

Voice and Inequality: The Transformation of American Civic Democracy

By Theda Skocpol

Introduction

About a century ago, the American Political Science Association (APSA) was launched at a December 1903 meeting held at Tulane University during the joint conventions of the American Economics Association (AEA) and the American Historical Association (AHA).¹ That founding was the culmination of a yearlong process of tapping the opinions of scholars and men of affairs interested—as the original circular letter put it—in “the establishment of some representative body that can take the scientific lead in all matters of a political interest, encouraging research, aiding if possible in the collection and publication of valuable material and . . . in general advancing the scientific study of politics in the United States.”² Did it make more sense, asked the letter, to organize special-interest sections *within* the AEA, the AHA, and the American Social Science Association, or to launch an independent national association? Fortunately for us, prospective members overwhelmingly chose the latter course. In New Orleans, they adopted a constitution and elected founding officers for APSA, including Frank J. Goodnow of Columbia University as the first president.

Much has changed over the past century. An association that started with founding participants numbering in the dozens now boasts about 14,000 members. An association once closely focused on the formal arrangements of law and government now encompasses a much broader understanding of politics; and presidential addresses over the decades document the emergence of behavioralism, systems theories, and rational choice to coexist with new variants of institutional analysis. An association that originally functioned through 10 scholarly and governing committees now has 47 program divisions, 35 organized sections, 55 related groups, and 42 committees devoted to governance, awards, and representation. Each year, some 700 people, about one of every 20 members, participate in the voluntary leadership of APSA and its sections. Last but not least, an association founded by

white men now includes a rainbow of persons, and it has just witnessed the first instance of a woman president handing off the gavel to a female successor.

Despite the many changes over the decades, there have been important continuities—so many that Goodnow and his colleagues would surely recognize us today as inheritors of the association and disciplinary vision they launched. Now, as then, organized political science encompasses normative theory as well as empirical research. Now, as then, APSA features comparative research, area studies, and a focus on international politics as well as studies of American politics; and our membership is international. APSA fosters both pedagogy and research. We nurture ties to neighboring disciplines and proudly include scholars who started elsewhere in our ranks. Now, as then, we aim to link responsible citizenship in the larger society to scholarly studies of government and politics. In the words of Pendleton Herring, delivered in his APSA presidential address 50 years ago: “[A]s we . . . develop political science as a discipline we both serve our professional needs and perform the vital function of helping our democracy to know itself better.”³

Above all, as Goodnow put it in his first presidential address, APSA aspires to be “inclusive.” We do not define political science narrowly, and yet we still seek to nurture solidarity and fellowship, especially by sponsoring “annual sessions” that “offer a common meeting ground in more ways than one for those whose work is mainly or largely political rather than economic or historical.”⁴ Ours is a vital association, still benefiting from active member involvement and support, a model of unity nourished by diversity. For 100 years, we political scientists have stuck together and flourished. Let us hope that a century from now our successors can look back and say that we built well on earlier foundations, opening the way for still further growth and intellectual and practical engagement.

The centenary of APSA, a thriving voluntary membership group, is a fitting time to reflect on the changing shape of the American civic democracy of which we are a part. U.S. democracy has long been considered distinctive—and a model of sorts for the rest of the world. This is somewhat owing to the U.S. Bill of Rights and electoral contests; perhaps even more so, it is because Americans have long been portrayed as preeminent organizers and joiners of voluntary associations that shape and supplement the activities of government. In the 1890s, Lord Bryce—who later served as the

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fourth president of APSA—observed that “associations are created, extended, and worked in the United States more . . . effectively than in any other country.”⁵ Bryce echoed earlier observations by Alexis de Tocqueville and foreshadowed the eventual findings of survey studies such as Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba’s 1963 book *The Civic Culture*, which documented the unusual proclivity of Americans for participation in voluntary groups.⁶

Although American voluntary groups have always been celebrated, their characteristics and political effects are not well understood. Our vision of voluntary associations of the past has been especially hazy—and as a result we are ill equipped to grasp the momentous reorganization of U.S. civic life that has taken place in our time. Between the late 1960s and the 1990s, Americans launched more nationally visible voluntary entities than ever before in the nation’s history. They thus remained preeminent *civic organizers*. But late-twentieth-century Americans ceased to be such avid *joiners*—especially because they pulled back from organizing and participating in membership associations that built bridges across places and brought citizens together across lines of class and occupation.

In this essay, I will:

- succinctly characterize the great civic reorganization of our time, delineating it against the backdrop of the history of American civic democracy;
- suggest why our contemporary great civic transformation occurred;
- reflect on the implications of recent reorganizations for the broader workings of U.S. democracy.

I will rely on previous studies by scholars of many methodological and theoretical persuasions. Yet given my proclivities as an historical-institutionalist, I will highlight what we can learn by focusing on the changing universe of voluntary and interest group *organizations* as such.⁷ Organizations concentrate resources, voice, and clout in democratic politics—so we should care as much about the organization as we do the individual level of politics. We should focus on the strategies used by civic organizers as well as on the responses of masses of citizens. I will also explore interactions between organized voluntary entities and the changing institutions and policies of government. Social movements and voluntary groups influence politics and government, to be sure—yet the opposite is also true. Access to politics and partnerships with government spur group formation and influence changing forms of voluntary organization.

A Great Civic Transformation

I begin by characterizing the universe of U.S. voluntary associations as of the middle of the twentieth century and then describe the major reorganizations that occurred from the 1960s to the 1990s.

American civil society at mid-century

In mid-twentieth-century American civil society, business associations coexisted with broad-based, popularly rooted voluntary membership associations. In terms of sheer numbers of groups, business associations predominated. Groups

representing businesses or businesspeople constituted about half of all nationally visible associations in 1950 and more than 40 percent in 1960.⁸ This situation helps explain why political scientists saw business dominance within the Washington lobbying community at mid-century.⁹

Yet if we examine voluntary groups with large individual memberships, we see another side of mid-century civic life. Compared with citizens of Britain and Germany—the two other advanced-industrial nations surveyed in Almond and Verba’s book *The Civic Culture*—mid-twentieth-century Americans of both genders and all educational levels were more likely to join and hold office in voluntary associations.¹⁰ What is more, Americans were involved in distinctive types of groups. Americans, Britons, and Germans joined occupationally based associations at roughly equal levels (although the British were more often members of labor unions and did not join farm groups). And respondents of all three nationalities were comparably involved in social and charitable groups. But Americans were unusually likely to claim one or more memberships in church-related associations, civic-political groups, and fraternal groups—and were also significantly involved in cooperative and military veterans’ associations. The “fraternal” category especially stands out, in that Almond and Verba tallied it *only* for the U.S. case.¹¹

As late as the early 1960s, in short, Americans were avid participants in “fellowship associations”—groups emphasizing and expressing solidarity among citizens, or among “brothers” or “sisters” who see themselves as joined in shared moral undertakings. In 1955, more than two dozen very large membership federations enrolled between 1 percent and 12 percent of American adults apiece.¹² Rooted in dense networks of state and local chapters that gave them a presence in communities across the nation, major fraternal groups, religious groups, civic associations, and veterans’ associations predominated among very large membership associations (apart from the AFL-CIO). Smaller nationwide membership federations also flourished in the immediate post-World War II era—including elite service groups such as Rotary and the Soroptimists; civic associations such as the League of Women Voters; and dozens of fellowship and cooperative federations with memberships restricted to African Americans or to particular ethnic groups.¹³

Most of the business associations that were so numerous in the 1950s and early 1960s grew up over the course of the twentieth century; and the same was true of professional associations, also numerous by mid-century. But massive, popularly rooted fellowship federations had much deeper historical roots. They started to proliferate in the fledgling United States between the Revolution and the Civil War and then experienced explosive growth in the late nineteenth century, as civic organizers—some of whom had met during the Civil War struggles—fanned out across the United States, organizing state and local chapters in every nook and cranny of a growing nation. Millions of nineteenth-century Americans joined women’s federations, fraternal and veterans’ groups, and reform crusades. By the early twentieth century, the kinds

of membership groups that had the most consistent presence, apart from churches, in towns and cities of all sizes were chapters of nation-spanning fellowship federations.¹⁴

Of course, particular voluntary federations rose and fell over time. But as the United States industrialized between the 1870s and the 1920s—an epoch during which business and professional groups and labor unions grew in this country as they did in other industrializing nations—fellowship federations remained a strong presence. In addition to the Civil War, World Wars I and II promoted the growth of fellowship federations, which worked closely with the federal government to mobilize Americans for wars.¹⁵ In an important sense—and this is a key point—the United States continued pre-industrial patterns of civic voluntarism through much of the industrial era, adding occupational and class-specific associations to its universe of associations while retaining older cross-class federations.

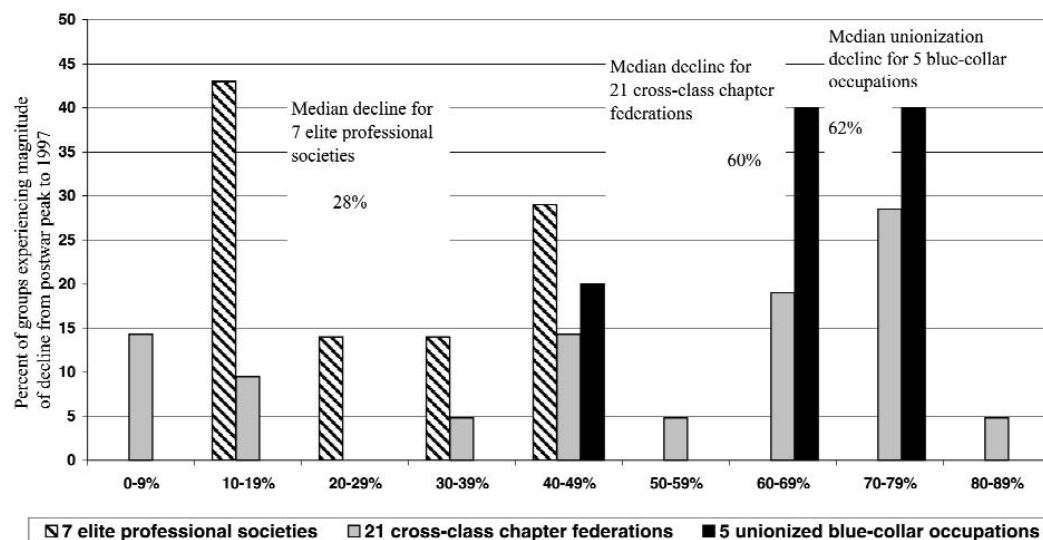
Although fellowship associations may seem to have been apolitical, in fact they were often involved in public affairs. Half to two-thirds of the 20 largest membership associations of the 1950s were directly involved in legislative campaigns or public crusades of one sort or another.¹⁶ This is perhaps obvious for the AFL-CIO and the American Farm Bureau Federation. But beyond these, the PTA and the General Federation of Women's Clubs were active in a variety of legislative campaigns having to do with educational and family issues.¹⁷ The Fraternal Order of Eagles championed Social Security and other federal social programs.¹⁸ And the American Legion drafted and lobbied for the G.I. Bill of 1944.¹⁹ These are just a few of many possible examples.

Contemporary civic reorganizations

Although business groups and popular membership federations held sway in U.S. civil society as of the mid-twentieth century, sudden and remarkable changes occurred thereafter. Three intertwined transformations remade the American civic universe between the 1960s and the 1990s.

First, while business groups continued to proliferate in absolute terms, they lost proportional ground in the universe of nationally visible voluntary associations. The total number of U.S. national associations expanded from about 6,000 in 1960 to reach a new plateau of about 23,000 in 1990 and

Figure 1
Postwar Membership Decline for Cross-Class Chapter Federations, Blue-Collar Unions, and Elite Professional Societies



Source: Putnam 2000. Information on chapter federations omits small elite service groups and ethnic associations; data on elite professional societies do not include nurses.

after. Yet as this expansion happened, the share of business associations shrank from 42 percent to 17.5 percent, while associations devoted to addressing issues in the realms of “social welfare” and “public affairs” burgeoned from 6 percent to 17 percent of all nationally visible associations.²⁰ Expanding categories included citizens’, or public interest, associations—that is, nonprofit organizations that aim to further value-laden understandings of the public good: for instance, environmental groups, antipoverty groups, pro-choice and pro-life groups, family values groups, and associations dealing with the rights of women, racial and ethnic minorities, and other vulnerable categories of Americans.²¹ The balance of organized voice in U.S. public affairs shifted markedly in the late twentieth century, as many new kinds of associations came to be heard, speaking for more causes and constituencies than ever before.

Second, previously hefty blue-collar trade unions and fellowship federations went into sharp decline. This fact has been empirically documented both in my own research and in the research of Robert Putnam.²² As Putnam has argued, all kinds of membership associations experienced a considerable drop from the 1960s on. Tellingly, however, as Figure 1 shows, the post-World War II declines have been greatest for blue-collar trade unions and chapter-based voluntary federations, especially once-vibrant women’s associations and fraternal groups. Elite professional societies have experienced much less membership decline than have most popularly rooted membership associations. And if we take into account affiliations with recently proliferating specialized professional organizations, educated Americans have certainly

increased their overall involvement with professional membership groups.²³

The third and final contemporary transformation involves shifts in the structures of voluntary groups and institutions. Although thousands of new, nationally visible groups were created between the 1960s and the 1990s, many—such as public law groups, think tanks, foundations, and political action committees—are not membership groups at all.²⁴ Others are staff-centered associations that recruit masses of individual adherents through the mail. With a few exceptions—such as the 35-million-member AARP—most contemporary mailing-list groups have followings in the tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands, not millions.²⁵

Recently proliferating associations have other telling features. Even when they claim substantial numbers of adherents, most recently founded associations rarely have chapters—or they have very sparse networks of subnational affiliates.²⁶ In addition, many recently founded or recently growing groups are heavily invested in professional staffing. There are as yet no definitive studies on staffing levels for all groups across time. But there are suggestive studies of environmental groups and other kinds of public interest associations, showing a sharp trend toward expanded professional staffs.²⁷

Over the past four decades, in sum, American associational life has become more pluralistic and less business-focused, yet it has shifted away from popularly rooted membership associations and toward professionally managed organizations, many with no members or chapters at all.

To the degree that there is any exception to the civic transformations I have just recounted, it is on the conservative side of U.S. civil society. Professionally managed advocacy groups have proliferated across the board, but conservatives have, at the same time, done more than liberals to renew or reinvent massively large, popularly rooted federations. The National Right to Life Committee, the Christian Coalition, and the National Rifle Association are all extensive chapter-based membership federations that have flourished in recent times. Inspired by moral and ideological world views, they have recruited people across class lines (through church networks or sports clubs, for example), linking local units to one another and into the penumbra of the Republican Party.²⁸ The one unabashedly liberal membership federation to experience comparable massive growth in recent decades is the National Education Association, a teachers' union.

The Roots of Civic Reorganization

Why did America's associational universe change so sharply in the late twentieth century? Some scholars argue that gradual changes in the choices made by masses of Americans are the principal reason for civic shifts.²⁹ I agree that this is part of the explanation. But I hold that we must also focus on a juncture of rapid civic reorganization between the mid-1960s and the early 1990s—a point at which elite, well-educated Americans led the way in abandoning cross-class membership associations, meanwhile creating and supporting professionally managed organizations.

Support for the proposition that civic reorganization was relatively sudden and elite-led is provided by data that allow us to look in detail at the specific civic affiliations of relatively privileged Americans. Questions repeated on national surveys cover only a short stretch of recent time and are very general, referring only to broad types of associations. But my research associates and I have discovered that some U.S. states have collected over many decades information on the specific, named groups with which their elected officeholders have claimed affiliations. Massachusetts, in particular, has collected such data every year in exactly the same format since 1920. We coded all group affiliations at five-year intervals for Massachusetts state senators—cohorts of 40 men (and recently a few women), almost all of whom come from a business or professional background. From the 1920s through 1960, four-fifths or more of these elite individuals claimed affiliations with cross-class fraternal, veterans', and other fellowship associations. But after 1965, both younger and older state senators—especially those newly elected to office—stopped claiming such affiliations and instead proclaimed their ties to advocacy groups and nonprofit cultural or social-service institutions.³⁰ When institutional affiliations are claimed, moreover, senators often say that they are serving as trustees or board members, rather than as ordinary members or elected officers. Other data show that male state senators in Massachusetts stopped listing affiliations with fraternal and veterans' associations *sooner* than other male citizens in the state.³¹ These elites led the way in abandoning the cross-class fellowship federations that had once been typical affiliations for state senators as well as for ordinary citizens.³²

When a fundamental reorganization occurs as rapidly as it did in late-twentieth-century America, a combination of causal forces—not just a single causal factor—is usually at work. In this case, a critical event, the Vietnam War, coincided with converging social, political, and technological trends to spur civic reorganization. The Vietnam War mattered because it broke the tradition of cross-class male solidarity that had nourished traditional fellowship federations. Vietnam was a losing war, and unpopular with young, highly educated Americans. It drove a wedge in the associational world between social strata and between younger and older men. As for the broader trends that engendered civic transformation, let me discuss each set of developments in turn.

Rights revolutions and civic transformation

The key social changes that propelled civic reorganization in late-twentieth-century America were associated with the “rights revolutions” of the 1960s and 1970s. Because most traditional U.S. fellowship federations were racially exclusive and gender-segregated, new attitudes and practices about race and gender hit them like a tornado. Virtually all fellowship federations at mid-century had explicit or implicit racial exclusion built into their constitutions, membership requirements, and organizational practices. In addition, especially among whites, longstanding, chapter-based membership

associations were typically either gender-specific or organized into separate sections for men and their female relatives. Traditional gender roles tended to be assumed, with women not only organizing their own voluntary associations but also serving as helpmates to male organizations.

In a 1997 survey, a representative sample of Americans told sociologist Robert Wuthnow about the kinds of associations they would be “very unlikely” to join. Ninety percent said that they would not join groups “with a history of racial discrimination,” and a clear majority (58 percent) also said that they would be very unlikely to join an association that “accepts only men or women.”³³ These attitudes reflect a half century of rapid changes among Americans.³⁴ With the dawn of new racial attitudes, many traditional groups were understandably delegitimated in the eyes of younger people, especially the well educated, so these associations found it hard to recruit new members. Likewise, traditional associations were undercut by the rise of feminism, the entry of more and more women into the paid labor force, and the proliferation of female-led families. Women were no longer available as helpmates for men’s groups; and changes in work and family life hurt membership groups that needed to coordinate people’s availability for recurrent meetings.³⁵

The civil rights struggle and other rights revolutions also raised questions about forms of organization favored by old-line chapter federations. Across much of U.S. civic history, membership associations trumpeted constitutions paralleling U.S. government and celebrated representative modes of decision making. But such structures traditionally embodied compromises between the racially segregationist South and the rest of the nation. Movements aiming to enhance the rights of minorities and promote value changes were naturally skeptical of existing majoritarian practices and organizational arrangements. To this day, many Americans whose youthful political consciousness was shaped by the rights struggles tend to think of majoritarian institutions as cumbersome, bureaucratic, and unresponsive—remembering that in the 1960s and 1970s such institutions often *were* obdurate when first faced with demands for racial and gender equality.

Instead of the old majoritarian, federated ways of doing things, the new rights movements depended initially on activist cadres and, later, on professionals—types of leaders who could readily get out in front of laggard majorities. Old-line membership federations such as African American churches, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the General Federation of Women’s Clubs played visible roles in the rights revolutions of the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. But even in an era of popular protests, the key roles were often played by newly launched vanguard organizations, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), founded in 1957; the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), founded in 1960; the National Organization for Women (NOW), founded in 1966; the Women’s Equity Action League (WEAL), founded in 1968; and the National

Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (now called NARAL Pro-Choice America), created in 1973 as a reorientation of an earlier group. Of the above-named organizations, SCLC was a coordinating group of activist African American ministers, and SNCC was a coordinating group of student civil rights activists.³⁶ In due course, NOW developed chapters and a modest-sized national membership, and WEAL and NARAL eventually developed modest-sized mailing-list memberships. Yet these and other women’s rights organizations started out as “leadership and not membership based.”³⁷ Activists devoted to organizing protests and lobbying the federal government were the key founders and association builders.

A new political opportunity structure

This brings us to the second set of factors that propelled civic reorganization. National government activism of broader scope and greater intensity spurred the formation and professionalization of voluntary groups.³⁸

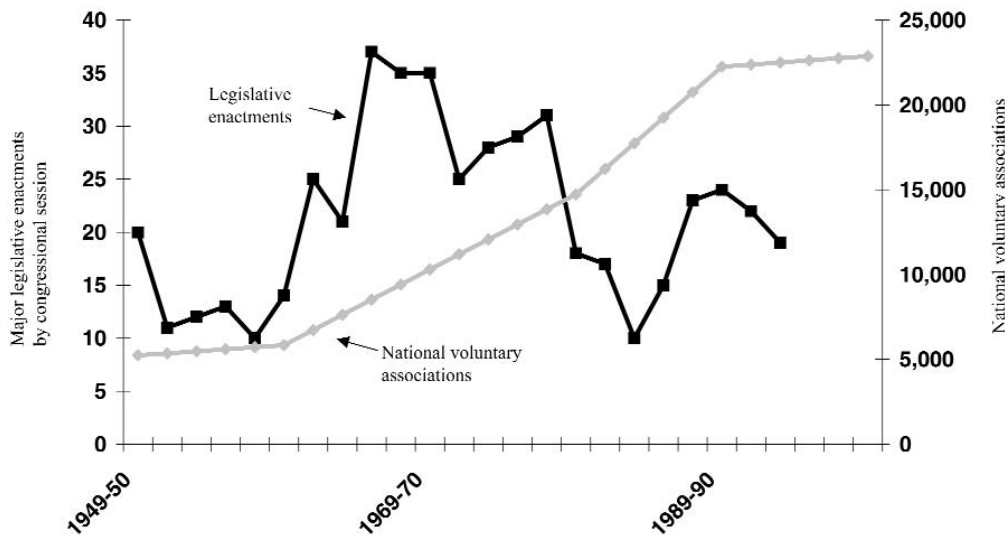
A sudden “bulge” of important federal legislative enactments started in the late 1950s and peaked in the 1960s and early 1970s.³⁹ This constituted what political scientist Hugh Hecllo has aptly called a new “age of improvement,” in which the federal government aimed to influence new realms of American social and economic life—ranging from women’s and minority rights to the health of the environment to the well-being of the poor and the elderly.⁴⁰ As Figure 2 suggests, the emergence of thousands of new nationally focused associations followed slightly after heightened federal legislative activism. In specific policy areas as well as overall, innovative federal measures tended to precede the bulk of voluntary group proliferation.⁴¹ For example, new advocacy associations speaking for women and minorities sprang into being most rapidly not before but after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the establishment during the next few years of federal agencies to enforce affirmative action regulations.⁴²

After liberal rights and public interest associations emerged in large numbers in the 1960s and 1970s, business associations and conservative public interest groups proliferated during the 1980s.⁴³ This should not surprise us, because new government interventions not only help to define new values, social identities, and economic interests; they also change the stakes for groups on all sides of every issue, encouraging organization and counterorganization to influence further government policy making. On all sides, moreover, federal tax rules prompted the development of clusters of cooperating associations—as 501(c)(3) groups engaged in research and public education, sister 501(c)(4) groups lobbied government, and affiliated political action committees raised money for elections.⁴⁴

Late-twentieth-century changes in the structures and activities of the federal government similarly encouraged the professionalization of associations.

One inducement to add professionals to group staffs is perhaps obvious. From the 1960s, the federal courts showed a new willingness to entertain class action suits, and they became intensely involved in adjudicating issues arising from

Figure 2
Major U.S. Legislative Enactments and the Growth of National Voluntary Associations, 1949–1999



Sources: Legislative enactments from Howell et al. 2000. Associations' trends interpolated between decade totals from Fox 1952. *Encyclopedia of Associations* national data as assembled in Skocpol 2003.

legislation on federal rights, the environment, and social regulation.⁴⁵ Fighting federal lawsuits became an important way to influence social policy making—and this naturally encouraged the proliferation of public interest law firms and stimulated many other advocacy groups to add lawyers to their staffs.

The professionalization of Congress likewise proceeded apace from the 1960s through the 1980s. During this period, congressional representatives were increasingly likely to be college graduates; and thousands of new employees staffed the offices of individual members, providing expert assistance to congressional committees and subcommittees, which grew in number after reorganizations in the early 1970s.⁴⁶ Many of these new congressional employees were professionals, college-educated students, or former students—persons with the skills and expertise needed to help representatives cope with the intensive and specialized legislative environment.

At the same time, the “age of improvement” brought changes in the federal bureaucracy. National government employment did *not* increase very much—even after the mid-1960s, it increased at a much less spectacular rate than federal spending and regulations did.⁴⁷ But the “upper and upper-middle levels of officialdom” did expand, while “employees in the field and in Washington” who performed “routine chores” became relatively less numerous.⁴⁸ Federal agencies added technical and supervisory personnel to oversee new regulations and implement programs with assistance from private groups as well as state and local officials.

Not surprisingly, the proliferation of national associations closely tracked the expansion of congressional staff and the

reorganization of federal employment.⁴⁹ After all, there were now more decision makers to contact about policy concerns, new levers to pull in Washington, D.C. And it was usually a matter of professionals contacting fellow professionals, people with similar policy interests, or perhaps fellow college classmates. Associations added professionals to their D.C. offices—people who could do policy research, monitor legislation in Congress, and interact with officials as new laws were administratively defined and implemented. “Issue networks” with lots of interacting experts formed in every aspect of federal policy making—and advocacy group professionals were avid

participants.⁵⁰ Environmental policy making is an excellent case in point. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 mandated the preparation of “environmental impact statements” by government agencies. This created an incentive for environmental associations to hire policy experts who could influence such statements—and thus the staffs of associations grew at an even faster rate than the sheer number of environmental groups did after 1969.⁵¹

During the “age of improvement,” finally, the federal government engaged in administration “by remote control”⁵² in a fashion that greatly encouraged the growth of state and local government and the professionalization of nonprofit agencies. Instead of expanding the federal bureaucracy to directly administer new programs, the new laws of the 1960s and after typically used regulations and subsidies to induce nonfederal actors to pursue desired goals. Federal supervisors hired private contractors or consultants; federal agencies channeled moneys to governors or mayors. In turn, either the federal government or state and local governments often designated private nonprofit agencies to run new social programs established by the war on poverty, the Great Society, and Nixon-era social legislation. The 1967 amendments to the Social Security Act, for example, included hefty inducements for state governments to contract out social programs to nonprofit agencies.⁵³ In response to the new opportunities, thousands of nonprofit social agencies were created, while older service associations expanded their activities, especially activities administered by service professionals.

Many unanticipated civic effects followed from the indirect administration of expanded federal and state programs in

late-twentieth-century America. Local chapters of old-line voluntary membership federations became less engaged in the provision of social services through mutual aid or voluntary community efforts. Meanwhile, proliferating professionally run nonprofits expanded their staffs—and aimed to recruit civically active politicians, businesspeople, and public figures to their supervisory boards. It is not incidental, I would suggest, that from the mid-1960s on, prestigious forms of civic activity in localities across the United States became less a matter of joining and leading a membership association and more a matter of either working with or serving on the board of a nonprofit service agency. Social service employees, occasional volunteers for local agencies, and members of the boards of service agencies—these are the kinds of people we usually consider the preeminent civic activists today.⁵⁴

Interestingly, the stress I have placed on changing political opportunities can help us to understand why conservatives remained more reliant on traditional forms of voluntarism. Back in the 1965–1980 period, when professional advocacy was taking hold as a prestigious associational model, conservatives often felt excluded from the Washington “establishment.” Although this would change later, conservatives originally did not see as many opportunities as liberals did to mount lawsuits or lobby Congress and executive agencies. Instead, organizers in the Christian right, the anti-gun control movement, and the pro-life movement, and around the populist edges of the Republican Party, experimented with melding new methods of professional advocacy and fund-raising with membership federations networked across many congressional districts.

In very recent times, nonconservatives have begun to feel excluded from centers of power. Thus it is perhaps not surprising that we see new experiments with federated community organization and popular mobilization in, for example, the labor movement and the environmental movement.

New technologies and models of association building

New technologies and models of association building constitute the third and final set of trends propelling civic reorganization in the late twentieth century. Obviously, the current vogue for professionalized, staff-led civic associations has been shaped by changes parallel to those affecting political parties since the 1950s—an era during which decentralized party organizations have largely been displaced by a coterie of professional fund-raisers, pollsters, and media managers.⁵⁵

Like old-line politicians who relied upon state and local party networks to pull as many eligible voters to the polls as possible, the organizers of old-line U.S. voluntary federations took it for granted that the best way to gain national influence was to recruit mass memberships and spread a network of chapters. There were good reasons why this model came to be taken for granted in classic civic America from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1960s. After the start-up phase, the budgets of voluntary federations usually depended heavily on membership dues. Supporters had to be continuously recruited through person-to-person contacts. And if leverage over government was desired, a voluntary federation had to be able

to influence legislators, citizens, and newspapers across many legislative districts. For these reasons, classic civic organizers with national ambitions moved quickly to recruit activists and members in every state and across as many towns and cities as possible. Like Frances Willard of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union—who was always on the train and hardly ever “at home” in Evanston, Illinois⁵⁶—leaders traveled around the country, convened face-to-face meetings, and recruited and encouraged intermediate leaders who could carry on the work of member recruitment and retention. “Interact or die” was the watchword for classic American association builders.

Today, nationally ambitious civic entrepreneurs proceed in quite different ways. When Marian Wright Edelman got the inspiration to found the Children’s Defense Fund, she turned to private foundations for funding and then recruited an expert staff of researchers and lobbyists.⁵⁷ Ever since the Ford Foundation launched the trend in the late 1950s, foundation grants have been especially important to the funding of U.S. public interest associations, encouraging their professionalization and allowing many of them to avoid reliance on membership dues.⁵⁸ Liberal foundations moved first, but in the past two decades conservative foundations have been major players as well. The late Jack Walker and his associates surveyed hundreds of associations with headquarters in Washington, D.C., and found that foundation grants were especially important for the founding and maintenance of recently established public interest (citizens’) groups.⁵⁹

Alternatively, contemporary advocacy groups can use patron support to get started and then turn to computerized direct-mail solicitations to develop continuing support from individual adherents. To name just a few examples, this technique has been effectively used by Common Cause, big environmental groups, the Concord Coalition, and Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Civic entrepreneurs need generous seed grants to start direct-mail solicitation, because appropriate lists must be purchased and hundreds of thousands of letters repeatedly mailed.⁶⁰ And staff expertise is equally necessary, because mailings must be honed and deployed again and again.⁶¹ The Internet is modifying these realities, but only modestly.

Ready access to national media outlets is the final circumstance allowing advocacy associations to forgo recurrent contacts among leaders and members. Rather than coming up through small media markets, elite television, newspaper, and magazine reporters today are often recruited directly from universities and operate from the start out of major metropolitan centers.⁶² In punditry hubs like Boston, New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C., reporters, politicians, and advocacy spokespersons participate in endless talk shows; and print reporters are always on the phone to advocates as well as politicians. National media outlets want to stage debates among dramatically polarized sets of spokespersons; and advocacy associations need to keep their causes and accomplishments visible. By dramatizing causes through the national

media, advocates can enhance their legitimacy and keep contributions flowing from patrons or direct-mail adherents.

The very model of civic effectiveness has, in short, been upended since the 1960s. No longer do civic organizers think of constructing vast federations and recruiting interactive citizen-members. When a new cause appears, activists envisage opening a national office and managing association-building as well as national projects from the center. Contemporary organization-building techniques encourage public interest groups—just like trade and professional associations—to concentrate their efforts in efficiently managed headquarters located close to the federal government and the national media. Even a group aiming to speak for large numbers of Americans does not need “members” in any meaningful sense of the word.

Civic Transformation and American Democracy

If the United States in our time has experienced a great civic reorganization from membership federations to professionally managed groups—so what? More than a few analysts hold that recent reorganizations have been for the best.⁶³ Our democracy has been enlarged, say the optimists, by social movements and advocacy groups fighting for social rights and fresh understandings of the public interest. Americans are reinventing community, too—joining flexible small groups and engaging in ad hoc volunteering, while supporting expert advocates who speak for important values on the national stage.

Many of these points strike me as reasonable responses to pessimists who declare that contemporary civil society is falling apart.⁶⁴ In personal lives, at work, and in resourceful neighborhoods, Americans are indeed finding new ways to relate to one another personally and to accomplish particular shared tasks.⁶⁵ Advocacy associations have injected fresh perspectives and unprecedented expertise into our public policy debates, while nonprofit institutions skillfully manage the delivery of highly valued social services and cultural experiences. And who would want to return to the days when most civil associations excluded African Americans, vilified gays, and segregated women?

But if we consider U.S. democracy in its entirety, and bring issues of power and social leverage to the fore, then optimists are surely overlooking the downsides of our recently reorganized civic life. Too many valuable aspects of the old civic America are not being reproduced or reinvented in the new public world largely run by elite trustees and professional staffers. Justifiably pleased with advances in social rights and citizen advocacy since the 1960s, optimists have failed to notice that more voices are not the same thing as increased democratic capacity. Furthermore, optimists do not see—indeed, most are hardly willing to imagine—that gains in racial and gender equality could be accompanied by erosions of cross-class fellowship and democratic participation and representation. Let me elaborate briefly on these worrisome developments.

Dwindling avenues for participation

As long-standing popularly rooted unions and fellowship federations have faded while professionally run public interest associations—along with business and professional groups—have proliferated, avenues for citizen participation have become more constricted. We can see this by contrasting the modicum of class appeal of these two types of associations.

Scholars studying political participation have established that a combination of resources, motivation, and mobilization explains variations in who participates, how, and at what levels.⁶⁶ Individuals from privileged families have advantages of income and education, and also tend to be regularly contacted by civic organizers or election campaigners. What is more, people in managerial and professional careers are likely to gain skills at work that can be transferred to public activities. Nevertheless, such socioeconomic disparities can be partially counteracted if popularly rooted political parties, unions, churches, and associations mobilize and motivate average citizens and spread skills that facilitate participation.

Along with unions and farm groups, traditional U.S. fellowship federations have been organizational mechanisms for widely distributing civic skills and motivation. Back in 1892, Walter B. Hill published a humorous piece in *The Century Magazine* purporting to explain to a foreign friend how the United States could encourage every boy to aspire to be president and “every American girl to be the [p]resident’s wife” when, in fact, there were not that many public offices to go around. The “great American safety valve,” he wrote, is that “we are a nation of presidents” with “an enormous supply of official positions” at the local, state, and national level in a “thousand and one societies.”⁶⁷

Hill’s observations about “the significance of the non-political office-holding class in our country” identified a crucial aspect of traditional American civic life.⁶⁸ Countless churches and voluntary groups of all sizes needed volunteer leaders. Indeed, the largest, nation-spanning voluntary federations could have as many as 15,000 to 17,000 local chapters, each of which needed 12 to 18 officers and committee leaders each year. Considering just the 20 largest voluntary federations in 1955, my research group estimates that some 3 percent to 5 percent of the adult population served in leadership roles in that year. Additional recruits were needed each year thereafter, as members moved through ladders of positions and into “past officer” status. And hundreds of smaller federations also needed regular rounds of volunteer leaders.

As they cycled millions of Americans through official responsibilities, classic voluntary federations taught people how to run meetings, handle moneys, keep records, and participate in group discussions. So many officers and activists were required that there were plenty of opportunities for men and women from blue-collar and lower-level white-collar occupations.⁶⁹ Local activists, furthermore, got on leadership ladders that could lead to responsibilities at district, state, and national levels. Some who moved up were ordinary citizens, and even those who were from more elite backgrounds and occupations had to interact with a cross-section of fellow

citizens to prove their worthiness for higher associational offices.

Not only did popularly rooted unions, farmers' groups, and cross-class federations spread civic skills widely in the population; they also conveyed politically relevant knowledge and motivation. Many membership organizations were directly involved in electoral or legislative campaigns. But even associations that largely stayed out of politics conveyed knowledge and motivation that could be transferred to other endeavors. The constitutions of voluntary federations taught people about parliamentary rules of discussion; about legislative, judicial, and executive functions; about elections or other forms of representative governance; and about the relationship between taxation and collective services. All traditional voluntary associations reinforced ideals of good citizenship, stressing that members in good standing should understand and obey laws, volunteer for military service, engage in public discussions—and, above all, vote. Alan Gerber and Don Green show that people are more likely to turn out to vote in response to face-to-face appeals, and America's traditional popular associations routinely provided such appeals.⁷⁰

Additionally, fellowship federations, in particular, stressed people's value as citizens, quite apart from their roles in the market economy. "As I looked over this audience tonight," explained William Jennings Bryan in a 1903 speech to the Modern Woodmen of America, a fraternal group of which he was a member, "I could not help thinking of the representative character of the men here assembled . . . [I]n the camp we learn that worth does not depend upon the amount of money a man has, that it does not depend upon the degrees he receives from a college, that it does not depend on his pedigree or the distinction of his ancestors. We learn in the camp . . . to measure men by the manner in which they discharge the duties of citizenship, and this fraternity and fraternities like it have been doing . . . wonderful work, not only here, but everywhere, in bringing the people together and making them know each other."⁷¹

Contrast the workings of traditional, popularly rooted associations with today's professionally run associations. To be sure, as the Children's Defense Fund exemplifies, certain kinds of advocacy groups can enlarge our democracy by speaking on behalf of vulnerable groups that could not otherwise gain voice. Nevertheless, in an associational universe dominated by business groups and professionally managed public interest groups, the mass participatory and educational functions of classic civic America are not reproduced. Because patron grants and computerized mass mailings generate money more readily than modest dues repeatedly collected from millions of members, and because paid experts are more highly valued than volunteer leaders for the public functions of today's public interest groups, the leaders of these groups have little incentive to engage in mass mobilization and no need to share leadership and organizational control with state and local chapters.⁷² Why hold membership meetings or invest in building a dense network of chapters if peer networks are not critical to recruitment or resource

mobilization? Professional managers have a greater need to pay attention to foundations and wealthy patrons. And they must cultivate access to government professionals in order to be able to claim to their public audiences that they have an impact on public policy making.

In the case of mailing-list organizations, most adherents are seen as consumers who send money to buy a certain brand of public interest representation. Repeat adherents, meanwhile, are viewed as potential big donors.⁷³ Only a tiny fraction of recipients respond to mass mailings, and of those who do send money a first time, only a fraction renew their contributions in later years. Huge and well-targeted mailings can recruit enough of a changing mass of adherents to help keep the professional organization going—especially if respondents can later be winnowed to find substantial repeat donors, people who contribute much more money than nominal "dues."

Indeed, the focus on donors is critical to understanding the socioeconomic moorings of many public interest associations. Professional advocacy organizations have become more and more money-hungry operations. This tendency interacts with the increasing inequalities in wealth and income in the United States since the 1970s.⁷⁴ Let me be clear: Rising economic inequalities did not in any simple way *cause* civic reorganization. But the new socioeconomic disparities reinforce the tendency of professionally led associations to orient their appeals toward potential wealthy contributors. Economically privileged supporters are the constituents many associations and nonprofit institutions seek today. America is full of civic organizations that look upward in the class structure—holding constant rounds of fund-raisers and always on the lookout for wealthy "angels."

Another important difference between traditional fellowship federations and contemporary public interest associations is worth underlining. In the past, ordinary Americans joined voluntary membership federations not only because of their political clout—that did matter to many people—but also in search of sociability, recreation, cultural expression, and social assistance. Recruitment occurred through peer networks, and people usually had a mix of reasons for joining. Men and women could be drawn in, initially, for nonpolitical reasons yet later end up learning about public issues or picking up skills or contacts that could be relevant to legislative campaigns or electoral politics or community projects. People could also be drawn in locally yet end up participating in statewide or national campaigns.

But today's public interest associations are much more specialized and explicitly devoted to particular causes—like saving the environment, or fighting for affirmative action, or opposing high taxes, or promoting "good government." People have to know what they think and have some interest in national politics and the particular issue *before* they send a check. Today's advocacy groups, in short, are not very likely to entice masses of Americans indirectly into democratic politics.

For the reasons just discussed, adherents of contemporary public interest associations are heavily skewed toward the

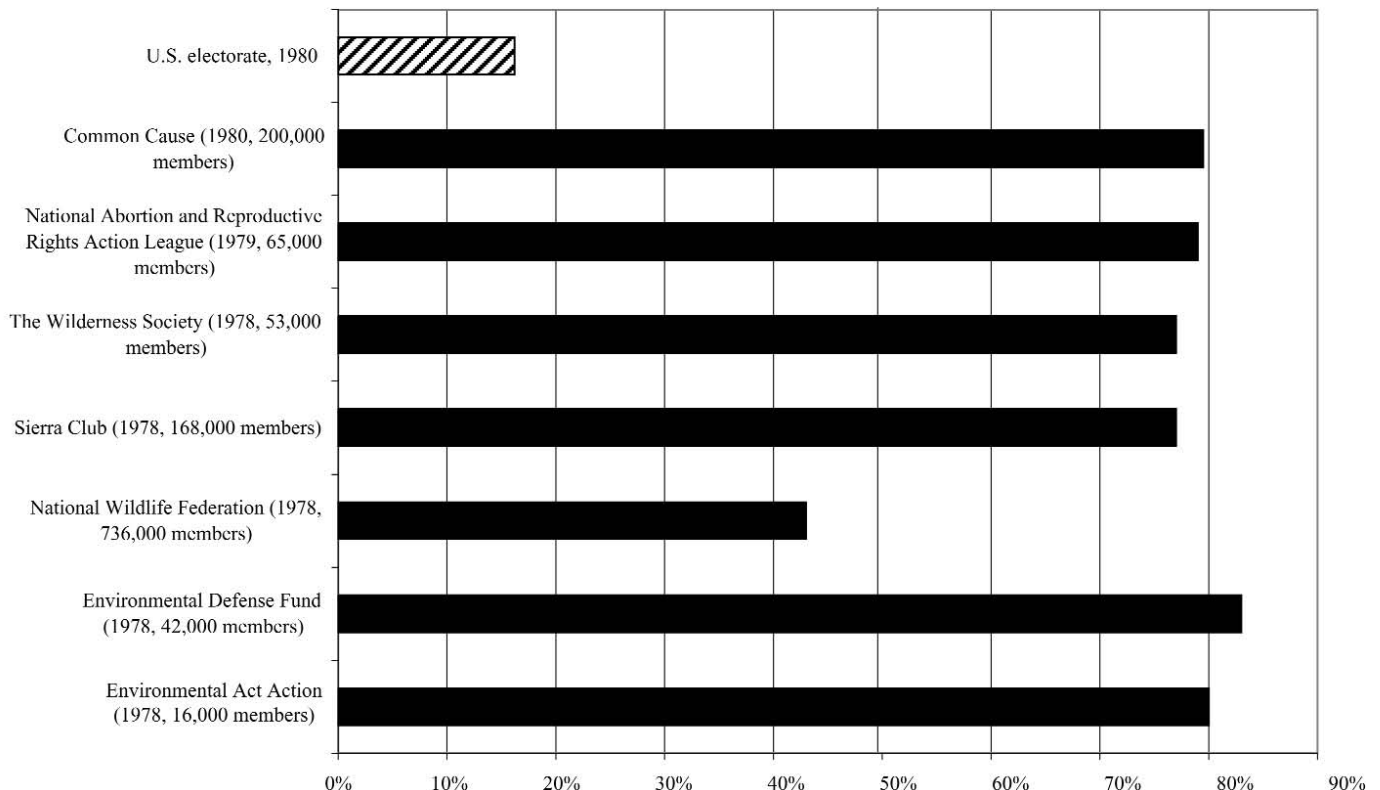
highly educated upper-middle class. Of course, well-educated and economically privileged Americans have always been differentially engaged in voluntary associations. But there used to be many federations seeking huge numbers of members; and in a country with thin strata of higher-educated and wealthy people, mass associations could thrive only by reaching deeply into the population. Nowadays, we live in a country where the top quarter of the population hold college degrees, because higher education expanded enormously in the late twentieth century.⁷⁵ In consequence, groups seeking mailing-list followings in the tens of thousands to the hundreds of thousands can focus recruitment on the higher-educated—aiming to attract the very Americans who are most likely to know in advance that they care about public issues. These are the people who appreciate the mass mailings that public interest groups send out. And because higher-educated Americans have experienced sharply rising incomes in recent decades, they are also the folks who can afford to write big checks.

Available evidence on the membership size and characteristics of professionally run public interest associations is congruent with this interpretation. In 1980, Americans with college degrees constituted 10.7 percent of the national electorate, and those with postgraduate education constituted another 5.5 percent—adding up to 16.2 of the national electorate at that time. Around then, data were collected on the

membership sizes and characteristics of a number of public interest advocacy groups, including Common Cause, the good-government association; NARAL; and five major environmental associations. As Figure 3 shows, in six cases out of seven, associational memberships in the tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands were highly skewed toward Americans with college or postgraduate degrees. Of all the groups included in Figure 3, only the largest group, the National Wildlife Federation, had significant chunks of its membership in the “high school graduate or less” and “some college” categories. At the time, this association placed relatively little emphasis on policy appeals to members, and it offered social incentives through a relatively dense nationwide network of state and local chapters. It was also the only major environmental association that relied heavily on material “selective” benefits to attract members. The others stressed policy representation (although the Sierra Club also offered opportunities for social activities to some of its members through a modest-sized network of chapters).⁷⁶

Normative as well as cognitive factors, finally, illuminate the link between citizens’ associations and the well-educated. The proliferation of citizens’ associations run by experts has developed hand in hand with new understandings of what it means for the best-educated Americans to be civically involved and responsible.⁷⁷ Before the 1950s, when

Figure 3
College and Postgraduate Members of U.S. Advocacy Groups



Sources: Rothenberg 1992; Mitchell et al. 1979, Shaiko 1999.

higher-educated Americans were but a thin, geographically dispersed stratum of the national population, they understood themselves as “trustees of community.” Working closely with and for less-educated fellow citizens in thousands of towns and cities, lawyers, doctors, ministers, and teachers once found it quite natural to join—and eventually lead—locally rooted voluntary federations that included broad swatches of their fellow citizens. In the post-1960s United States, by contrast, higher-educated people are much more numerous and more specialized, and live lives that are at once more cosmopolitan and more socially self-enclosed. Top-ranked high school graduates are recruited into leading universities, often located far from native regions to which they may never return.⁷⁸ After many years of education and career development, large numbers of professionals and managers live and work among themselves, crowded in or near metropolitan centers.

Understandably, higher-educated Americans today are likely to see themselves as individually meritorious experts who can best contribute to national or local well-being by working with other professional specialists to tackle complex technical or social problems. For reasons of cultural affinity as well as cognitive sophistication, therefore, support for public interest advocacy associations that especially proliferated between the 1960s and the 1990s has come disproportionately from higher-educated Americans, whose ranks expanded markedly in the same era.

Upward-tilted public agendas and policy making

Apart from the participatory effects of recent civic transformations, what about their broader impact on agendas of public discussion and public policy making? Here the evidence is spotty, and some of what I will say should be seen as posing hypotheses.

Even for the middle class, professionally led associations with virtual constituencies may not deliver as much representational clout as we sometimes imagine. In a conceptually very interesting comparison of “pro-life” and “pro-choice” mobilizations in U.S. abortion controversies, sociologist John McCarthy first measures public “sentiments” as reflected in national opinion surveys.⁷⁹ At the time he wrote, such results showed that pro-choice sentiments were considerably stronger in the U.S. public, yet organized mobilization magnified the pro-life impact on public agendas and legislation far beyond what was achieved by the more popular pro-choice efforts. To see why, McCarthy argues, we must notice the gap between social movements that can build on already existing social institutions and social networks—as the pro-life movement and other contemporary New Right movements can—and “thin infrastructure” movements run by “professional social movement organizations” that use direct-mail techniques. Although McCarthy does not deny that such “thin infrastructure” organizations can make some headway in translating widespread mass sentiment into publicity and legislative results, he sees them as far less effective, relative to the proportion of citizens who may hold a given position, than

movements that can build on already organized, network-rich institutions and associations.⁸⁰

More telling is the impact of recent civic reorganizations on America’s capacity to use government for socioeconomically redistributive purposes. The decline of blue-collar trade unions is surely a case in point. Unions mobilize popular constituencies electorally as well as in workplaces to demand an active government role in social redistribution. A recent study investigating variations among nations and across the U.S. states argues that union decline helps to explain shrinking electorates. “Rates of unionization are important determinants of the size of the electorate,” explain Benjamin Radcliff and Patricia Davis, “and, thus, the extent to which the full citizenry is engaged in collective decisions . . . Declines in labor organization . . . mean that the electorate will increasingly over-represent higher-status individuals. The result, presuming that elected officials are more responsive to those who vote than those who do not, will be public policies less consistent with the interests of the working class.” Furthermore, “given that unions also contribute to the maintenance of left party ideology, a declining labor movement implies that left parties may move toward the center. Shrinking union memberships . . . thus contribute to a further narrowing of the ideological space.”⁸¹

The dwindling of once-huge cross-class membership federations has also affected representation and public discussions. Ideologically, traditional voluntary federations downplayed partisan causes and trumpeted values of fellowship and community service, so their decline clears the way for alternative modes of public discourse less likely to facilitate social inclusion or transpartisan compromises. Modern advocacy associations often use “rights talk” and champion highly specialized identities, issues, and causes. Stressing differences among groups and the activation of strong sentiments shared by relatively homogeneous followings, advocacy group tactics may promote further artificial polarization and excessive fragmentation in American public life.⁸² In the eloquent phrasing of Karen Paget, the proliferation of advocacy groups can add up to “many movements” but “no majority.”⁸³

Historically, popular and cross-class voluntary membership federations championed inclusive public social provision—but contemporary advocacy groups plus business and professional associations are much less likely to do so. Consider contrasts in the associational politics surrounding the enactment of the G.I. Bill of 1944 and the defeat of the Clinton proposal for universal health insurance coverage in 1993–1994. Benefits for World War II veterans and universal health coverage were both popular causes, if we judge only by mass public opinion. But when it came to translating popular will into legislation, the latter cause lost steam—in part because the organized civic universe of the 1940s was so different from that of the 1990s.

Back in the 1940s, a large national fellowship federation, the (otherwise conservative) American Legion, drafted, lobbied for, and helped to implement a G.I. Bill that was one of the most generous and inclusive federal social programs ever

enacted.⁸⁴ The Legion had a nationwide network of chapters that could persuade conservative and liberal congressional representatives to vote for extensive veterans' benefits—and it was motivated to take this course by the hope of attracting millions of new dues-paying and actively participating members from the ranks of the 16 million Americans who served in the military during World War II.

By contrast, in the early 1990s when the Clinton administration tried to devise a proposal for universal health insurance coverage, highly specialized professional and advocacy associations influenced the drafting of legislation in ways that defied broad public preferences. As a result, the proposed legislation was far too complex and regulatory for ordinary citizens to understand, and mass associations were not much involved in the ensuing political struggles. Instead, hundreds of lobbying business and professional groups mobilized to defeat any possibilities for extended health coverage.⁸⁵

Perhaps the most intriguing evidence on the distributive effects of recent civic changes appears in Jeffrey Berry's book *The New Liberalism*. As Berry's longitudinal research shows, professionally run public interest groups have increasingly made quality-of-life causes such as environmentalism more visible; and they have often prevailed after going head-to-head with business interests in legislative battles. But Berry also offers some more discouraging data. Recent gains by citizens' associations have crowded out advocacy by unions and other groups speaking for the interests and values of blue-collar Americans. Furthermore, Berry shows that liberal-leaning citizen advocacy groups have become *less* likely over time to ally with traditional liberal groups on behalf of redistributive social programs. "Liberal citizen groups," he says, "have concentrated on issues that appeal to their middle-class supporters. . . . [A]s the new left grew and grew, the old left was . . . increasingly isolated."⁸⁶

Berry's findings are echoed in new research that Kristin Goss and I are currently doing on the changing universe of female-led voluntary associations. If we look at public opinion, American women in the present as well as the past care to an unusual degree about public policies providing support for families, children, and communities. Prior to the mid-1960s, classic women's fellowship associations regularly championed such causes. But most of the new women's associations founded and active since the 1960s tend to focus on reproductive rights, women's health, or other issues of special concern to middle-class employed career women.⁸⁷ These newly featured concerns certainly enrich public discussion. Yet women's associations are no longer speaking so avidly on behalf of broad social supports for families, children, and communities. And with women's organized voices muted, such causes—of vital interest across class lines—no longer have the saliency they once did in U.S. democracy.

Challenges for Political Scientists

The bottom line of the arguments I have presented is this: Variety and voice have surely been enhanced in the new American civic universe forged by the organizing upsurges of

the 1960s to the 1990s. But the gains in voice and public leverage have mainly accrued to the top tiers of U.S. society—while Americans who are not wealthy or higher-educated now have fewer associations representing their values and interests, and enjoy dwindling opportunities for active participation.

So how can political scientists contribute to civic revitalization? One part of the answer to this question is close to home. We can work to ensure that our own membership association, the American Political Science Association, remains vital, inclusive, and united into the future. We have an excellent professional staff, yet members paying dues and volunteering their time and insights remain essential to our governance. Our officers should remain ever vigilant to maintain this situation, and everyone should take it as a matter of pride to pitch in for our association. What is more, all of us should take care that any organizational reforms we adopt do not undo the conditions that have allowed us to remain unified with increasing diversity. Many other professional associations have not done as well as we are doing, and the dangers of factionalization and fragmentation are very real.

Additionally, we political scientists can contribute to civic revitalization in America and beyond by continuing to make civic engagement central in our research and teaching. Many of us do this as individuals, of course. And the association as such currently has relevant task forces looking at issues of civic engagement, work and family life, and inequality in American democracy.

Research by individuals and by task forces needs to continue to probe the ways in which the institutions and policies of government directly and indirectly influence civic associations and patterns of participation in elections and voluntary groups. I have suggested here that government institutions and policies often have pervasive, though unintended, effects on civic life—especially via the incentives and disincentives they create for civic organizers. Much more can be learned about the impact of government through studies using various methodologies to range across time and across countries.

The same is true for understanding the impact of innovations such as the Internet. The Internet holds the promise of allowing civic interaction not bound by meetings in particular times and places—yet it also may magnify the adverse side effects of interjecting too much intentionality into civic life. It may favor educated elites who know what they are looking for in politics before they get involved with others. There are many research issues here, and political scientists can strive to be at the forefront of discerning the impact of new technologies on civic life and democratic politics.

Finally, we political scientists need to remember that we are *citizens* as well as professionals. I have argued that recent civic transformations have promoted an over-professionalization of voluntary associations, with corresponding deficits in opportunities for nonelite citizens to participate and gain adequate political representation. Following the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, much of civic life inadvertently became more oligarchic, as new conceptions of leadership

took hold, stressing expertise, management from centralized offices, and elites who *speak for* other citizens rather than *speaking with* them.

As professionals ourselves, we need to recognize the limitations of too much professionalization. We can and should look for ways to meld the best of traditional civic America with the gains of voice and expertise brought by recent changes. In our activities as citizens, let each of us consider what we can do personally—by organizing and joining together with our fellow citizens from all walks of life, and by imagining new modes of popular involvement that hold the promise of revitalizing civic democracy.

Notes

- 1 This essay is an expanded version of my presidential address at the 2003 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, on the occasion of the centenary of the founding of the association.
- 2 American Political Science Association 1905, 11.
- 3 Herring 1953, 971.
- 4 Goodnow 1905, 36, 45.
- 5 Bryce 1895, 278.
- 6 Tocqueville 1969 [1835–1840]; Almond and Verba 1963. See also Schlesinger 1944.
- 7 For related overviews of organizational change, see Hayes 1986 and Loomis and Cigler 1998.
- 8 Fox 1952; Skocpol 2003.
- 9 Baumgartner and Leech 1998.
- 10 Almond and Verba 1963, chapter 11. For additional early survey evidence, see Hausknecht 1962.
- 11 Almond and Verba 1963, 302, Table 2.
- 12 For a list, see Skocpol 2003, 130–1, Table 4.1. The 1 percent of adults threshold refers to men or women alone, for groups that (in practice or formally) consisted of one gender.
- 12 Almond and Verba 1963, chapter 11.
- 13 On service clubs, see Charles 1993.
- 14 Gamm and Putnam 1999; Skocpol et al. 2000.
- 15 Skocpol et al. 2002.
- 16 Skocpol 2003.
- 17 The roots of this go back to the early twentieth century. See Skocpol 1992.
- 18 Davis 1948.
- 19 Bennett 1996; Skocpol 1997.
- 20 Skocpol 2003.
- 21 Berry 1977; Berry 1999; Walker 1991.
- 22 Skocpol 2003; Putnam 2000.
- 23 Brint 1994; Skocpol 2003.
- 24 Skocpol 2003; Ricci 1993; Rich and Weaver 1998; Conway and Green 1995; Conway and Green 1998.
- 25 When very small groups are factored in, this means that median or mean membership sizes have dropped sharply. A study (Smith 1992) of all nonprofit associations listed in the *Encyclopedia of Associations* found a median membership size of about 10,000 in 1962, whereas by 1988 the median membership was only 1,000, with about half of the 1988 groups reporting no members at all. Examining only associations in the *Encyclopedia* that claimed members, Putnam (2000) found a drop from an average membership of 111,000 in 1956 to an average of 13,000 in 1998. In addition, I looked (Skocpol 1999) more closely at data on “social welfare” and “public interest” associations founded between 1960 and 1989, groups that survived to be listed in the 1998 *Encyclopedia of Associations*. These groups had time to build memberships if they were trying to do so, yet only tiny fractions had more than 100,000 members, while more than 70 percent either had none or fewer than 1,000 members (in some instances, “memberships” under 1,000 may refer to other organizations, not individuals).
- 26 Berry 1977; Putnam 2000, using data from Walker 1991.
- 27 Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Shaiko 1999.
- 28 Guth et al. 1995; McCarthy 1987; Patterson 1998.
- 29 This argument is most fully developed in Putnam 2000.
- 30 Skocpol 2003.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Additional data about the affiliations of state senators in North Carolina, Illinois, and Maine confirm this picture, showing similar rapid transitions from affiliations with membership associations to affiliations with nonmembership groups and institutions.
- 33 Wuthnow 1998, 243, note 51.
- 34 Farley 1996.
- 35 Costa and Kahn 2003; Crawford and Levitt 1999.
- 36 On mass protests and leadership organizations in the civil rights struggles, see Morris 1984 and McAdam 1982.
- 37 Gelb and Palley 1982, 15.
- 38 For an argument similar to the one developed here, see Baumgartner et al. 2003.
- 39 The legislative “bulge” is documented with slightly different data in Mayhew 1991, chapter 4, and Howell et al. 2000.
- 40 Hecl 1978, 89. See also Talbert and Potoski 2002.
- 41 Baumgartner and Jones 1993, chapter 9; Baumgartner and Mahoney (forthcoming); Baumgartner et al. 2003; Campbell 2003; Imig 1996; Pratt 1976; Pratt 1993, chapter 9; Van Tassel and Meyer 1992.
- 42 Skrentny (2002, 142) argues that “the mass mobilization of the black civil rights movement helped create agencies for civil rights [enforcement] that obviated any similar need” for other categories of people. “A nonparticipatory minority-rights politics became possible, where self-appointed leaders could pressure and have impact.” In turn, Minkoff (1995) shows that minority-rights advocacy and advocacy-service organizations mostly proliferated *after* the great civil rights legislation and key administrative innovations of 1964 to 1970,

- just as Skrentny's account would lead us to expect. See also Costain 1992 and Schlozman 1990.
- 43 Berry 1997, chapter 2.
- 44 Conway and Green 1998; Paget 1990.
- 45 Melnick 1994.
- 46 Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Ornstein et al. 2000.
- 47 Heclo 1978.
- 48 Ibid., 99.
- 49 Compare the trend in associational proliferation displayed in Figure 2 to the trends of growth in congressional personal staff and committee staff documented in Ornstein et al. 2000 (combining the totals given on pages 131 and 135). For the second half of the twentieth century, the correlation (r) between the increase in national associations and the growth of congressional staff members is 0.94.
- 50 Heclo 1978. See also Beer 1978 on "the technocratic takeover."
- 51 In Baumgartner and Jones 1993, compare the trends in Tables 9.2 and 9.3. For similar developments in the health policy arena, see Peterson 1993.
- 52 The phrase is from Heclo 1978, 92.
- 53 Crenson and Ginsberg 2002; Smith and Lipsky 1993.
- 54 This generalization may not hold for areas of the United States where churches are the preeminent community institutions. However, if current proponents of expanded public subsidies for "faith-based" social services have their way, an unanticipated effect may be the spread of professionalism into the religious sector as well, displacing the centrality of membership-based fellowship.
- 55 On changes in parties, see Aldrich 1995, part 3; Mayhew 1986; and Schier 2000, chapter 2.
- 56 Bordin 1986, chapter 8.
- 57 Edelman 1987; Walls 1993.
- 58 For overviews of the activities of U.S. foundations, see Kiger 2000; Dowie 2001; Foundation Center 2002. On the extent and effects of foundation funding of associations, see Berry 1977; Gelb and Palley 1982; Jenkins 1998; Jenkins and Halcli 1999.
- 59 Walker 1991, chapter 5.
- 60 For the start-up grants used by Common Cause, see McFarland 1984.
- 61 For good overviews of direct-mail techniques, see Berry 1997; Bosso 1995; Godwin 1992; Godwin and Mitchell 1984; Johnson 1998.
- 62 This transition is described in Fallows 1996.
- 63 Prominent optimists include Berry 1999; Minkoff 1997; Norris 2002; Schudson 1998.
- 64 Putnam (2000) is the best-known pessimist. See also Council on Civil Society 1998; National Commission on Civic Renewal 1998.
- 65 Wuthnow 1994; Wuthnow 1998.
- 66 Models to this effect are developed, for example, in Burns et al. 2001; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1995.
- 67 Hill 1892, 384.
- 68 Ibid., 383.
- 69 See Skocpol 2003 for discussion of an especially pertinent study by Douglas Rae.
- 70 Gerber and Green 2000.
- 71 Quoted from a widely distributed pamphlet (n.d.) apparently published by the Modern Woodmen of America, called "W. J. Bryan's Speech at the M.W.A. Class Adoption in Lincoln, Nebraska, on May 6, 1903." From my personal collection of ephemera.
- 72 The theoretical framework offered in Moe 1980 has helped me formulate the arguments offered here.
- 73 My discussion draws on ideas in Bosso 2002 and Jordan and Maloney 1997.
- 74 On rising inequalities, see Danziger and Gottschalk 1995; Mishel et al. 2003.
- 75 Mare 1995; National Center for Education Statistics 2001.
- 76 Shaiko 1999, chapter 5.
- 77 The following interpretation relies on Brint 1994.
- 78 Frank and Cook 1995, chapter 8.
- 79 McCarthy 1987. See also Granberg and Denny 1981.
- 80 McCarthy 1987.
- 81 Radcliff and Davis 2000, 140.
- 82 See Fiorina 1999; McCarthy 1987; Skerry 1997.
- 83 Paget 1990, 115.
- 84 For further details and references, see Skocpol 1997.
- 85 See Skocpol 1996 for the full story.
- 86 Berry 1999, 57. A similar conclusion emerges from a study by sociologists Craig Jenkins and Abigail Halcli (1999, 230, 240) of the up to 1 percent of all private foundation grants that channel resources to "previously unorganized or politically excluded" groups. Social movement philanthropy swelled from 21 grants totaling just over a quarter of a million current dollars in 1960 to 3,418 grants channeling more than 88 million current dollars in aid to various causes in 1990. Nevertheless, as the volume of gifts increased, the overall philanthropic effort shifted away from programs intended to further minority rights and economic justice, and toward more middle-class causes such as environmentalism, consumer rights, peace and world order, and women's rights.
- 87 Preliminary findings and arguments appear in Goss and Skocpol 2003.

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