby

What can a public interest lobby tell us about citizen participation and representation?

1. Citizen Participation

John Gardner's new form of creative participation introduced a dyad connecting yet separating leaders and members. Citizens fulfilled necessary supporting roles but were separate from leaders making decisions from the top-down. Other variables interact with the relationship, such as citizen participation practices, political context, and the collective action problem.

When Common Cause formed, citizen participation was changing as fewer people joined federated associations such as the Elks Club (see Skocpol, 2003). Bottom-up representation processes were giving way to top-down professional lobbying groups that members supported with their dues and contributions. However Common Cause's early members were familiar with social capital practices to

mobilize support, as suggested by their organization of state offices and coffee klatches to inform and invite others to join.

Practices changed again as the internet became a form and forum of citizen participation. Interested parties, or individuated activists, may support Common Cause's purposive goals just by clicking a mouse. Participation is more fluid, as becoming a member and making contributions are optional. Common Cause appeals' use of the term supporters instead of members is indicative of this change.

Tax Day Marches held on April 15, 2017 to protest President Trump's refusal to release his tax returns illustrate the change. Common Cause sent email invitations to join the march at nearby locations. At some of the marches, Common Cause's presence was obvious with people carrying blue signs with the organization's logo "Hold Power Accountable." At other locations, there were few signs besides those addressing the tax issue. Thus in the age of individuated activism, participants clearly need organizing but act independently of the organization. Thus it is unclear if the supporters attracted through the internet will rise on the ladder of engagement generally, or for Common Cause specifically.

Individuated activism, Web 2.0 interactivity, and the growing population of niche-specific interest groups narrows citizen participation (similar to fewer readers of print newspapers narrows the news people receive). The breadth of Common Cause's agenda keeps it from becoming a niche group, but within each issue network it competes against groups committed to a singular cause (see Bosso, 2005, p.64). Digital strategies help the organization compete with narrowly focused groups by measuring supporters' interest in, and tailor approaches to, targeted campaigns within issue areas.

An online presence enables Common Cause to build a network among a broad range of people and groups interested in governance integrity. Also it improves accessibility to the organization, especially among younger people, a demographic critical to the organization's future. The lists of supporters that grow when people sign online petitions or click "like" on Facebook pages may be an updated iteration of the mailing lists Common Cause would buy from progressive groups or magazines.

The quantity of supporters is increasing, but it is unclear if the quality is also improving. In other words, the five percent of members who are more active implies about 35,000 activists out of the 700,000 supporters. This number is likely an overestimate due to individuated activists' support of issues instead of groups. Also the ease of joining campaigns means a percentage of supporters could belong to a number of government integrity groups besides Common Cause, limiting the time they could give to any one group.

In the founding years, a contingency of secondary activists were primed by the reform cycle environment and widespread alarm about government operations. John Gardner's brand of charisma and national reputation helped attract people to his nascent organization. People across the U.S. supported his ideas for a public interest group—an attitude still expressed in the 2015 survey responses. The 2015 survey concluded with an open-ended question, "Finally is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences with Common Cause?" A respondent wrote, "The organization inspired me when John Gardner founded it, and it does still." Another offered advice, "Stay true to your founding principles." One response suggests the longevity of the organization, "My mother introduced me to this group early in its formation and it has been aligned with our hopes and dreams for America."

After reforms were enacted in the mid-1970s, public alarm decreased and secondary activists demobilized, even though John Gardner was still active in Common Cause. This suggests Common Cause's early attraction to citizens was a combination of exogenous and endogenous factors. Indeed, organizational memberships fluctuate, depending on the political climate and group characteristics (see Karpf, 2013; Skocpol, 2003; Putnam, 2000; Clemens, 1997).

In general, the adversity theory of Common Cause is supported over time. Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 caused a panic, partly due to his nuclear proliferation and environmental policies. In 2000 George W. Bush's election deficiencies, combined with a final push toward campaign finance reform, helped improve membership and revenue. Membership totals increased as Common Cause worked to overturn the *Citizens United* decision but jumped during and after the 2016 presidential

campaign. The elections of President Donald Trump and Republican majorities in both chambers of Congress mobilized many citizens across the country.

Also regional location contextualizes advocacy efforts. Daniel Elazar (1972) described the influence of regional political subculture on citizen participation. States within certain regions share participation characteristics. The characteristics may help or hinder mobilization efforts and chances for successful advocacy, especially as attention shifts toward state campaigns.

Citizen participation is affected by the collective action problem, put forth by the rational choice scholar Mancur Olson (1971). The problem occurs when “the few defeat the many,” or minority interests tend to rule and democratic governance is limited (McFarland, 2011, p.12). In particular, groups advocating a public interest (e.g. Common Cause) must overcome a person’s incentive to “free ride” on the efforts of others.

Common Cause leaders’ attempts to overcome the collective action problem are evident in each phase of the organization’s narrative. During the first phase, small dues and purposive goals attracted many middle and upper middle class individuals during a time of mounting alarm with government operations. But relying on purposive incentives made the organization sensitive to environmental changes, which helps explain membership decline (see Wilson 1995, p.210).

In the second phase, small dues and purposive goals were insufficient to keep Common Cause afloat. Members’ contributions remained a financial base, but built upon that base was an increasing reliance on their participation in grassroots mobilization. The collective action problem was partially addressed by the ease of signing online petitions, comments, and letters to public officials. Yet membership numbers continued their decline and the question of Common Cause’s viability remained unanswered.

Third phase renewal put to rest concerns about the organization’s survival. Free riders remain a challenge for leaders, but they address it differently. Instead of growing a national movement from the top-down, state Common Cause leaders, some with community organizer experience, work with small

groups of supporters (e.g. Illinois’ Action Teams). Local subgroups, comprised of fewer members, are a means to overcome the collective action problem.

Elements of Gardner’s Rules are reviving, especially at the state level. Executive directors lobby on the inside and organize supporters to lobby from the outside. In this manner, Common Cause is developing face-to-face infrastructure for those who want to do something in certain locations.

As this project concludes in 2017, Common Cause appeals urge actions in support of redistricting reform and voting rights—two issue areas at the core of citizen participation. State redistricting campaigns are underway in a number of states (including Illinois and Texas). Notable examples include the Wisconsin gerrymandering case *Gill v. Whitford*, (218 F. Supp. 3d 837, 2017) which the Supreme Court agreed to hear during its next term. Common Cause filed an *amicus* brief arguing that “Partisan gerrymandering clearly violates the First Amendment” (p.10). Common Cause North Carolina filed a federal lawsuit protesting partisan gerrymandering of a remedial map drawn by the North Carolina Republican Party after the Supreme Court struck down its districts due to racial gerrymandering (*Common Cause v. Rucho* No. 1:16-CV-1026). The district court postponed the trial indefinitely when the Supreme Court agreed to hear *Gill v. Whitford*.

Revitalization helps Common Cause Illinois successfully advocate protection of voter rights. Resources are going to states like Texas, where Common Cause is focused on overturning oppressive voter ID laws. A federal district court called Texas’ voter ID law an “unconstitutional poll tax” in its *Veasey v. Perry* (2014) decision.

Redistricting and voting laws that advance citizen participation are applicable to governance integrity issues. They bridge government institutions serving the public interest and democracy reforms—two perspectives of what Common Cause represents. In addition, they provide justification for the transition from representing A public interest to THE public interest (e.g. one person one vote).

2. **Representation**

Common Cause's formation as a national government reform lobby, funded by diffuse constituents, implies representation processes. Members (the principle) depend on lobbyists (the agent) to advance their interests before government officials. Leaders depend on members to fund their efforts. This relationship means both parties are invested in the organization's success but there is a distinct separation between professional lobbyists and the constituents who support them.

Members joined due to a vague notion of the organization's purposive goals, then renewed their membership when their interests were congruent with Common Cause campaigns (see Rothenberg, 1992). Common Cause leaders' decisions were limited by members' ability to exit the organization, but leaders still had latitude to act as they saw fit, especially as most issue polls indicated large support for what the organization was doing. For example, Fred Wertheimer focused on campaign finance reform for over a decade, a decision in line with Gardner's Rules and lobbying requirements, as well as member issue poll results.

In addition, efforts were made to create a board that descriptively represented a national constituency. McFarland (1984, p.102) wrote, "The Common Cause board must contain a significant number of . . . women, Republicans, minorities, the West, the South . . . or else lobbying will be hindered by criticisms of its 'unrepresentative' nature." Members nominated candidates and submitted ballots for board elections. A number of seats were set aside in case appointments were necessary to improve diversity.

Characteristics of Common Cause's early years offer support for Hanna Pitkin's (1967) dyadic model of representation. A few examples suggest influence flowed from principal to agent or "the who before the what." But most of its history is indicative of dual representation or "the what before the who" and Saward's (2005) concept of two-way representation processes. In general, leaders select issues and use frames that are accepted and supported by those who perceive interest alignment.

It seems unlikely that Gardner intended Common Cause leaders to act as agents of the members, or the principal. Indeed, his rules indicate that “members are mainly contributors.” Yet in the organization’s beginning months, leaders administered the first member issue poll—and followed the results.

Subsequent polls became more symbolic as leaders chose to advance structure and process issues. At that time, government operations were at a highpoint in public opinion polls (see APPENDIX B). Selecting this particular issue focus was not a founding vision of the organization, but it was an effective means to channel public support into action among Members of Congress.

After purposive goals were clarified members joined and continued their support as a general expression of aligned interests. Eventually issue polls became part of the organization’s marketing strategy. Yet, leaders remained interested in the results in order to determine if their efforts continued to align with members’ interests (an example of members’ exit option limiting adaptation options). Also leaders were concerned about finding the “sweet spot” of communicating with members and supporters—enough to keep them informed without becoming junk mail.

Over time, other variables added complexity to the dyad. Increasing reliance on major donors and foundation grants shifted leaders’ attention to their interests. Like E.E. Schattschneider’s (1975, p.34-35) “flaw in the pluralist heaven,” some voices held more influence than others.

Descriptive representation practices mostly disappeared. Board elections became a matter for board members only. Reducing the board from 60 to 30 members meant fewer possibilities for descriptive representation, although candidate selection promoted a level of diversity on the board. Common Cause members no longer participated in board elections, implying more emphasis on the “what before the who” of dual representation.

Also, the rise of individuated activism complicated the relationship between leader and supporter. On one hand it added a number of constituencies within issue areas. On the other hand it

enabled passive democratic feedback Common Cause used to tailor communications to each individual (see Karpf, 2016).

Responding to individual interests is different from using digital analytics to aggregate and measure data, a capability found in significantly larger groups than Common Cause (such as Avaaz; see Karpf, 2016). But it manifests changes in representation as leaders know in real time if appeals achieve some level of success (instead of waiting weeks or months for mailed in responses). Also it suggests another component of two-way communication processes.

Throughout its history, Common Cause leaders fulfilled more trustee than delegate representative functions. For many years, they acted according to Gardner's Rules and led the organization from the top-down (one notable exception occurred with activist members pressured leaders to fight against MX missile production and deployment in the mid-1980s). Clear action principles, disproportionate information processing, and the exit option structured leaders' trustee-like roles for over two decades.

Trustee-like representation, or "acting-for" members' interests, changed over time. The strategic focus on insider lobbyists promoting interests—accepted and supported by members—became less effective and financially unsustainable as environments changed. While still fulfilling trustee roles, leaders worked to educate and mobilize members to act-for their interests too, particularly successful at the state level. The change suggests evolving co-dependency (also see FIGURE 10, p.180).

Common Cause is a lens to study dual representation in a public interest group. With a few exceptions, Common Cause promoted the "what before the who." Early efforts to achieve descriptive representation more in line with the "who before the what" were suspended when finances tightened. Thus leaders most often fulfilled trustee roles, especially after Gardner's Rules were established.

Amending Gardner's Rules broadened leaders' options when acting-for members. At the same time, the formation of the education fund forced leaders to follow foundation requirements. Thus the

what of representation shifted toward education and civic engagement and away from targeted insider lobbying efforts.

Common Cause still represents governance integrity, but from a different perspective. The shift is apparent in differences between the 1995 and 2009 Mission Statements (see FIGURES 11 and 12, p.190-191). In particular, emphasis shifted from ensuring “open, honest, accountable, and effective government” to “restoring the core values of American democracy.” The shift suggests the increasing use of education and civic engagement campaigns as means to improve governance integrity. Also it implies the opening of, and growing reliance on, the 501c3 CCEF revenue stream.

Representative processes became more complex over time. Major donors, foundations, and individuated activists changed the composition of the principal node. Even if it wanted to, it would be almost impossible for Common Cause leaders to “stand-for” or descriptively represent the plethora of interests. Thus Common Cause no longer necessarily represents a group of people (i.e. members) but certain—and somewhat transitory—collections of interests, much like Wilson’s (1995) department store analogy (public interest groups must reflect members’ preferences like a store’s displayed goods reflect customers’ preferences). Yet Wilson did not foresee a future where people may enter a store and select and use items without paying for them or that even going to a store would require little more than a click.

Studying a public interest lobby reveals citizen participation and representation are widening with the internet as form and forum. Effective leaders must keep individuated activists interested in campaigns and encourage them to move up the ladder of engagement. Paradoxically a way to achieve these goals is to narrowly tailor campaigns, in order to accentuate individual interests and promote face-to-face strategies.

The dyadic relationship changes with leaders’ adaptations to environmental circumstances. Leaders continue to instigate campaigns, leading from the top-down, but in order to survive the separation between nodes is less clear. Attending to the interests of major donors and foundations, as

well as a need to demonstrate legitimacy and strength through grassroots mobilization, is a markedly different dynamic than members' contributions supporting professional lobbyists.

Web 2.0 digital capabilities enhance two-way communication and passive democratic feedback. Yet tailoring communications to a recipient also narrows the information received. This is not as much of an issue for niche groups but must be a concern for organizations with broader goals, such as Common Cause.

Improving descriptive “standing-for” representation in the leadership of a public interest group is made more difficult by environmental factors: (1) the amorphous nature of individuated activists; (2) loss of dues-paying members committed to an organization and not just an issue; (3) loss of a membership base across states and in almost every congressional district; (4) the lack of diversity in the membership; and (5) partisan polarization that pushes groups into a major party's camp. Thus leaders must “act-for” their constituents. Their decisions embody a form of dual representation, or “the what before the who.”

D. Hypotheses

Answers to the three research questions test two hypotheses:

H1: Large public interest groups tend to follow the rules and norms set up under the founding leadership and first years of success.

H2: Large, long-term public interest groups change their founding rules and norms only when there are changes to the external environment and under threats to the interest group's survival.

Historical analysis of Common Cause reveals support for both hypotheses.

According to the first hypothesis, large interest groups, such as Common Cause, tend to follow the rules and norms set up under the founding leadership and first years of success. John Gardner's reputation was critical to the successful launch of the organization. His brand of charisma inspired those who worked for and with him. Action principles and lobbying requirements he promoted grounded an organizational culture that lasted long after he stepped down.

Common Cause lobbyists influenced policies as they acted according to Gardner's Rules. The first flush of success, with pressing for an end to the Vietnam War, was followed by significant reforms such as the 1974 Federal Election Campaign Act Amendments. At about the same time, state offices successfully pressed for reforms.

For almost thirty years, Common Cause leaders adhered to the rules. Eventually adhering to the rules was less effective. External and internal characteristics changed, creating a growing mismatch between the rules, the political arena, and the organization itself. Loyalty to Gardner's Rules proved insufficient to reverse growing existential crises.

Once Common Cause rules and norms were established, leaders' decisions suggest disproportionate information processing. This appears to be generally consistent. As existential crises built, leaders conceivably had a number of options to address existential crises. Strategies could have narrowed to pursuing one issue, like the interest group Democracy 21. But this was in contrast to the structure and process focus of Gardner's Rules. A federated organizational structure could have been adopted making state offices more independent, similar to the League of Women Voters. But in the early 1990s a line of decisions began to unify national and state offices. Even the punctuation of adding a 501c3 arm was another thing that could be done in order to keep Common Cause alive.

Fifteen years after the 501c3 arm was created, it is an increasingly important revenue stream for the organization. At the same time, there is some revival of the rules, particularly at the state level. In general, Common Cause's evolution indicates the triumph of Gardner's ideas if not his rules.

John Gardner greatly influenced organizational norms. Lobbyists were the primary means of political influence—other departments and arenas provided critical support. A culture developed as newcomers were mentored by national staff who worked with or for Gardner. The norms may have contributed to a perspective of how a large interest group should be run, thus affecting leaders' disproportionate information processing. Also it suggests why leaders wanted to follow founding rules and norms even as existential crises loomed.

According to the second hypothesis, large, long-term public interest groups change their founding rules and norms only when there are changes to the external environment and under threats to the interest group's survival. This is mostly borne out by the evidence. Environmental changes and existential threats built pressure for amending the rules for about a decade. Yet it was not enough to sway a majority of the board to move beyond incremental adaptations.

Instead the external environment and survival threats contextualized a push for bringing in top leaders from the outside. When Fred Wertheimer announced he was stepping down as Common Cause president, a nation-wide search was conducted but ultimately the board elected a leader from inside the organization, Ann McBride. But when McBride unexpectedly announced her departure in 1999 there was a determination to go outside the organization. At about the same time, the board chair Edward S. Cabot stepped down as well. Subsequently the two top leadership positions were filled by Scott Harshbarger and Derek Bok who were relatively new to the organization.

Founding rules and norms were changed because new top leaders were not limited by disproportionate information processing. Their survival-first approach became a tipping point for amending the rules and introducing new norms. If external and internal circumstances had not grown so dire for Common Cause, then it is unlikely that new leaders could move the organization beyond its established rules and norms.

John Gardner's interest group design was highly effective during the founding years. Under his direction, early leaders developed organizational pathways and culture. Gardner's brand of charisma inspired leaders, activists, and many members—and continues to do so in 2017. His ideas helped make Common Cause a distinctive public interest group. As crises mounted, rules and norms changed so that his ideas for the common good could live on.

E. Project Implications

This project uses the lens of one public interest group yet speaks to general theories of interest groups, collective action, lobbying, and representation in the U.S. political system. From a neopluralist

theoretical perspective, Common Cause is one player in an increasingly crowded network of government reform groups. Attempts to apply countervailing pressure during the policymaking process are strengthened by advocacy coalitions but one group's influence may be more diluted. Further research based on interviews with Members of Congress and other political officials would advance significant research on lobbying and legislators (e.g. Baumgartner, et al., 2009; Nownes, 2006; and McFarland, 1983).

Overcoming the collective action problem remains a challenge, even with the ease of online activism. Mass-generated emails or petitions are frequent tactics that receive limited attention from political officials. Thus interest group leaders still must find incentives to organize, as well as mobilize their supporters.

Congressional gridlock forces some groups to advocate in state level arenas in order to build political momentum. State political subculture characteristics—put forth by Daniel Elazar (1972)—may help or hinder collective action. However, Elazar's theory needs to be updated to reflect how institutions built by east to west settlement patterns intersect with large migrations of people from the northeast to southwest and south of the border across the U.S.

John Gardner's requirements for lobbying Members of Congress include persistence and willingness to compromise. These traits are symbolic of his pragmatic approach to reform, yet appear idealistic with entrenched partisan polarization. Common Cause's membership, like the AARP interest group, is largely composed of older Americans. But without AARP's strength in numbers, and with a policy of not endorsing political candidates, Common Cause lobbyists' influence may be stronger in other venues.

Grassroots lobbying is a frequent strategy as it can demonstrate public interest and group legitimacy. But to be effective it must attract media and public officials' attention. Interest groups without large numbers of members must work in coalitions and perhaps more importantly, devise an unusual tactic.

Negative publicity is a useful leverage for corporations (as illustrated by Common Cause's rowdy protests at ALEC meetings). But if, and how, it affects political officials needs to be investigated, especially in light of Donald Trump's election even after his disparaging remarks against women. With this situation, the wisdom of Gardner's approach is evident—build long-term, credible relationships with political officials.

Lobbying on the inside cannot be replaced by grassroots mobilization. In the U.S. political system it is important to have a seat at the table, or at least near the table. The cacophony of political discourse, especially via the internet, must be channeled to reach officials' ears.

Findings in this project suggest representation in a public interest group is a two-way process but it is initiated by the agent instead of the principle. As an example of dual representations, leaders claim to represent certain interests and then it is up to constituents to decide whether or not they agree. There are a few instances of the reverse in Common Cause's history (e.g. limiting the production and deployment of MX missiles in the 1980s) but most of the time members agree with how leaders advocate their interests.

A caveat to a two-way process is the need to appeal to major contributors. As a result, how leaders advance interests may change. In Common Cause, education and civic engagement were added to the agenda—a significant step away from a national government reform lobby representing citizens' interests before Members of Congress.

Internet-based grassroots—or netroots—groups may be an exception to the rule of agent-initiated representation. Netroots groups' structure and strategies enable citizens to lead ad hoc advocacy efforts. But their short duration leads to questions of effective and lasting policy change.

Interest groups, collective action, lobbying, and representation in the U.S. political system evolve as environments change. However certain characteristics remain such as the goal to influence the policymaking process. To achieve the goal, mobilization and organization are essential but even more important is the ability to work with those who hold power.

John Gardner's interest group design included clear action principles to influence political officials. Early policy successes entrenched organizational pathways which guided leaders decisions long after Gardner stepped down. In order to survive Common Cause leaders amended the rules, creating new action principles and norms.

Common Cause is a different organization in 2017 than it was in its founding years. It maintains its role as a national government reform lobby but the definition of lobbying extends to grassroots mobilization and state campaigns. In some ways, it is less a mass-based interest group but by advocating democracy reforms it claims to represent the public interest. Even with its evolution, John Gardner's legacy remains as a foundation. Fewer leaders and members may have known or worked for John Gardner but his ideas continue to guide the interest group he designed.

APPENDIX A
COMMON CAUSE NATIONAL GOVERNING BOARD CHAIRS AND PRESIDENTS
1970-2015

Year	National Governing Board Chair	President
1970	1. John Gardner (Republican) Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare 1965-1968 Leader of Urban Coalition 1969-1970 Common Cause Founder 1970 Common Cause National Governing Board Chair 1970-1977	Lowell Beck (Republican) American Bar Association lobbyist 1960-1968 Urban Coalition Action Council chief lobbyist 1968-1970 Worked with Gardner to found Common Cause 1970 Common Cause Executive Director 1970-1971
1971		1. Jack Conway (Democrat) Political aide to Walter Reuther (head of United Auto Workers) Deputy Administrator of Housing and Home Finance Agency 1960 Director of Community Action Program 1965 Founder of Center for Community Change 1968 Worked with Gardner to found Common Cause 1970 First President of Common Cause 1971-1975
1972		
1973		
1974		
1975		2. David Cohen Americans for Democratic Action lobbyist Center for Community Change lobbyist Worked with Gardner to found Common Cause 1970 Common Cause Lobbyist, Administrator, Vice President of Operations 1970-1973 Common Cause National Governing Board 1974-1981 Common Cause President 1975-1981
1976		
1977	2. Nan Waterman President of the League of Women Voters Common Cause National Governing Board Member 1973-1977 Common Cause National Governing Board Chairwoman 1977-1980	
1978		

1979		
1980	3. Archibald Cox (Democratic) Harvard University Law Professor U.S. Solicitor General 1961-1965 Watergate Special Prosecutor 1973 Common Cause National Governing Board Member 1976-1980 Common Cause National Governing Board Chair 1980-1992 Chairman Emeritus 1992-2004	
1981		3. Fred Wertheimer Legislative Counsel to Representative Silvio Conte of Massachusetts 1967-1970 Common Cause lobbyist, head lobbyist, and political director 1971-1981 Common Cause President 1981-1995
1982		
1983		
1984		
1985		
1986		
1987		
1988		
1989		
1990		
1991		
1992	4. Edward S. (Ned) Cabot President of Housing All Americans, Inc. 1986-1992 President of the New York Chamber of Commerce and Industry 1985-1986 Common Cause National Governing Board Member 1985-1991 Common Cause National Governing Board Chair 1992-1999	
1993		
1994		
1995		4. Ann McBride Common Cause volunteer 1972 Common Cause staff member 1973-1984 Common Cause Senior Vice President 1984-1995 Common Cause President 1995-1999
1996		
1997		
1998		
1999	5. Derek Bok	*5. Scott Harshbarger

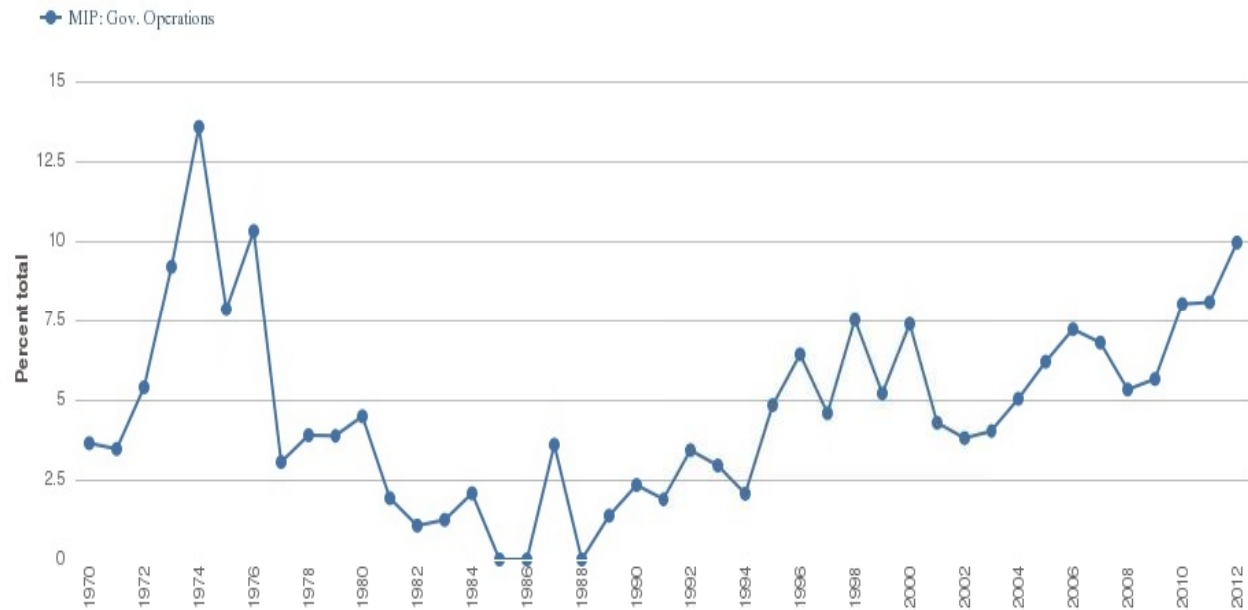
	Harvard University Law Professor Harvard University President 1971-1991 Common Cause National Governing Board Chair 1999-2006	Attorney General of Massachusetts 1991-1999 Democratic nominee for Massachusetts Governor 1998 Common Cause President 1999-2003
2000		
2001		
2002		
2003		*6. Chellie Pingree State Senator from Maine 1992-2000 Ran against Susan Collins for U.S. Senate in 2002 Common Cause President 2003-Feb. 2007 U.S. Representative from Maine 2008-present
2004		
2005		
2006	6. Richard North Patterson Trial Attorney Liaison to Watergate Special Prosecutor for the Securities and Exchange Commission Best-selling Author Common Cause National Governing Board Member 2000-2006 Common Cause National Governing Board Chair 2006-2007	
2007	7. Jim Leach U.S. Representative (R) from Iowa 1976-2007 Common Cause National Governing Board Chair December 2007-August 2008	7. Robert (Bob) Edgar U.S. Representative (D) from Pennsylvania 1975-1987 Common Cause National Governing Board 2005-2013 Common Cause President May 2007-April 2013
2008	Martha Tierney Acting Chair	
2009		
2010	8. Robert Reich Common Cause Intern 1970s Common Cause National Governing Board Member 1980s Harvard University Professor 1980-1992 Secretary of Labor 1993-1997 University of California at Berkeley Professor 2006-present Common Cause National Governing Board Chair 2010-present [founding co-editor of <i>The American Prospect</i>]	
2011		

2012		
2013		
2014		8. Miles Rapoport Connecticut General Assembly 1985-1995 Connecticut Secretary of State 1995-1999 Demos President 1999-2014 Common Cause President 2014-2016
2015		
2016		9. Karen Hobert Flynn Common Cause National Office 1985-1989 (Intern, Washington Connection) Common Cause Connecticut Executive Director 1996-2002 Common Cause Connecticut State Board Chair 2005 Common Cause Vice President of States 2007-2012 Common Cause Vice President for Strategy and Programs 2012-2016 Common Cause President 2016

***Don Simon** was acting President in the months prior to Harshbarger and Pingree's tenures.

APPENDIX B GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND PUBLIC TRUST

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM²⁵ 1970-2012



Source: <http://www.policyagendas.org/page/trend-analysis>

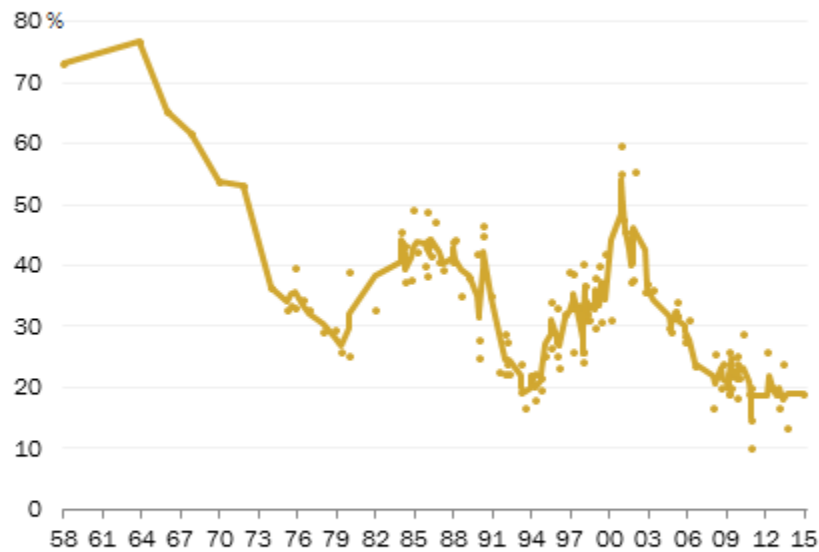
²⁵ The category Government Operations includes structure and process reform issues.

The data used here were originally collected by Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, with the support of National Science Foundation grant numbers SBR 9320922 and 0111611, and were distributed through the Department of Government at the University of Texas at Austin. Neither NSF nor the original collectors of the data bear any responsibility for the analysis reported here.

PUBLIC TRUST IN GOVERNMENT: 1958-2015²⁶

Public trust in government: 1958-2015

Trust the federal government to do what is right just about always/most of the time ...



Survey conducted Aug. 27-Oct. 4, 2015. Q15. Trend sources: Pew Research Center, National Election Studies, Gallup, ABC/Washington Post, CBS/New York Times, and CNN Polls. From 1976-2014 the trend line represents a three-survey moving average.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: <http://www.people-press.org/2015/11/23/public-trust-in-government-1958-2015/>, accessed May 19, 2016.

²⁶ Public trust in government is a reflection of criticism of the way government performs its duties as well as disillusionment with political leaders.

APPENDIX C
COMMON CAUSE SELECTED ADVOCACY ISSUES
1970-2015

For many years, Common Cause categorized its primary structure and process goals in its OUTS program. Appendix C advocacy issues are based on late-1990s categories which subsume the OUTS program. Although not exhaustive, the figure includes a sample of national policy achievements and advocacy from founding to 2015.

	Money in Politics	Ethics in Government	Voting and Elections	Government Accountability	Other Reforms
1970s	*FECA Amendments of 1974 --Public financing of congressional campaigns	*Ethics in Government Act of 1978	--Supports full voting rights in the Congress for the District of Columbia	*Reform Congressional Committee Seniority system *Open Meetings, or Sunshine Laws, at federal level and 45 states *Sunset Laws in 33 states; used at federal level	*Opposed funding of supersonic transport plane (1971) *Ending Vietnam War (1973) --Supported Equal Rights Amendment (1977-1982)
1980s	*Retain dollar check off for presidential campaigns on IRS Form 1040 (1985) *New York City public campaign financing (1988)	*Ethics investigation of House Speaker Jim Wright (1988) *Ethics Reform Act of 1989	--Redistricting reports issued in 1981 and 1982	--1985 monitor selection and confirmation of judges	*Tax Reform Act of 1986 *Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987
1990s	*Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 --Project Independence (led grassroots effort advocating soft money ban in 1997)			*1990 Fazio-Frenzel franking reform amendment to limit expenditures and enact reporting requirements on franked mail	*Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 *Civil Rights Act of 1991 --Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 1995 *With coalition opposed Balanced Budget Amendment (1997)

					*Opposed U.S. Congress Term Limits (1998)
2000s	<p>*Full and Fair Campaign Finance Disclosure Act of 2000</p> <p>*Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002</p> <p>--Public financing of Congressional campaigns (2006)</p>	<p>*Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007</p> <p>*U.S. House of Representatives creates independent Office of Congressional Ethics (2008)</p>	<p>--Help America Vote Act 2002 (501c3)</p> <p>--Voter Hotline 2004 Election (501c3)</p> <p>*2008 CCCA: Independent citizens commission formed to draw legislative districts</p>		<p>*With Public Interest Public Airwaves Coalition [PIPA] protests consolidation of media outlets (2003)</p> <p>*Opposes plan to cut funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (2005)</p>
2010s	<p>*Led reform coalition that exposed the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a 501c3 organization, and its corporate donors. More than 50 major companies ended their sponsorship of ALEC.</p> <p>*Pressed state and local governments to call for Constitutional Amendment to overturn the <i>Citizens United</i> decision</p>				

*Successes

--Advocacy/Watchdog

APPENDIX D
SELECT CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM LEGISLATION AND COURT CASES
1970-2014

Date	Event	Summary
1971	Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971	Enacted disclosure requirements for federal candidates, political parties, and political action committees (PACs); lack of independent body to enforce disclosure rules
1971	Revenue Act	Established public funding of presidential general election campaigns
1972	<i>Common Cause et al. v. Finance Committee to Reelect the President et al.</i> , C.A. 1780-72	Common Cause sued Nixon’s Committee to Re-Elect the President for collecting large sums of money—including large sums from corporations which were prohibited by the <i>Federal Corrupt Practices Act of 1925</i>
1973	<i>Common Cause et al. v. Shultz et al.</i> , C.A. 433-73 (D.C.D.C.)	Forced the Internal Revenue Service to place the presidential campaign fund check-off box on the tax return’s main page
1974	Federal Election Campaign Amendments of 1974	Legal limits on campaign contributions (e.g. “hard money”) from individuals, PACs, and political party committees. Federal Election Commission was created to ensure compliance with the FECA. Public funding of presidential campaigns expanded to primaries and nominating conventions. Limits imposed on total campaign expenditures and independent expenditures advocating the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate.
1976	<i>Buckley v. Valeo</i> (421 U.S. 1, 1976)	Hard money limits upheld; struck down limits on total campaign expenditures; independent expenditures could only be limited when expressly advocating the election or defeat of a candidate.
1976	Federal Election Campaign Amendments of 1976	Repealed campaign expenditure limits except for candidates who accepted public funds. Reversed an advisory opinion issued by the FEC that permitted corporations to use treasury money to establish, operate, and solicit contributions to a PAC
1979	Federal Election Campaign Amendments of 1979	Lifted limits on money spent for party building activities; codified FEC advisory opinions that allowed state political party committees to accept money above contribution caps if used for state party building activities (i.e. unregulated “soft money”)
1985	<i>Federal Election Commission v. National Conservative Political Action Committee</i> (914 F.Supp. 8, 1996)	Court overturned independent expenditure limitations on PACs
1986	<i>Federal Election Commission v. Massachusetts Citizens</i>	Court struck down independent expenditure limitations when applied to nonprofit ideological corporations using

	<i>for Life</i> (479 U.S. 238, 1986)	general treasury funds (that included contributions from corporations)
1990	<i>Austin v. Michigan Chamber of Commerce</i> (494 U.S. 652, 1990)	Court upheld Michigan law prohibiting the use of general treasury funds for independent expenditures in support of state candidate elections, but their decision signaled a turn in interpretation from distinguishing between corporations and individuals as differences in kind to differences of degree
1996	<i>Colorado Republican Federal Campaign Committee v. Federal Election Commission</i> (518 U.S. 604, 1996)	Court struck down FEC regulation of state political parties using funds to purchase radio advertisements attacking their opponent's likely congressional candidate
1996	<i>Maine Right to Life Committee, Inc. v. Federal Election Commission</i> (914 F.Supp. 8, 1996)	The U.S. Court of Appeals, First Circuit ruled the FEC's definition of express advocacy was invalid due to its chilling effect on free speech (see <i>Buckley v. Valeo</i>)
2000	Full and Fair Campaign Finance Disclosure Act of 2000	Imposed disclosure requirements on I.R.S. tax code Section 527 groups that did not expressly advocate for a specific candidate's election or defeat; lack of mechanism to enforce requirements
2002	Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA)	Banned soft money contributions to political parties. Redefined issue ads as regulated "electioneering communications" when aired in the 30 days before a primary or 60 days prior to a general election. Corporations, labor unions, and non-profit organizations were prohibited from using general treasury funds for electioneering communications ads
2003	<i>McConnell v. Federal Election Commission</i> (540 U.S. 93, 2003)	Court upheld Congress' authority to ban soft money contributions to political parties; also upheld limits on advertising by corporations, labor unions, and non-profit organizations, including distinctions between express and issue advocacy and if aired within sixty days of an election
2007	<i>Federal Election Commission v. Wisconsin Right to Life, Inc.</i> (554 US 724, 2007)	Court struck down BCRA's ban on corporate-sponsored issue ads in the 60 days before an election
2008	<i>Davis v. Federal Election Commission</i> (554 US 724, 2008)	Court struck down the "Millionaires Amendment" section of the BCRA, intended to limit campaign spending disparities by raising the legal limit on contributions for a candidate substantially outspent by an opposing candidate who was using personal wealth
2010	<i>Citizens United v. Federal Election</i>	Court overruled parts of the <i>McConnell v. Federal Election Commission</i> (2003) decision by striking down prohibitions against corporations and unions' use of

	<i>Commission</i> (558 US __, 2010)	general treasury funds for independent expenditures and electioneering communications in federal elections
2014	<i>McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission</i> (572 US __, 2014)	Court removed aggregate limits on an individual's contributions contribute to candidates, political party committees, and political action committees during a two-year federal election cycle

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Research

Investigation and historical analysis of Common Cause, a public interest lobby that claims to “hold power accountable” and represent citizens’ interest in governance integrity. Qualitative and quantitative analyses test theories of interest group influence and representation. Data collection includes participant observation, elite interviews, a general membership survey, newspaper content analysis, and archival research. 2013-2017

“The Impact of Mental Maps on Content Retention” assesses the efficacy of mental map learning strategies for content retention in AP U.S. Government and Politics classes. Research method is a quasi-experimental, nonequivalent control group design. Findings suggest mental maps’ effectiveness for content retention is comparable to traditional approaches of content review. 2006-2007

Research Assistant to Professor Evan McKenzie in preparation of “Multi-function Special Districts as Substitutes for Municipalities” 2015

Research Assistant to Professor Kevin Lyles in preparation of *Taking on the System: The Jurisprudence of Thurgood Marshall* 2010-2013

Community Service

Wichita Falls Chamber of Commerce Research Advisory Committee member, designing survey research in order to promote stability and growth across community sectors. 2017

Obama Presidential Library Town Hall Meeting Discussion Leader 2014

Amon Carter Museum Teacher Advisory Committee Member, Fort Worth, Texas 2004-2005

Professional Organization Memberships

National Council for the Social Studies 2017

Southern Education Research Association 2017

Midwest Political Science Association 2012-2017

Illinois Political Science Association 2011-2015

HONORS AND AWARDS

Friends of the Princeton University Library Research Grant	2015
UIC Milton Rakove Memorial Prize for Political Science Graduate Research	2014
UIC Doris Graber Scholarship	2010
UTA University Scholar	2009
UTA Political Science Honor Roll	2008
Fort Worth I.S.D. AP Scholar Teacher Award (recipient of initial award)	2008
UTA Political Science Scholar Award	2007
UTA Political Science Department Award of Excellence	2007
James Madison Memorial Fellowship	2005
Teacher of the Year—Carter-Riverside High School, Fort Worth, Texas	2003

PRESENTATIONS

Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference Chicago, Illinois 2016 “John Gardner’s Interest Group Design: The Foundation and Evolution of a Lobbying Organization”
Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference Chicago, Illinois 2014 “Common Cause and the Concept of Representation: Discussion and Analysis Using Hanna Fenichel Pitkin’s Criteria”
Illinois Political Science Association Conference Elgin, Illinois 2013 “Common Cause and the Concept of Representation: Discussion and Analysis Using Hanna Fenichel Pitkin’s Criteria.”
College Board Advanced Placement Summer Institute, Texas Christian University 2009 “Why Was There a Civil Rights Movement?”
College Board Advanced Placement Summer Institute, Texas Christian University 2009 “The Obama Presidency: An AP Perspective”
College Board Advanced Placement Summer Institute, UTA 2009 “The Policy-Making Process and AP U.S. Government”
Duke Talent Identification Program, Texas Christian University 2009 “Transitions in Politics: The Obama Days”

Texas Council for the Social Studies Convention, Fort Worth, Texas 2005
 “Technology Integration: A Student-Centered Learning Approach”

Advanced Placement Review Sessions, Texas Christian University 2005-2010
 AP U.S. Government and Politics, AP Macroeconomics, AP Psychology

RELATED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference Discussant	2016
“Reconsidering the Politics of Urban Infrastructure” Conference Facilitator	2015
College Board AP U.S. Government and Politics Exam Question Writer	2015
UIC Political Science Student Union Advisor	2013-2015
National Student Issues Convention Discussion Leader and Facilitator	2011-2014
Young Democrats Club Sponsor, Fort Worth I.S.D.	2008-2010
Junior Statesmen of America Sponsor, Fort Worth I.S.D.	2008-2010
College Board AP U.S. Government and Politics Exam Table Leader and Reader	2003-2017
Junior Achievement Sponsor, Fort Worth I.S.D.	2002-2007
Whiz Quiz Team Sponsor, Fort Worth I.S.D.	2001-2007