

A STUDY OF LOCAL LABOR UNIONS AS MEDIATING STRUCTURES:  
EXPLORING THE BLACK BOX OF DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

By

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Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Community Research and Action

August, 2005

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

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TO MY GRANDMOTHER, DORIS CAMPBELL HANLIN

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study began during my time as a doctoral student at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, under the supervision of Dr. Leah K. Gensheimer. She carefully and kindly guided me through the conception, design, and implementation of this study, and encouraged me for going my own way. I am forever grateful to her for standing by me and teaching me how to conduct and report research thoroughly and with heart.

Thank you to the University of Missouri-Kansas City Women's Council for helping to fund my research.

My guides in the Kansas City labor community also deserve thanks and applause, specifically Judy Ancel for her supportive chats, great ideas, quick phone calls to people who matter, and belief in a struggling student; Garry Kemp for seeing the potential in this study, opening his door to me, and gently putting me through my paces; Victor Callahan for being a good friend, go-to guy, and lunch partner; and Bridgette Williams for helping me in the midst of her tougher battles.

At Vanderbilt, thanks to Isaac Prilleltensky for helping me see the potential in what I thought was a lost hope, and to Doug Perkins and Isaac for taking time out of your summer for lots of reading. Also, *tousand dank* to Scotney Evans for eventually just driving me to the office!

Finally, my mother and brother have always been great supporters. My husband, Will, has continued to have faith in me and humor my big ideas while I worked it all out in my head. Look, Honey – I'm done! And to my father, thanks for regularly checking in on me.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The following thesis describes the details and rationale of a study exploring particular organizations that work to address structural inequalities in our society, local labor unions. The purpose of the study was to explore local labor unions using the lens of mediating structures, in which specific “program” components or activities that local labor unions sponsor for their members are examined as parts in the causal chain of democratic participation. In this way, light may be shed on the organizational mechanisms that have made the union movement vital in citizen mobilization and voter turnout. Labor leaders within the Kansas City metropolitan area were surveyed about their union-sponsored programs and activities and asked some general demographic information about their unions (e.g., size, composition). These descriptive data were analyzed to paint a picture of the union landscape in Kansas City, as well as to provide insights into the internal workings of successful mediating structures.

As a new millennium begins in the U.S., vast inequities exist along demographic lines. Race, class, gender, nationality, age, and other categories serve as dividers between those who hold the power and wealth in our nation and those who do not. For example in 1995, the median net financial wealth for White households was \$18,100. In comparison, the median net financial wealth for African American households was \$200; for Latino households, the number was zero (Heintz & Folbre, 2000). These inequities are perpetuated through institutions and industries that are owned and/or operated by the



powerful and wealthy. The richest 1% of American households held 49% of the total financial wealth in 1997, compared to the bottom 90% of Americans, who owned only 17% (Heintz & Folbre, 2000).

One way to reduce the disparity in our country has been through political means. By the election of representatives, the adoption of local legislation, and grassroots organizing campaigns, traditionally powerless groups have often succeeded in gaining more control and wealth for their members and communities. For a variety of reasons, however, many American citizens have chosen not to participate in politics. In particular, voting has become an unpopular activity. Citizen turnout in presidential elections has dropped from 62.8% of registered voters in 1960 to 48.9% in 1996 (Putnam, 2000). For off-year and local elections, turnout is also down by about one-quarter (Putnam, 2000). Out of all 24 industrialized nations, the US ranks 23rd in terms of per capita voter turnout (Putnam, 2000); however, McDonald and Popkin, 2001, offer compelling evidence that national voting patterns are actually experiencing an upswing, and since this study was conducted, national events surrounding presidential elections have brought many more voters to the polls.

Fortunately, there are organizations in our society that have been able to mobilize citizens for democratic participation, and have leveled some significant economic and power imbalances. These organizations are labor unions (Asher, Heberlig, Ripley & Snyder, 2001; Chang, 2001; Coleman, 1988; Greenstone, 1977; Holloway, 1979; Radcliff, 2001; Yates, 1998).<sup>1</sup> Understanding how unions have been successful in replicating democratic structures and facilitating citizen mobilization, and the ways in

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<sup>1</sup> The portrait of organized labor in America is certainly not without blemish. For a brief introduction to some research-based criticisms, see: Addison & Hirsch, 1989; Clawson & Clawson, 1999; and Hill, 1996.

which their methods can be duplicated in other organizations is of primary importance when addressing social inequality. This understanding can best be gleaned by examining labor unions as mediating structures, where labor unions exist and serve as intermediaries between the individual and society's larger decision-making institutions.

The following chapters contain a detailed description of and background for the study. Specifically, Chapter 2 reviews literature and research on mediating structures and labor unions in the context of political participation, establishing a rationale for the study. Chapter 3 details the methods that were used including descriptions of potential participants, the research setting, the survey instrument, and data collection procedures. Chapter 4 describes the results of all analyses performed. The final chapter provides a discussion on the conclusions to be drawn, shortcomings of the study, implications for labor unions and other mediating structures, and directions for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Contained in this chapter are overviews of existing literature written on mediating structures and labor unions. The section on labor unions is divided to cover the structure of organized labor in America, research on national and internal labor unions, and research on labor union members. Following that is a section concentrating only on research of local labor unions. Finally, this chapter concludes with a section providing the rationale for the current study.

#### Mediating Structures

In the literature, two parties have shaped the definition of mediating structures. First was Robert Nisbet's 1962 critique of market capitalism and centralized government entitled Community and Power. He introduced what became the concept of *intermediate associations*: "such groups as the family, the small local community, and the various other traditional relationships that have immemorially mediated between the individual and his [sic] society" (p. 45). Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus (1997) elaborated on this idea from a more libertarian perspective, and provided us with the now familiar term "mediating structures...defined as those institutions standing between the individual in his [sic] private life and the large institutions of public life" (p. 2).

Both of these definitions remain vague and allow for varied interpretations as to what kinds of organizations qualify as mediating structures, and what specific functions

mediating structures serve. As a result, the canon of existing research is highly limited in scope, leaving large gaps yet to be filled.

In 1973, the Commission of Private Philanthropy and Public Needs (also known as the Filer Commission, named for its chairman) was formed to examine the scope and role of voluntary associations, private non-profit organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (O'Connell, 1983). This research was conducted with the aim of informing public policy (O'Connell, 1983). The commission's final report detailed at great length the defining aspects, limitations, functions, relationships, and history of what the commission considered to be the "third sector" of America's institutional society (Silverstein, 1983, p. 299). Although the concept of mediating structures is not explicitly stated within the report, the commission does recognize intermediary roles of third sector organizations, for example, as bridges between the business and government sectors, as agents of civic mobilization, and as critics of the government (Silverstein, 1983).

Berger and Neuhaus' mediating structures project (1977) chose to examine mediating structures in the context of service provision in policy areas; health, housing, law enforcement, education, and welfare became topics of five books resulting from the project (Egan, 1981; Glazer, 1983; Levine & Idler, 1981; Seeley, 1981; Woodson, 1981). The research in these books is largely anecdotal, based on accounts of individual organizations that succeed in supplanting generic, bureaucratic government programs. These organizations are models of the kind of mediating structures they hope to encourage through policy initiatives (Evans, 1982; Peck, 1982).

In his book Making Democracy Work Better, Richard Couto (1999) described his investigation of mediating structures within the context of 23 community-based groups in

the Appalachian region. He conceptualized mediating structures as organizations that are formed to protect local citizens against the forces of market capitalism. Couto (1999) used interviews and anecdotal information to illustrate the organizations' successes and failures in this capacity.

Other work done on mediating structures includes: a study of the ways in which urban mediating structures affect the distribution of public services to Chicago neighborhoods (Jones, 1981); an examination of links between community health centers and other community resources for specifically defined populations in Australia (Walker, 1992); the proposition of stakeholder panels to resolve problems between business and environmental interests (Collins & Barkdull, 1995); and the proposition to include philanthropic organizations in the management of health care for the elderly (Dobrof, 1998).

Researchers have recognized mediating structures in the mobilization of private citizens to participate in politics. It is difficult to deny the vast impact of state and federal governments, as macro-level institutions, on individual lives. In turn, mediating structures can play an integral role in plugging individuals back into larger institutions to be part of decision-making processes. Couto (1999) recognized the importance of mediating structures' involvement in the development of democratic processes and devoted much of his book to the topic. Benjamin R. Barber (1984) incorporated neighborhood associations and citizen service corps among his vision for reformation of the American political system. Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers (1995) proposed a system of governmental reform meant to include and legitimate certain mediating structures for

the purposes of politically representing the underrepresented, creating awareness and respect for differences among societal factions, and improving local governance.

Other works that have held mediating structures as integral in political mobilization include: a 5-nation study of democratic political culture and the impact of voluntary association membership (Almond & Verba, 1963); a dated review of international literature on voluntary associations and political systems (Smith & Freedman, 1972); a critique of organizing campaigns throughout history that sought to politically empower lower-class citizens (Piven & Cloward, 1979); a brief study of social movements and organizations, including the citizen's movement, that have worked for democratic reforms (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1985); a review of research on interventions, local organizations, and policies all with the aim of individual empowerment (Perkins, 1995); and a correlational study in which institutional affiliation is examined as one predictor of individual political participation (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995).

Although researchers have studied organizations in the general context of politics and democracy, none to date have examined particular mediating structures that enable direct political participation in the electoral process. For labor unions, this kind of participation is key to their roles in system-level social change. "Union efforts to shape public policy... are constrained mainly by the capacity of unions to influence the behavior of voters and incumbent, elected public officials" (Cornfield, 1991, p. 41).

Few researchers of mediating structures have focused on local labor unions, however. The majority of scholars tend instead to concentrate on not-for-profit organizations and voluntary associations. If unions are mentioned in the literature, it is

either in passing, in the position of defendant, or in the context of fringe elements on the outskirts of the world of mediating structures (Couto, 1999; Silverstein, 1983; Smith, 1983). Two noteworthy exceptions exist, however. These are Theda Skocpol's Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life (2003), and Robert D. Putnam and Lewis M. Feldstein's Better Together (2003). These authors share, with this author, the hope that through the examination of particular local organizations, lessons can be gleaned that will help to revive our democratic process.

Skocpol's work details a mixed methods study lasting over ten years, during which she and her team traced lineages of over five dozen of some of the largest translocal voluntary associations in our nation's history. She looked specifically at "the interplay of democratic politics and civic voluntarism in the United States, offering a bird's eye view of association building and patterns of civic leadership from the birth of the nation to the present" (p. 12). Included in her study are labor unions. The book is arranged according to Skocpol's emergent theory, with examples from her data used to illustrate her points that, because more professional, advocacy or service organizations are replacing traditional local associations, we must aim to develop new mechanisms to build class-spanning community, networks of relationships for activism, and meaningful democratic participation in the decision-making processes of government.

Putnam and Feldstein's book covers a study smaller in scope, albeit just as ambitious. In Better Together, the authors describe findings from a qualitative review of 12 examples from across the country of how social capital<sup>2</sup> has been built and increased local citizen activism and participation. This book is meant to follow Putnam's famous

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<sup>2</sup> Social capital is defined by the authors as "social networks, norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and trustworthiness" (p. 2, 2003). Putnam and Feldstein understand the concept to be inextricably linked with mediating structures and necessary for a "healthy public life" (p. 3).

Bowling Alone (2000), a quantitative study of the decline of social capital in America over the last third of the century. One of the examples contained in the new book is the story of how workers at Harvard University successfully unionized. Some conclusions from this example and others include the primacy of building and sustaining commitment through relationships based on trust and community over the use of incentives or more superficial interests, allowing members to find and use their own voices, working for partnerships with adversaries, and knowing your audience.

While the waves generated by these two books in the debate regarding the revitalization of American democracy and mediating structures have been great, they have done little to revive general interest in labor unions. Perhaps the controversy generated by unions has deterred most other researchers. It is also possible that these organizations' size and unique structures place them in a category of study by themselves. Nevertheless, labor unions hold a unique position in our country as both a social movement working for the rights and needs of underrepresented citizenry whether they are unionized or not, and as an interest group where money, lobbyists, and member numbers are used to persuade politicians to attend to pertinent issues (Asher, Heberlig, Ripley & Snyder, 2001; Greenstone, 1977; Holloway, 1979; Radcliff, 2001). In this way, unions meet the definition for mediating structures as put forth by Berger and Neuhaus (1977) by having a well-documented history of serving as an equalizing force for disenfranchised workers in the face of larger, dominating systems (Coleman, 1988; Greenstone, 1977; Yates, 1998). Local labor unions deserve the attention of mediating structures researchers.



## Labor Unions

Researchers in sociology, political science, industrial relations, and labor studies have not avoided organized labor, and have in fact produced a fair body of knowledge that details labor's connection to politics. It has been argued, however, that this body of knowledge is disjointed, inconsistent, and lacking a guiding theory (Masters & Delaney, 1987). Nevertheless, the content of this body illustrates the pivotal role played by labor unions in bridging the gap between citizenry and larger, influential institutions in American politics; research has been concentrated in both the relationship of labor to the larger decision-making institutions, and the relationship labor has with its members and the general public. In order to appreciate these relationships, a brief description of the structure of organized labor is necessary.

### *The Structure of Organized Labor*

Most local labor unions in America enjoy the support of the vast organizational structure provided by the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). Formed as a marriage between the two major national labor unions, the AFL and the CIO in 1955, this umbrella organization is now comprised of 65 national and international labor unions, thousands of local unions and over 13 million American union members (AFL-CIO, 2003; Yates, 1998).<sup>3</sup> Unions at the local level are most often extensions of national or international unions, which are in turn affiliated with the AFL-CIO (Yates, 1998). Such an arrangement enables the small, local union strength

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<sup>3</sup> As of July 24, 2005, these numbers have drastically changed. During the annual AFL-CIO convention, two of the largest unions voted to split from the umbrella organization, and two others were expected to leave soon after. The dissident unions have formed a new organization, the "Change to Win Coalition" (Associated Press, 2005)

in numbers and resources (Yates, 1998). However, the national or international unions and their locals remain fairly autonomous from the AFL-CIO, forming their own constitutions and electing their own officers (Yates, 1998). The AFL-CIO cannot dictate union action or policy (Yates, 1998).

At the regional level, the AFL-CIO has chartered nearly 570 central labor councils to bolster local activity, mobilize members and organizing campaigns, educate members and the public, and help community charities (AFL-CIO, 2003; Yates, 1998). The AFL-CIO has also chartered 51 state federations that coordinate with central labor councils and local unions to support each state's unions, publish a newspaper, and lobby state legislators (Yates, 1998). National and international unions, again affiliated with the AFL-CIO, serve their locals by establishing the national union agenda, retaining a staff of researchers, organizers, lawyers, and lobbyists to work on behalf of the union's members, and promoting unions to the general public (Yates, 1998).

The AFL-CIO itself is governed by officers of an executive council elected every four years, and by a biennial convention during which delegates from unions set national policies and goals (AFL-CIO, 2003). The federation also contains 11 programmatic departments and 7 trade and industrial departments that work to address specific labor needs and interests (AFL-CIO, 2003). A general council composed of the executive council, a chief officer of each affiliated union and AFL-CIO departments, and a regional representative from each state federation also works at national labor issues, including the endorsement of presidential candidates (AFL-CIO, 2003). Finally, the AFL-CIO is allied with outside constituency groups and sponsored organizations to accomplish goals and broaden the supportive base (AFL-CIO, 2003).

Such an extensive network of assistance allows local unions much latitude in the methods for the political mobilization of their members. Sometimes it is the network itself that works to mobilize and educate members and the nonunion public. At the national and international level, unions and the AFL-CIO also act to directly influence important political players like the Democratic party and politicians. Research has been dedicated to both topics of national and local union political action. It is important to note that political action is examined at many different levels of analysis within the organized labor structure. These levels will be elucidated in the following review of labor research.

#### *National and International Labor Unions*

Studies of national and international labor unions have found that membership size, dependence on government regulations, and demographic, economic, and internal political characteristics affect the unions' external political activity (Cornfield, 1989; Delaney, Fiorito & Masters, 1988; Masters & Delaney, 1985). Other research using national and international unions and the AFL-CIO as the level of analysis has focused on how unions work to influence various political players through the coordination of contributions, membership organizing, the lobbying of legislators, and the promise of votes. The two political players most often examined are the Democratic party and legislators.

*The Democratic Party.* Since Roosevelt's New Deal, national and international unions and the AFL-CIO have had a contentious link to the Democratic party. Much research has been dedicated to documenting this relationship. The prominent view of

labor's ties to the Democratic party has been that, because of similar ideologies, goals, and mutual need, labor is inextricably linked to the Democratic party (Chang, 2001; Coleman, 1988; Greenstone, 1977; Masters & Delaney, 1987). Organized labor has been able to provide the Democrats with a solid base for national voter organization, mobilization, and contributions that the party would not otherwise have had (Chang, 2001; Greenstone, 1977; Holloway, 1979). In exchange, the Democratic party's agenda has included some issues favored by labor unions (Chang, 2001; Coleman, 1988). More recent research indicates, however, that the Democratic party has not honored the commitment of organized labor because of a shift to probusiness politics (Chang, 2001; Dark, 1999; Delaney, Fiorito & Jarley, 1999; Moberg, 2000). For example, despite its work to create a strong support base for Bill Clinton and the Democrats in the 1992 elections, organized labor received few favors with the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (an international policy for businesses in which obstacles to employing labor out of the country and bringing cheaper goods into the country were removed) (Delaney, Fiorito & Jarley, 1999; Moberg, 2000). At the crux of this argument is the idea of mutual dependence, and whether or not the Democrats will support the union agenda if labor is able to deliver dependably large numbers of voters (as is noted later, individual union members do not always vote for the democratic ticket), or provide a competitive amount of contributions (Moberg, 2000).

Contributions are made through Political Action Committees (PACs) of unions or of the AFL-CIO, using monies voluntarily given by members for that specific purpose (Delaney, Fiorito & Jarley, 1999). The PAC created by the AFL-CIO is the Committee on Political Education, or COPE, and is primarily involved in candidate endorsements,

voter registration, political education, voting drives, and coordinating with community organizations (Asher et al., 2001; Yates, 1998). Labor unions have been criticized for using these PACs to financially support political players and have been accused of buying influence (Masters & Delaney, 1985). Recent court decisions and legislation have been made to curtail union spending on indirect political activities (Delaney, Fiorito & Jarley, 1999). Interestingly, however, organized labor has not been able to match half of what business spends in PAC contributions. In the 1995-96 congressional campaigns, business PACs contributed \$147 million, compared to labor PAC contributions of \$49 million (Delaney, Fiorito & Jarley, 1999; Heintz & Folbre, 2000). All accounts of campaign expenditures indicate that costs continue to rise, and as a result, so do donations (Delaney, Fiorito & Jarley, 1999). Thus, even though labor unions have been shown to contribute loyally to the Democratic party and/or Democratic candidates (J. Ancel, personal communication, April 2, 2003; Masters & Delaney, 1987), that financial loyalty may be losing its worth in this free market political system.

*Legislators.* The relationship that national and international unions and the AFL-CIO have with legislators has also been a focus of some research. Although organized labor tries to endorse issues more often than candidates (Moberg, 2000), unions do attempt to gain the attention of legislators through lobbying, the offering of supportive services, and campaign contributions. According to Masters and Delaney (1985), the act of lobbying can entail a variety of activities for unions, including

- 1) informing elected officials of their positions on issues and their political agendas;
- 2) arousing their members to apply pressure to elected officials to support or oppose specific legislation (e.g., through letter-writing campaigns); and
- 3) forming permanent or ad hoc coalitions with other pressure groups to broaden their educational audience or to coordinate other lobbying strategies or both (p. 344).

These activities therefore require not only employed lobbyists, but also the same sort of organizational network and tactics engaged to assist the Democratic party.

Organized labor has been shown to provide services like fundraising, communications, management, and community-level organizing for legislators who have established pro-labor records, and in turn, labor has received moderate support for sponsored legislation (Burns, Francia & Herrnson, 2000). These legislators can be either Democrats or Republicans, although most are Democrats, and most are liberal in their records (Burns, Francia & Herrnson, 2000; Masters & Delaney, 1987). The interventions of organized labor can play an important role in a legislator's electoral standing; as Jacobson (1999) showed in his research, the AFL-CIO's 1996 voter education campaigns were successful in derailing the elections of targeted freshmen House Republicans.

Legislators receiving union campaign contributions have tended to be Democrats, and to hold similar ideologies with organized labor (Rudolph, 1999). This strategy of funding is contrasted with that of business, whose contributions tend to be made along more pragmatic or legislative lines based on power positions, seniority, and committee assignments (Rudolph, 1999). Campaign contributions to legislators through labor PACs have shown mixed results in terms of gaining advantages for labor unions. Moore, Chachere, Curtis, and Gordon (1995) found that, for the period of 1979-1988, union PAC contributions had a significant, positive effect on pro-labor voting in the Senate. Other studies of union PACs have shown similar positive effects of union contributions on Congressional pro-labor voting, although studies that refute these findings also exist (Burns, Francia & Herrnson, 2000). Ultimately, it has been difficult to extract the effect of PAC contributions from other, significant predictors of pro-labor voting behavior,

including party affiliation, ideology, union membership in the state, constituency interests, and the district's presidential vote (Burns, Francia & Herrnson, 2000).

Because of difficulties surrounding PAC contributions like competing business interests, rising campaign costs, prohibitive legislation, and mixed results of outcomes, organized labor has recognized the importance of concentrating on other means of maintaining political clout. As Delaney, Fiorito, and Jarley (1999) point out, "It is clear that unions cannot win this electoral dollar battle. In their search for new approaches to strengthen the labor movement, union leaders have emphasized bottom-up, grass-roots methods" (p. 280). Traditionally, labor has relied on its dedicated membership base to support or put pressure on elected officials and the Democratic party.

#### *Labor Union Members*

*Attitudes.* The research on union member attitude and political activity has centered mainly around members' feelings of propriety regarding union intervention into their political choices, as well as the congruency between member and leader political views (Chang, 2002; Fields, Masters & Thacker, 1987). Regarding the propriety of union political activity, analyses of studies have revealed consistent outcomes. In particular, some union members have been shown to disapprove of their union's political involvement in general (Fields, Masters & Thacker, 1987). Those members who do support union involvement object to specific political actions, for instance, telling members how to vote in elections (Fields, Masters & Thacker, 1987; Masters & Delaney, 1987). The more partisan unions become in their political involvement, the less members approve (Asher et al., 2001). Researchers have speculated that these results may be

motivated by the widely held belief that politics is a private, personal matter (Fields, Masters & Thacker, 1987).

Another possibility is the adherence by members to the perspective of *business unionism*, the idea that unions in the US should work for a very narrow range of interests (Fields, Masters & Thacker, 1987). A dominant trend in organized labor since the 1920's, business unionism was a shift in focus from what were perceived to be the more radical labor driven, class-conscious social movements. Business unionism is based in collective bargaining, and means that instead of working for broad social change, unions push only for member interests (J. Ancel, personal communication, April 2, 2003). Employees today join unions for business purposes first; political involvement for broad social change is not workers' primary priority for enlisting in a union (Asher et al., 2001), nor is it often any longer a major priority of the unions they join (J. Ancel, personal communication, April 2, 2003).

The literature has also demonstrated that a disparity exists between labor leader and member political opinions. Several studies have indicated that leaders often take a more progressive position on political issues than their rank-and-file members do (Asher et al., 2001; Fields, Masters & Thacker, 1987; Masters & Delaney, 1987). There is also growing evidence that, as the kind of jobs available in our economy changes from manufacturing to service, the kinds of workers who are unionized will also change, creating a more heterogeneous union member population in opinion and behavior (Chang, 2002).

All of the data would seem to suggest that unions have much to overcome in order to mobilize their members for political action. Researchers have provided a clue to union



success; members' level of commitment to unions in general and their support for union political activity have been shown to be positively correlated (Fields, Masters & Thacker, 1987). Through the formation of lasting bonds and positive relationships with union members, leaders may be positively affecting attitudes toward political involvement. In addition, unions are working to move toward a heavier focus on political issues rather than the endorsement of specific candidates, which may leave members with a greater feeling of independence when making decisions at the polls (J. Ancel, personal communication, April 2, 2003).

*Behaviors.* Research on member behavior and politics has focused on voting preferences and mobilization activities. As previously stated, union members turn out to vote at higher rates than nonunion members (Asher et al., 2001; Chang, 2001; Coleman, 1988; Delaney, Fiorito & Jarley, 1999; Radcliff, 2001; Yates, 1998). Families of union members have also been shown to turn out to vote more often than nonunion families (Chang, 2001; Radcliff, 2001). Most importantly, union members and their families consistently vote for the Democratic party's candidates and issues and/or labor-endorsed candidates (Chang, 2001; Delaney, Fiorito & Jarley, 1999; Juravich & Shergold, 1988). These three characteristics of the union population contribute greatly to the power of organized labor, in that the membership can be expected to vote reliably as a unified constituency in the election of politicians or passage of legislation.

This phenomenon has lately been called into question, however, as union members have broken party lines in more recent elections. For example, 44% of union voters in 1984 chose Ronald Reagan over Jimmy Carter for President, despite Reagan's anti-union reputation (Chang, 2001; Delaney, Fiorito & Jarley, 1999; Juravich &

Shergold, 1988). In the 2000 presidential election, 35% of union votes went to George W. Bush, a Republican (Chang, 2001). Researchers have suggested that social or cultural issues (also called *wedge issues*, J. Ancel, personal communication, April 2, 2003) can often split the votes of union members in races where candidates show little difference in economic and labor policy (Chang, 2001), or when the health of the economy is simply not at issue. Competing mediating structures and/or interest groups organize to push these sociocultural issues, for example the NRA and gun rights legislation, or the Christian coalition and anti-abortion legislation (J. Ancel, personal communication, April 2, 2003). Union voting strength seems to be particularly diminished in the face of this trend.

Despite these setbacks, unions and union leaders have still been shown to be quite effective in mobilizing members, as well as influencing membership voting preference (Juravich, 1986; Juravich & Shergold, 1988). In the mid term elections of 1998, union members led nonunion members by thirteen percentage points in the level of participation in political activities (Asher et al., 2001). Some electoral activities that unions sponsor for their members include donating money, attending candidate meetings, distributing literature, registering voters, staffing phone banks, placing signs, working at party headquarters, and transporting voters to polls (Asher et al., 2001). Member participation in these activities has been found to be largely a function of union commitment, political agreement, and education level (Asher et al., 2001; Juravich & Shergold, 1988). Local and/or national and international unions may also sponsor membership political education programs which can involve political discussions, evaluations of candidates and initiatives, candidate endorsement, and persuading

members to vote for particular candidates or issues (Chang, 2002; Delaney, Fiorito & Jarley, 1999). The AFL-CIO's PAC, the Committee on Political Education, is dedicated to the sponsorship of these activities on a national level (Asher et al., 2001). These efforts have been shown to be worthwhile in mobilization and influencing member voting preference (Delaney, Fiorito & Jarley, 1999; Juravich & Shergold, 1988). In a survey of 939 Pennsylvania union members, Juravich and Shergold (1988) found that the reception of union literature or telephone calls was a significant predictor of voting for the union-endorsed candidate in the 1984 presidential election. Other predictors of union member voting preference include length of union membership, level of activity in the local union, and the holding of a leadership position in the local union (Juravich & Shergold, 1988).

### Local Labor Unions

Few studies have used the local labor union as a unit of analysis. In an examination of labor unions as mediating structures, however, it is necessary to concentrate on the community level, where citizens are directly engaged, mobilized, and "plugged in" to political activities. One of the only studies to do this was Chang's *Electoral Activities of Southern Local Unions in the 2000 Election* (2002). This work is the closest approximation to the currently proposed study found in the literature. It was a correlational study of the electoral activities of 140 southern local unions and their organizational/environmental characteristics. Chang (2002) found that union size, the development of rank-and-file leadership, internal organizing activities, and state union density were all positively related to the local unions' electoral activity (Chang, 2002).

The Chang (2002) study goes far in developing a picture of a politically mobilized union, as well as the larger context in which these unions exist. For this reason, some elements of Chang's study have been incorporated into the current research. These include the examination of union characteristics such as local union size, number of stewards, and racial/ethnic and gender composition. Other variables of interest adopted include internal organizing, how member problems are addressed and solved, and electoral activities sponsored by the local union.

Where the Chang study falls short, however, is by examining only electoral activities, rather than viewing the entire local union as a political, participatory organization, or mediating structure. Through the lens of mediating structures, the local union can be understood as an organization whose life processes revolve explicitly around large degrees of internal and external member participation. As the review in previous pages suggests, the national network of organized labor is compelled to create and sustain major membership participation for its very existence.

According to J. Ancel (personal communication, August 6, 2002), local labor unions engage their members in three types of activities: electoral, non-electoral political, and internal activities. By examining three different types of democratic activities sponsored by unions that go beyond the explicitly electoral, deeper organizational components surface as integral in the attempts to create mature and engaged citizens. Following is a description of these types of activities.

**Internal activities** are part of the normal functioning of a labor union local. These activities help to create a "political culture" where "norms, institutions, and structures of interaction in 'the community' shape and constrain participation..."

(Salisbury, 1975, p. 337). Other scholars have agreed, and have added that providing members with an internal democracy and thus a chance to govern their local union is the quickest route to a politically dedicated and involved membership (Blume, 1970; Strauss, 1991). Activities in this category may include holding internal elections for officers, promoting the development of stewards, and addressing workplace grievances during meetings. These activities happen year-round on a regular basis.

**Nonelectoral political activities** are meant to advance more general labor agendas. International unions or the AFL-CIO often initiate activities like the political education of union members, advocacy, and lobbying for legislation. Activities in this category may include disseminating political-educational materials, meeting with politicians/legislators to discuss policy, and attending union breakfasts to speak informally with members of the press. These activities may occur at any time of the year. Although past research has not explored the frequency or impact of such activities, scholars have recognized the importance of developing knowledge in members about the political process, connecting members to various external bodies for political reasons, as well as making national/global issues pertinent to members' daily lives (Asher et al., 2001; Chang, 2002; Delaney, Fiorito & Jarley, 1999; Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995).

**Electoral activities** are specific to a candidate or issue up for vote. These elections are external to the union and are open to participation of the community-at-large. Activities in this category may include attending fundraisers for candidates, phone-calling members the night before elections to ensure turnout, and erecting yard signs that endorse the candidate/issue. These activities are time-specific, occurring only around election dates. Past research on labor unions and political activities has focused

most heavily on these activities because they are most readily connected with politics and because organized labor has also emphasized the importance of these activities in the accomplishment of their goals.

As described by Ancel, the three kinds of organizational activities can be placed in the context of unions and member political participation using a logic model. Figure 1 is this author's interpretation of the general model for local unions and member participation based on the research and concepts summarized above. The scope of this study includes the organizational activities (letter b) as the primary focus of the current study along with one item from resources (letter a), demographics of the dues-paying membership.

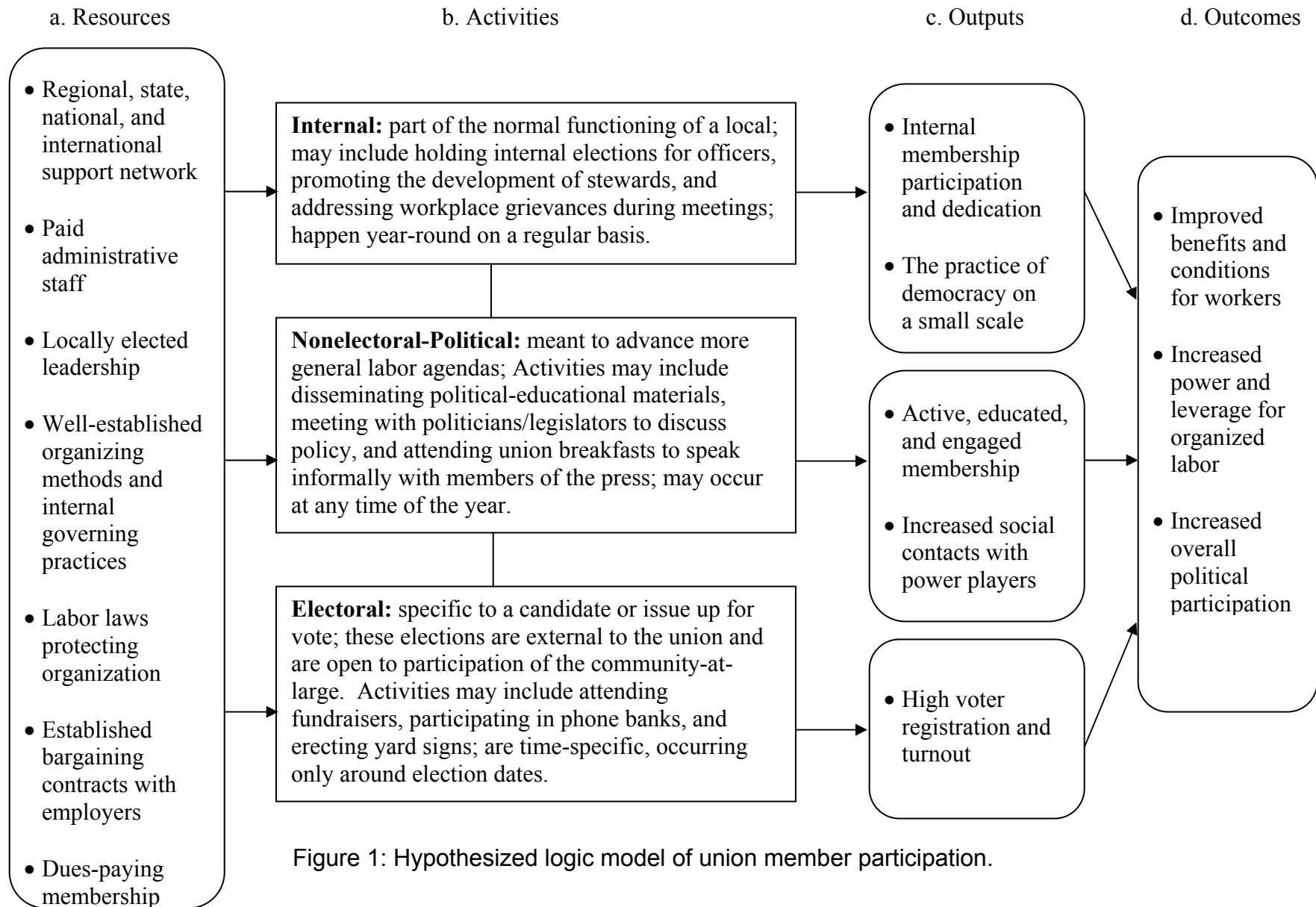


Figure 1: Hypothesized logic model of union member participation.

## The Current Study

Local labor unions have been perhaps one of the most effective community-level groups at organizing their members for collective power and voice. In terms of voting alone, union members are found to register and vote at significantly higher rates than citizens who are not union members (Asher et al., 2001; Chang, 2001; Coleman, 1988; Delaney, Fiorito & Jarley, 1999; Radcliff, 2001; Yates, 1998). However, researchers of mediating structures have not yet examined either particular mediating structures that promote direct political participation in the electoral process or studied local labor unions. The majority of scholars in this area instead tend to concentrate on not-for-profit organizations and voluntary associations as the focus of their research. Although researchers of labor unions have inspected the relationships between unions and politics, few studies have directly examined the role of local organizational activities in political participation.

The current study is unique because it examined the local union as a mediating structure, an organization whose entire life processes revolve around the connection of members to internal and external participatory mechanisms. Several aspects of labor's attention to democratic participation have already been well established through research. This study was an attempt to work backwards from the starting point of labor's mobilization attempts, and to focus sights on exactly how local unions play a role. Thus, this study proposed to open up the organizational "black box" of democratic mobilization and participation, and is largely descriptive.

This study detailed specific kinds and amounts of activities sponsored by Kansas City's local labor unions for their members during 2002, the year of national, mid-term



elections. The objective was to learn about the democratic organizational activities of actual, working local unions for two major reasons.

The first reason is concerned with the body of knowledge on mediating structures, and making a novel contribution to it. This author believes, as Robert Nisbet did, that local organizations could be the linchpin to a healthy democracy and the equitable distribution of power to govern. In order to fulfill this potential, however, an organization must truly strive to mediate; that is, it must provide a means for exchange of information, resources, and/or power between those that have some, and those that have less. This means may be through direct collective action, or via advocacy and lobbying. The organization might even become a local chapter of a federation, making decisions that are taken back to a larger body for ratification. It is this understanding of mediating structures that the author has hoped to share and develop through the current study. Then, not only might other scholars respond and dialogue, but other local organizations may find the example of unions as mediating structures useful in working to increase democratic participation and mobilization.

The second reason for this study is for the labor community, so that it might use this information to learn about the reality of their own efforts in pursuing democracy and creating an organized political force. As illustrated in the previous paragraphs, organized labor has designed a complex and intentional national structure to sustain and facilitate unionization. Indeed, the results of their work are mixed at best. There are clearly many factors serving to undermine this work, not the least of which is an internal culture of conflict and secrecy. For those who believe in the cause of organized labor, it is sometimes necessary to present a mirror to the movement, or a magnifying glass. This

study has attempted to shed light on perhaps the most integral structure for labor, the local union. It is here that members exist and interact, learn and connect, and become union citizens. And yet so little is known about this level of organization in terms of mechanisms for engagement.

Specific research questions posed by this study were:

1. Organizational components:
  - a. To what extent do Kansas City area labor unions engage in democratic activities, i.e., What is the political landscape of Kansas City locals?
  - b. How do local unions vary in detail based on the hypothesized ideal model of internal, non-electoral political, and electoral activities (Figure 1)?
2. Demographic variables:
  - a. What is the gender and racial/ethnic composition of Kansas City union locals?
  - b. How are demographic variables related to democratic activities?

The study used survey research methods. A five-step, multi-modal design was employed to solicit participation from local union leaders. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Details of the research methods are described in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### Setting

Kansas City, Missouri, is an unusual locale with unique considerations for social science research. The city is located in the center of the US directly on the border of Missouri and Kansas, and has a population of approximately 450,000 (Miller, 2003). It is also part of a much larger, bi-state metropolitan area in which more than 136 cities/townships are embedded, some within the borders of others (Feist Publications, 2002-3). The population of this area is currently estimated at 1.7 million (Feist Publications, 2002-3). It is difficult to examine Kansas City in isolation of this entire region, especially for local politics.

Because of its size, the Kansas City area (Kansas City itself, as well as other cities in the metropolitan area on the Missouri side) is influential in state politics (S. Kraske, personal communication, January 21, 2003). Along with the other major cities in Missouri (St. Louis, Columbia, Jefferson City), the Kansas City area is considered to vote consistently for Democratic candidates (S. Kraske, personal communication, January 21, 2003). The many rural areas in Missouri are thought to be the strongholds of Republicans, and as a result Kansas City often plays a pivotal role in determining the outcomes of statewide elections (S. Kraske, personal communication, January 21, 2003).

Within the city area, there are several community-level interest groups that have come to prominence, including: Freedom, Inc., an eastside African American political

club; a westside gay and lesbian political group; La Raza, a westside Hispanic political club; Citizens for County Progress (CCP); and the Citizen's Association (S. Kraske, personal communication, January 21, 2003). Candidates work to earn the endorsements of these groups, although the effects of such endorsements in election outcomes are debatable (S. Kraske, personal communication, January 21, 2003). Contributions and voter-mobilization are the most valued commodities offered by interest groups, particularly in light of the fact that Kansas City voters are no more involved politically than the rest of the country (S. Kraske, personal communication, January 21, 2003).

Local labor unions have made a major impact on Kansas City area politics. With over 100 local unions in the metropolitan area, candidates and politicians recognize Kansas City's unions as a well-organized political machine (S. Kraske, personal communication, January 21, 2003). In the past, their two-tiered political mobilization efforts (reaching both union members and the general public) have set the standard for grass-roots movements in the area (S. Kraske, personal communication, January 21, 2003).

The 2002 mid-term election was noteworthy for Missouri for several reasons. Nationally, the US had a Republican president, and a near balance of Republicans and Democrats in both House and Senate. The results of this were most often Congressional gridlock. By the time of election, only a handful of states had Congressional candidates that could tip the balance if elected, Missouri included. Jim Talent, a Republican, was running against Jean Carnahan, a Democrat, for one of Missouri's seats in the Senate. A similar situation was occurring in the Missouri legislature, and within the city there were

many contentious races for district representatives. For a mid-term election, 2002 had several inducements for Kansas City voters.

For organized labor, this was also an important election. Labor leaders felt that they had much to lose if there were to be both a Republican president and majority in Congress. Jean Carnahan was the labor-endorsed candidate in the Missouri US Senate race, and unions worked hard in Kansas City to get her elected. For example, the AFL-CIO initiated “The 10 Point Program,” which involved a comprehensive approach to mobilizing and connecting members with local politics. However, Republicans also worked hard in Missouri to stimulate support for Jim Talent. President Bush, vice-president Cheney, and other top-ranking Republicans visited the state several times to raise money and mobilize Republican voters. The race was very close, and ultimately Republican candidate Jim Talent won. Some speculative reasons for this outcome include: a very dedicated, state-wide Republican voting base; visits from members of the Bush administration; Republican mobilization in rural areas; Carnahan’s lack of experience or capability (her husband, Mel Carnahan, died in the midst of his own senate race in 2001, and she became the de facto candidate; when Mel Carnahan posthumously won the race, she ended up in the seat) and a Republican appeal to gun owners on second amendment issues (S. Kraske, personal communication, January 21, 2003). However, Kansas City citizens did vote overwhelmingly for Carnahan, an outcome that may speak to the effectiveness of union campaigns (S. Kraske, personal communication, January 21, 2003). Presumably, then, 2002 was an important and active year for local unions and union members in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

## Participants

Potential participants included all local union leaders in the Kansas City metropolitan area belonging to one of three AFL-CIO local labor councils. This researcher coordinated with the local councils to send surveys out to all unions on their membership lists (total = 80). As advocated by Dillman, 2000, a mixed mode survey research design was used (see *Recruitment & Data Collection Procedures*, below). Final participants were those who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study by completing and returning the survey. Participants were recruited in the spring of 2003.

## Procedures

The data collection method involved a mailed paper-and-pencil survey to leaders of local unions of the AFL-CIO in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

### *Survey Data*

*Pilot Test.* Prior to the start of data collection, a group of approximately 5 labor union leaders comparable to those who participated in the study were asked to complete the survey. These leaders were asked to offer any comments or suggestions they might have concerning the survey's clarity and content. Based on this feedback, changes to the survey were made as deemed appropriate.

### *Recruitment & Data Collection Procedures*

Potential participants included all local union leaders in the Kansas City metropolitan area belonging to one of three AFL-CIO local labor councils (total = 80).

Contacts to the potential participants were made through 3 AFL-CIO affiliated, local labor councils, with whom local labor unions are aligned. For those local labor unions that were not aligned with a local labor council and that could be identified, contacts were made directly by the principle investigator. An article alerting local union leaders prior to the study was published in the statewide labor newspaper *The Labor Beacon*. Also, a 5-minute informational interview with this researcher that alerted leaders to the study was run during a local labor radio show.

A mixed mode survey research design was used to solicit participation and collect data. Specifically, a five-step contacting process was employed. This approach has been empirically found to increase participation rates (Dillman, 2000). Table 1 outlines this process and provides the time line.

The first contact was a letter mailed by US Postal Service or faxed directly from the leaders of participating labor councils (for those free-floating labor unions, the director of the Institute for Labor Studies made the first contact). This letter alerted labor union leaders to the upcoming survey. It also contained a brief explanation of the research, the importance of the research to the labor leaders, and the labor council leader's endorsement of the research (see appendix A). One week after this introductory letter was mailed, a survey packet was sent out to each local union leader containing the survey, an information release form for voter turnout data (see appendix H; more information on this component is provided in the discussion section), an addressed/stamped envelope for the return of the survey to the researcher, and a cover letter explaining the research (see appendix B). The cover letter described the purpose of the research, what participation entailed, the voluntary nature of participation, and the

efforts used to maintain confidentiality. The letter also requested surveys and information release forms to be returned by a specified date. The third contact was a thank you/reminder postcard (see appendix C), mailed a week after the survey packets were sent out. The fourth contact was a follow-up telephone call made two weeks later to all local union leaders who had not yet returned the survey, using a scripted monologue to remind them of the survey and to solicit their participation (see appendix D). A scripted message was left when an answering machine or voice mail was reached. The final contact involved mailing a second survey packet to those leaders who had not yet responded (see appendix E).

In addition to the planned five-step process, the researcher worked through summer and fall to contact unresponsive leaders over the phone and get their commitment to complete and return surveys (see appendix F). This was done because of initial low response rates. To those leaders who gave their commitment, another round of surveys and release forms with a revised final cover letter (see appendix G) were sent.

This multi-step survey research design incorporated critical elements that have been demonstrated to enhance response rates, particularly: the use of specific organization contacts, authority endorsements, personalized appeals, mixed methods of contact, and stamped return envelopes (Dillman, 2000).



Table 1. Five-step mixed mode survey design & timeline

WEEK	STEP	MODE
1	A one-page introductory mailing from the leaders of participating local labor councils. This letter alerted labor leaders to the upcoming survey. It also contained a brief explanation of the research, the importance of the research to the labor leaders, and the leader's endorsement of the research.	US mail
2	A packet containing the survey, an information release form, a self-addressed/stamped envelope, and a cover letter from the PI explaining the research. The cover letter described the purpose of the research, what constitutes participation, the voluntary nature of participation, and the efforts that are being used to maintain confidentiality.	US mail
3	A thank you/reminder postcard, mailed a week after the survey packets are sent out.	US mail
4	A telephone call follow-up to all nonrespondents, reminding them of the survey and soliciting their participation.	Telephone
5	The final contact involved mailing out a second survey packet to those leaders who had not yet responded or who had requested a mailed packet during the telephone call.	US mail

Additional contacts due to low response rate

	A telephone call follow-up to all nonrespondents asked for a commitment to complete and return a new survey packet	Telephone
	A new packet with a revised cover letter referencing the previous telephone call was mailed out to those leaders who had not yet responded and who had verbally committed to completing a mailed packet.	US mail

## Survey

The “*Union Democratic Activities Survey*” (*UDAS*) was specifically developed for the present study (see appendix I). The *UDAS* contains 4 sections of a total of 52 items designed to measure specific union sponsored activities and obtain some basic background information on participating labor unions. The surveys were printed by a union printer with the union seal affixed at each bottom front page. A copy of the *UDAS* is contained in the appendix. Following is a detailed description of the survey.

**Section I** of the *UDAS* consists of 7 items designed to obtain some basic information about participating local unions, including: name of the local that the leader represents; type of occupation that the union represents; city and state where the union is located; number of members in the local; number of stewards in the local; estimated percent of male and female members; and estimated ethnic breakdown of union membership (i.e., percent of Caucasians, African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, native American, and “other”). The last item in this section asks respondents to estimate: 1) the percent of members who show up to meetings, 2) the percent of members who voted in the last union election, and 3) the percent of union members who voted in the 2002 election. Local union sizes, number of stewards, gender, and race/ethnicity of members have all been hypothesized to be related to the political activity of a union (Chang, 2002; Delaney, Fiorito & Jarley, 1999; Delaney, Fiorito & Masters, 1988; Fields, Masters & Thacker, 1987). Voting and attendance rates at union meetings were included as an additional measure of member participation.

The estimation of voting rates for the national election was originally intended to supplement actual archival voter turnout data (see discussion section for a detailed

explanation); it was not expected that every leader might have an estimate of their membership turnout, or that any estimate would necessarily be close to accurate. However, given the amount of average union activity surrounding election time, it was plausible that some leaders might be able to give reasonable estimates to support the archival figures.

Sections II, III, and IV of the *UDAS* were designed to measure the extent to which local unions engaged in the three general types of political activities intended to promote membership participation in the political process (i.e., internal activities, nonelectoral political activities, and electoral activities).

**Section II** was designed to measure frequency of union-sponsored, internal activities for the past year (Items 8 – 24). These activities are part of the normal functioning of a labor union local. Items 8 – 19 are forced-response questions in which participants are asked to indicate the frequency with which their local union sponsored the specific activity listed, using a 6-point Likert scale of “1 = Not at all,” “2 = Once,” “3 = A few times,” “4 = Every other month,” “5 = Once a month,” and “6 = Two or more times a month.” Three “Other” options are provided, allowing participants to report on union-sponsored activities that are not already listed in the survey (written-in responses for the “Other” items were to be content analyzed for common themes, and appropriate follow-up coding and quantification was to be performed; however, no responses were written in at any point of the survey). Items 20, 21, 22, and 24 are open-ended, asking participants to report the frequency of contract renewal, the percent of members who participated in committees, the number of grievances pending, and the number of functional committees in the local union in the past year. Item 23 is contingent on the

answer to 22, so that if there were grievances pending in the past year, the participant may indicate whether or not the status of those grievances were reported in member meetings by circling “yes” or “no” (an “N/A” response is also provided in case there were no grievances pending that year).

**Section III** was designed to measure frequency of union-sponsored, nonelectoral political activities (Items 25 – 37). These are activities meant to advance general labor agendas. Items 25 – 35 are forced-response questions in which participants are asked to indicate the frequency with which their local union sponsored the specific activity listed, using a 6-point Likert scale of “1 = Not at all,” “2 = Once,” “3 = A few times,” “4 = Every other month,” “5 = Once a month,” and “6 = Two or more times a month.” Three “Other” options are provided, allowing participants to report on union-sponsored activities that are not already listed in the survey. Items 36 and 37 are forced-response, asking participants to circle “yes” or “no” to answer whether or not their local union had a subscription to *The Labor Beacon* (a state-wide labor newspaper), or if their local union had its own newsletter.

The Nonelectoral Political Activities variable (NPA) was scored by taking a mean composite for items 25 – 35 and adding points based on the answers to items 36 and 37. High scores on the NPA suggest a high level, or greater frequency, of union-sponsored, nonelectoral political activities during the past year.

**Section IV** was designed to measure frequency of union-sponsored, electoral activities (Items 38 – 52). Electoral activities are specific to a candidate or issue up for vote. Item format and response options for items 38 – 49 are identical to that of Section II and III. Specifically, participants are asked to indicate the frequency in which their

local union sponsored the specific electoral activity listed during the 2002 election season, using a 6-point Likert scale of “1 = Not at all,” “2 = Once,” “3 = A few times,” “4 = Every other month,” “5 = Once a month,” and “6 = Two or more times a month.” Again, three “Other” options are provided, allowing participants to report on union-sponsored activities that are not already listed in the survey. Items 50 – 52 are forced-response, asking participants to circle “yes” or “no” to answer whether or not their local union had organizations to get family members involved in electoral activities, if their local union had an active retiree organization, or if their local union had members hand out candidate endorsements at the polls.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

In all, 40 local labor union leaders volunteered to participate in this study (response rate of 50%). Thirty of these locals were based on the Missouri side of the Kansas City metropolitan area, 4 on the Kansas side, and 6 had locations in both states. Employment sectors represented ranged from plumbers to printers, musicians to meatpackers, aircraft mechanics to actors (a full report of employment sectors/types of unions in this sample will be omitted to preserve participants' confidentiality). This sample of unions represented a membership total of 55,074 working men and women. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS statistical software, version 12.0 for Windows.

#### Membership Demographics

The range of organizational size was wide. The smallest union in the sample contained 32 members, and the largest contained 12,000; average union size was 1,376.85 (SD = 2,171.283). Most of these union members were white males: the average percentage of male membership was 82.38% (SD = 21.13), and ranged from as small as 20% of membership in one local, to 99.69% in another. Caucasian members accounted for an average of 74.73% of the membership per union (SD = 17.61), ranging from a low of 40% to a high of 99.0%. Nonwhite racial/ethnic groups represented included: African Americans, with an average membership percentage of 15.10 (SD = 14.17); Asian

Americans,  $M = 1.19$  ( $SD = 1.56$ ); Hispanics/Latinos,  $M = 7.15$  ( $SD = 5.96$ ); Native Americans,  $M = 0.89$  ( $SD = 1.19$ ); and those members who identified with none of those categories,  $M = 0.39$  ( $SD = 0.96$ ).

When examining the relationships amongst these demographic variables using a two-tailed Pearson correlation, there appears to be a significant correlation ( $r = .633$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between male and Caucasian membership. That is, the percentage of male membership increases along with the percentage of Caucasian membership. There are also significant positive correlations between female and African American membership ( $r = .726$ ), between Asian American and Native American membership ( $r = .647$ ), and between Native American membership and the Other category ( $r = .539$ ). A positive correlation exists between African American membership and Asian American membership ( $r = .415$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Some correlations approaching significance ( $p < 0.1$ ) may be indicative of trends, including the relationship between female and Asian American membership ( $r = .320$ ); Hispanic/Latino and Asian American membership ( $r = .307$ ); and Hispanic/Latino and Native American membership ( $r = .301$ ). With a larger sample size, these correlations might have been significant. Finally, there is no correlation of significance amongst any of the gender or racial/ethnic variables and union size.

Overall, these correlations and trends suggest that local unions are subject to the same rules of diversification as other organizations – that female and nonwhite members attract other female and nonwhite members, just as white male members attract other white male members. For a visual depiction of all correlations performed, see tables 3, 4, and 5.

## Range and Level of Democratic Activity

### *Internal Democratic Activity.*

Those internal democratic activities with the highest mean frequency rating were member meetings ( $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ), and committee meetings ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ). These numbers indicate that local unions reported hosting member and committee meetings, on average, between every other month (Likert option 4), and once a month (Likert option 5). For a graphic depiction of all internal activities and their frequencies, see figure 2.

A breakdown of results from additional measures of internal democratic activity can be found in table 2. These include: number of stewards (union representatives at the worksite); the estimated percentage of membership that regularly attend meetings, committee meetings, and participated in their last union election; frequency of contract renewal; number of grievances pending and whether they were reported to members at meetings; and, number of functional committees.

Many of the above indicators of internal democratic activities were combined to create the Internal Activities variable (IA). Specifically, the IA was scored by taking a mean composite for items 8 – 19 and adding points based on the answers to items 5 and 20 – 24, adjusted by per capita membership. Estimates of percentage of regular membership participation in meetings and the last union election were not incorporated,



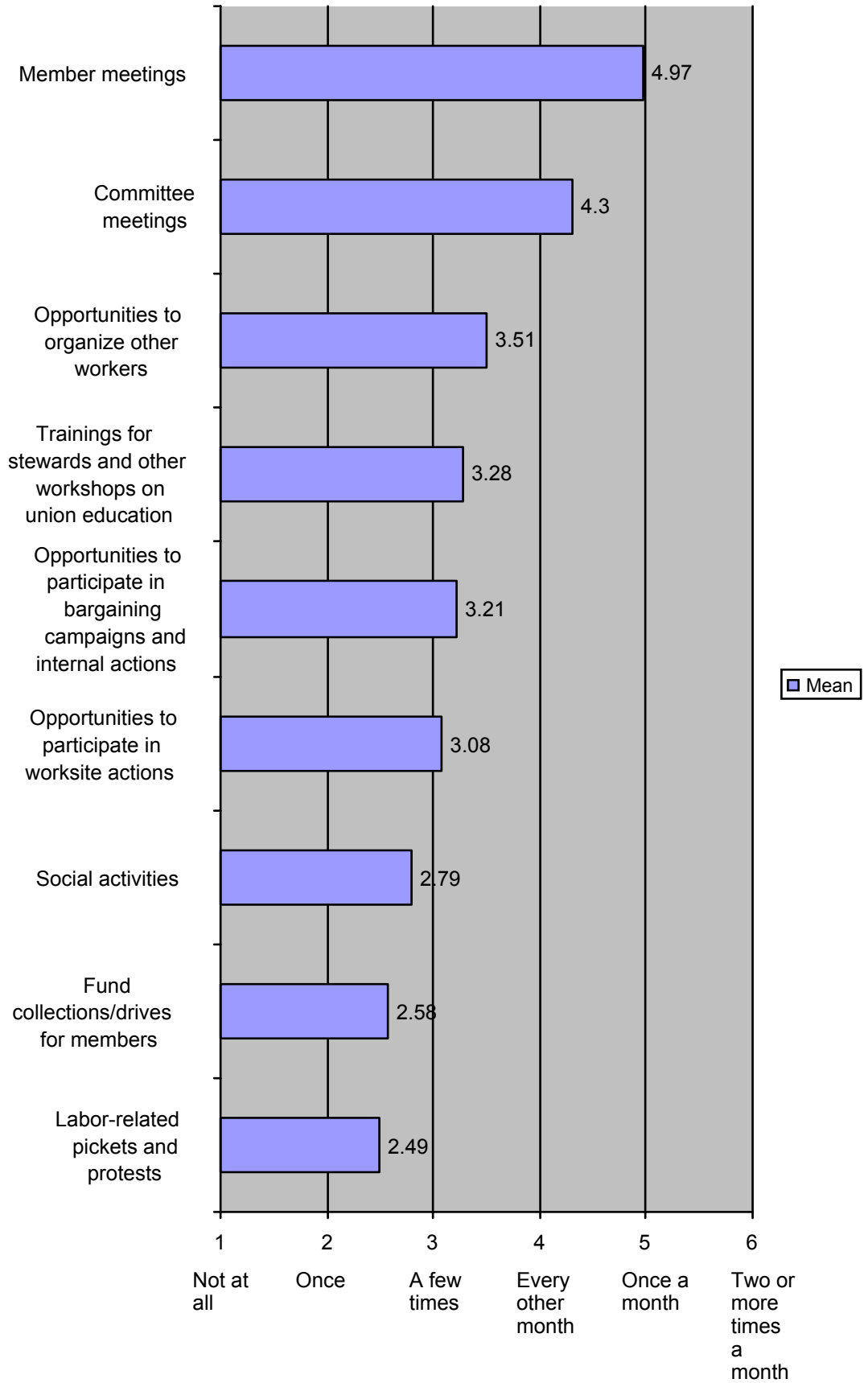


Figure 2. Frequency of Internal Activities, in the last year

Table 2. Other measures of Internal Activity

Variable	N	Freq.	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Stewards <i>per capita</i>	36	-	0.00	19.48	5.28	4.87
Estimate of <i>percentage</i> membership meeting participation	40	-	1.00	40.00	11.67	10.54
Estimate of <i>percentage</i> membership committee participation	39	-	0.00	17.50	5.17	5.04
Estimate of <i>percentage</i> membership participation in last union election	39	-	10.00	100.00	45.33	25.02
Frequency of contract renewal, <i>in years</i>	38	-	1.00	6.00	3.39	0.87
Number of grievances pending <i>per capita</i>	38	-	0.00	106.67	6.26	19.40
Were they reported to members at meetings?	40	35	-	-	-	-
Number of Functional Committees <i>per capita</i>	40	-	0.00	6.25	1.18	1.28

since these numbers may not typically be measured and kept by union leaders in the ways that the other numbers are (they are merely best guesses). High scores on the IA suggest a high level, or greater frequency, of union-sponsored internal activities during the past year. The highest possible IA score is 17, and the minimum is 1. Out of all the participating unions, the maximum IA score was 9.89, and the minimum score was 3.33. The average level of internal democratic activity was 6.88, SD = 1.71, or 40.5%. For a

graphic depiction of these findings and a comparison with other activity composites, see figure 5.

#### *Nonelectoral Political Democratic Activity*

The nonelectoral political activity with the highest mean rating was the discussion of current issues occurring either at union meetings or other union-sponsored events ( $M = 4.63$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ). This activity reportedly happened, on average, between every other month (4) and once a month (5). For a graphic depiction of all nonelectoral political activities and their frequencies, see figure 3.

Additional measures of nonelectoral political democratic activities included whether or not the local had a subscription to the regional union newspaper *The Labor Beacon*, or if that local union had its own newsletter. Either of these media venues have traditionally been opportunities for regional, state, and federal issues and ideas beyond those pertaining to internal governance to be presented. Out of all 40 participating unions, 29 (or 72.5%) reported having a subscription to the *Beacon*, and 27 (67.5%) reported having their own newsletter. Eleven unions (27.5%) reported not having a *Beacon* subscription and 13 (32.5%) did not have their own newsletter. Three unions reported having neither, and 19 reported having both media sources.

The above indicators of nonelectoral political democratic activities were combined to create the Nonelectoral Political Activities variable (NPA). Specifically, NPA was scored by taking a mean composite for items 25 – 35 and adding points based on the answers to items 36 and 37, adjusted by per capita membership. High scores on the NPA suggest a high level, or greater frequency, of union-sponsored, nonelectoral

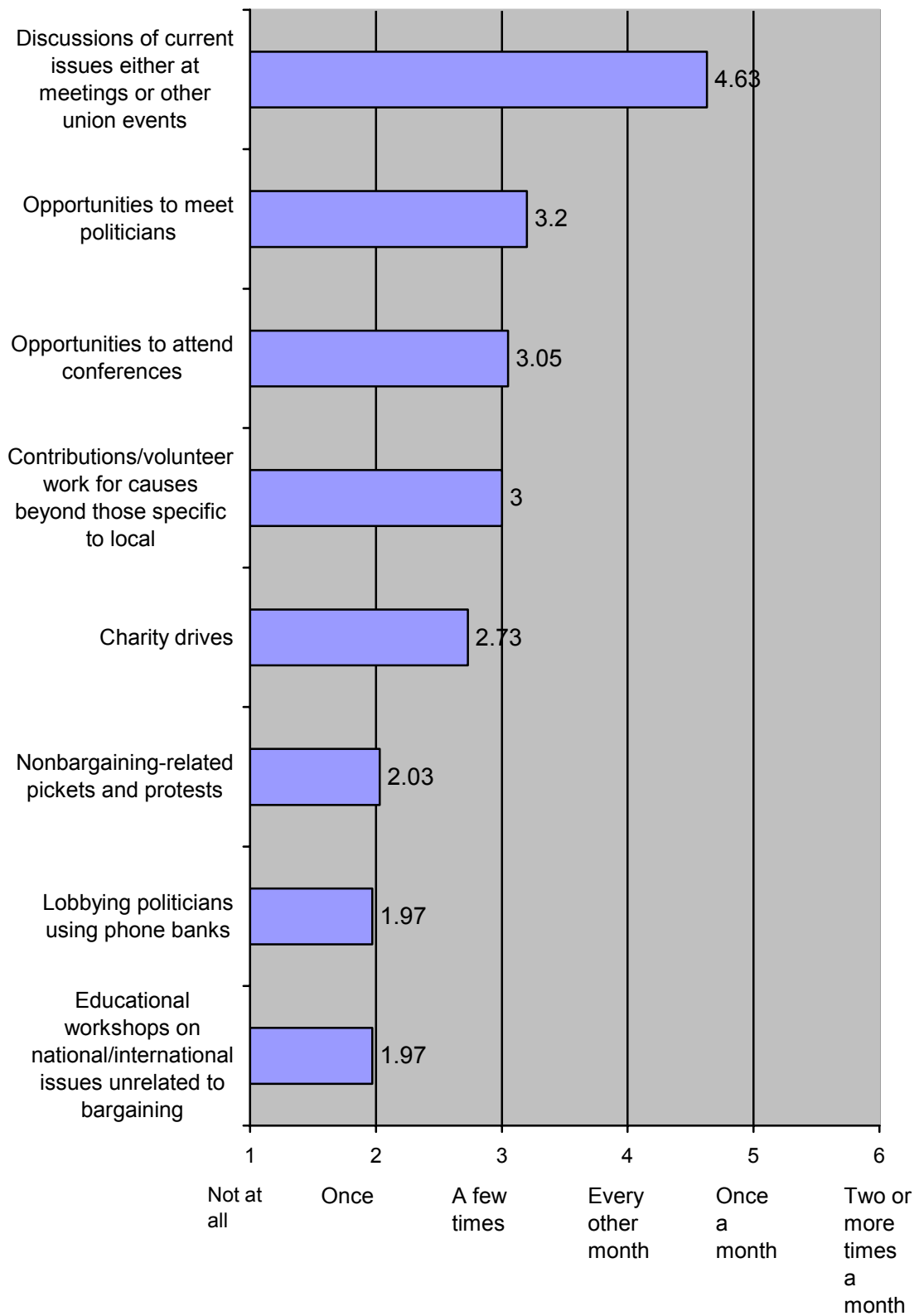


Figure 3. Frequency of Nonelectoral Political Activities, in the last year

political activities during the past year. The highest possible NPA score is 8, and the minimum is 1. Out of all the participating unions, the maximum NPA score was 6.14, and the minimum score was 1.75. The average level of nonelectoral political democratic activity was 4.26, SD = 1.08, or 53.3%. For a graphic depiction of these findings and a comparison with other activity composites, see figure 5.

### *Electoral Democratic Activity*

The average electoral democratic activities rated highest in frequency include voter registration (M = 3.62, SD = 1.62), hand-outs of campaign literature (M = 3.38, SD = 1.60), get-out-the-vote drives (M = 3.12, SD = 1.67), and the placement/handing out of yard campaign signs (M = 3.03, SD = 1.61). These activities were reported as being offered between a few times a year (3) and every other month (4). For a graphic depiction of all electoral activities and their frequencies, see figure 4.

Additional measures of electoral democratic activity included whether or not the local union had organizations that got family members involved in electoral activities (15 did out of 39, or 38.46%); whether or not the local union had an active retiree organization (23 did out of 40, or 57.5%); and whether or not the local union had members handing out candidate endorsements at the polls (21 did out of 39, or 53.85%).

Another measure of electoral democratic activity included an estimate by the union leader of how many members voted in the last general election. Out of 40 participating unions, 29 leaders responded. The average estimate of the percentage of turnout by union members in the last general election was 47.81% (SD = 20.70), ranging from a high of 90% to a low of 10%. Although this average estimated turnout is higher

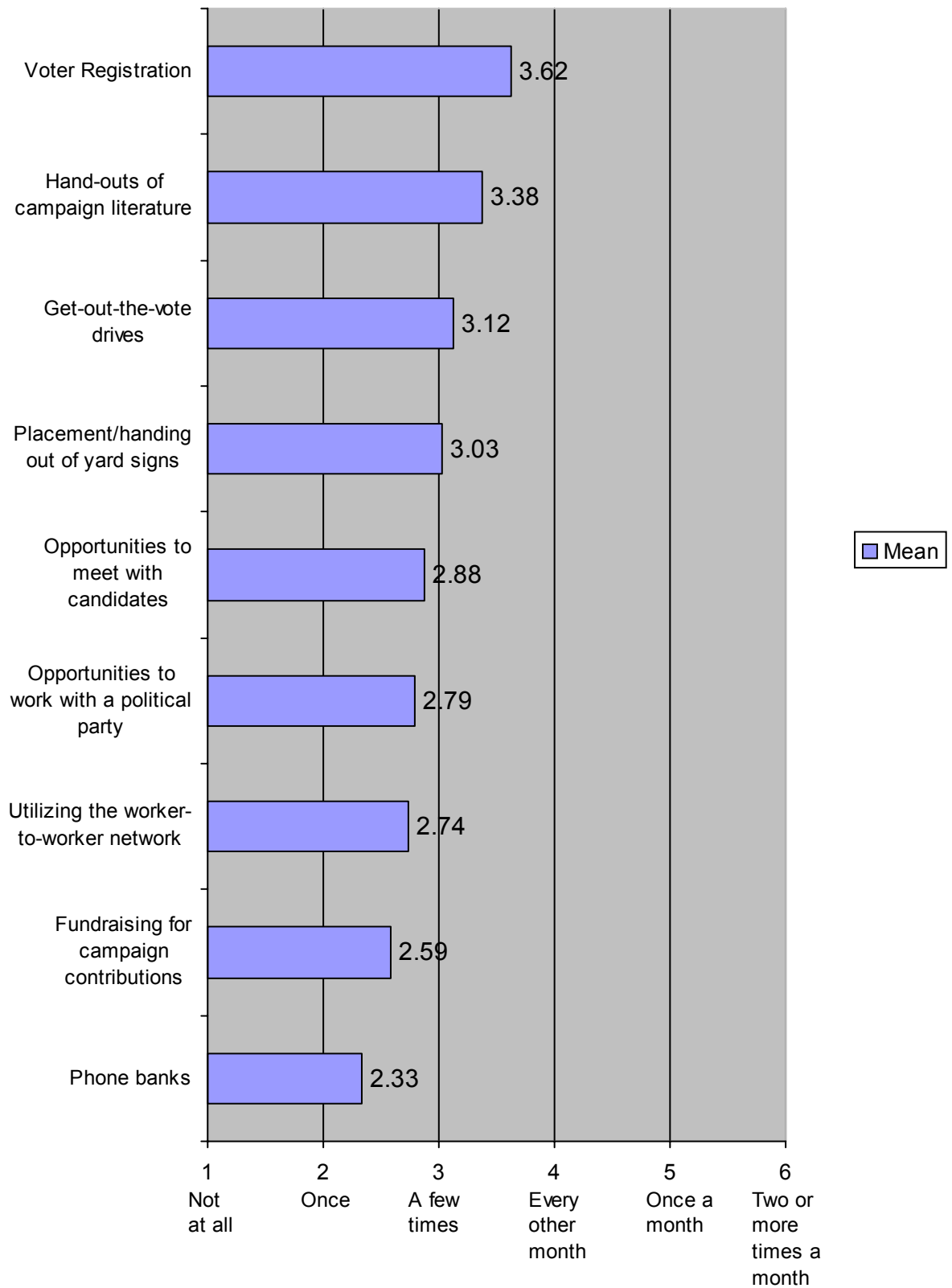


Figure 4. Frequency of Electoral Activities, in the last year

than the national average for the 2002 general election (M = 39.51%, according to M.

McDonald, 2005), it is only moderately so.

The above indicators of electoral democratic activities were combined to create the Electoral Activities variable (EA). Specifically, the EA was scored by taking a mean composite for items 38 – 49 and adding points based on the answers to items 50 – 52, adjusted by per capita membership. Estimates of percentage of membership turnout in the last general election were not incorporated, since these numbers were originally meant to supplement a dependent variable (see discussion section on archival data for a detailed explanation). High scores on the EA suggest a high level, or greater frequency, of union-sponsored, electoral activities during the 2002 election season. The highest possible EA score is 9, and the minimum is 1. Out of all the participating unions, the maximum EA score was 8.67, and the minimum score was 1.00. The average level of electoral democratic activity was 4.42,  $SD = 1.99$ , or 49.1%. For a graphic depiction of these findings and a comparison with other activity composites, see figure 5.

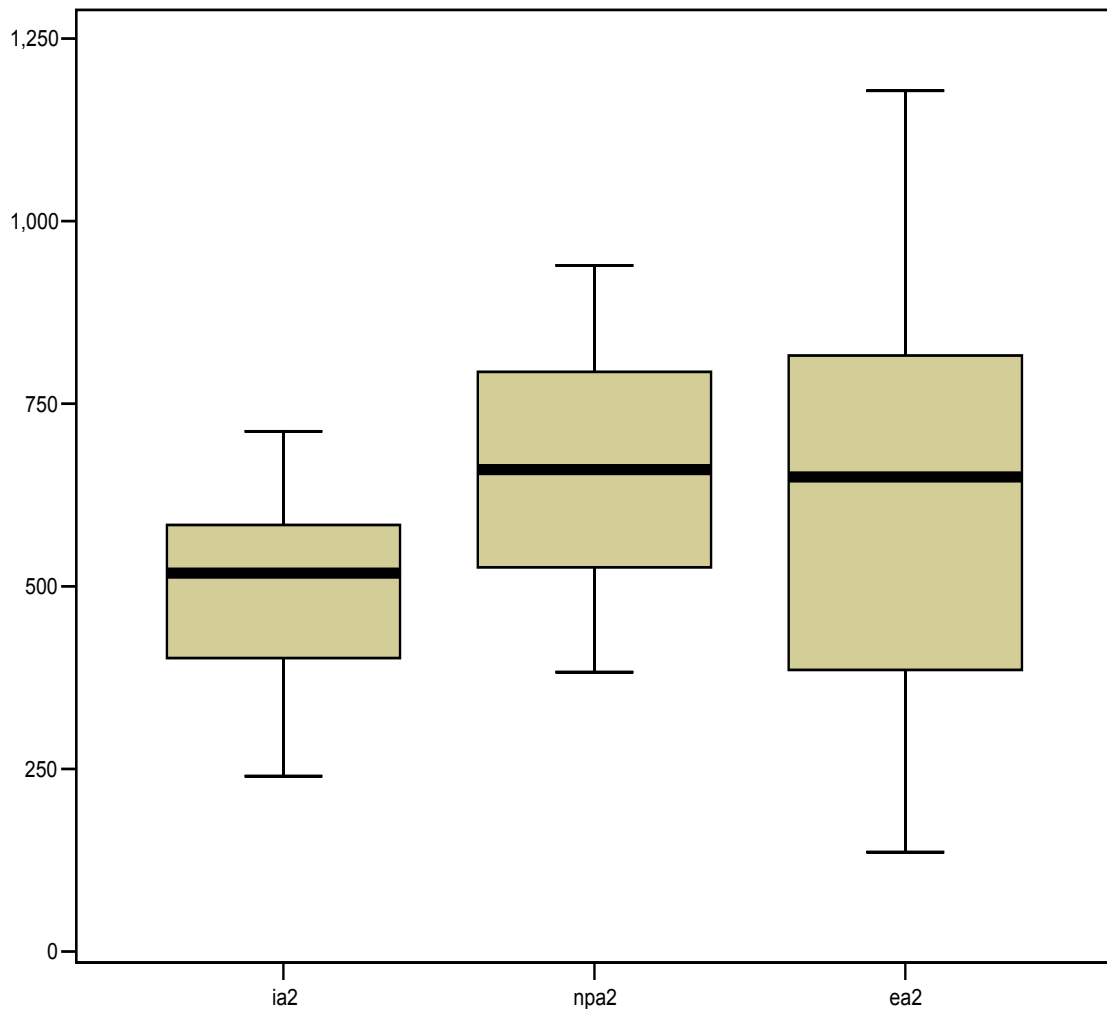


Figure 5. Levels of Democratic Activities (Internal Activities, Nonelectoral Political Activities, and Electoral Activities) as boxplots, with scale adjusted for comparison

*Overall Democratic Activity*

All three democratic activity variables (IA, NPA, and EA), were combined to create a simple measure of overall democratic activity (“DEMTOT”) for the sake of comparison. This variable is the sum of all three variables. The upper limit for DEMTOT is 24 and the lower limit is 3; the maximum score was 22.15 and the minimum



was 7.83. The average score for DEMTOT was 15.65 (SD = 3.13). This means that the average level of democratic activity across all 40 participating unions was at approximately 65.21%. For a graphic depiction of these findings, see figure 6.

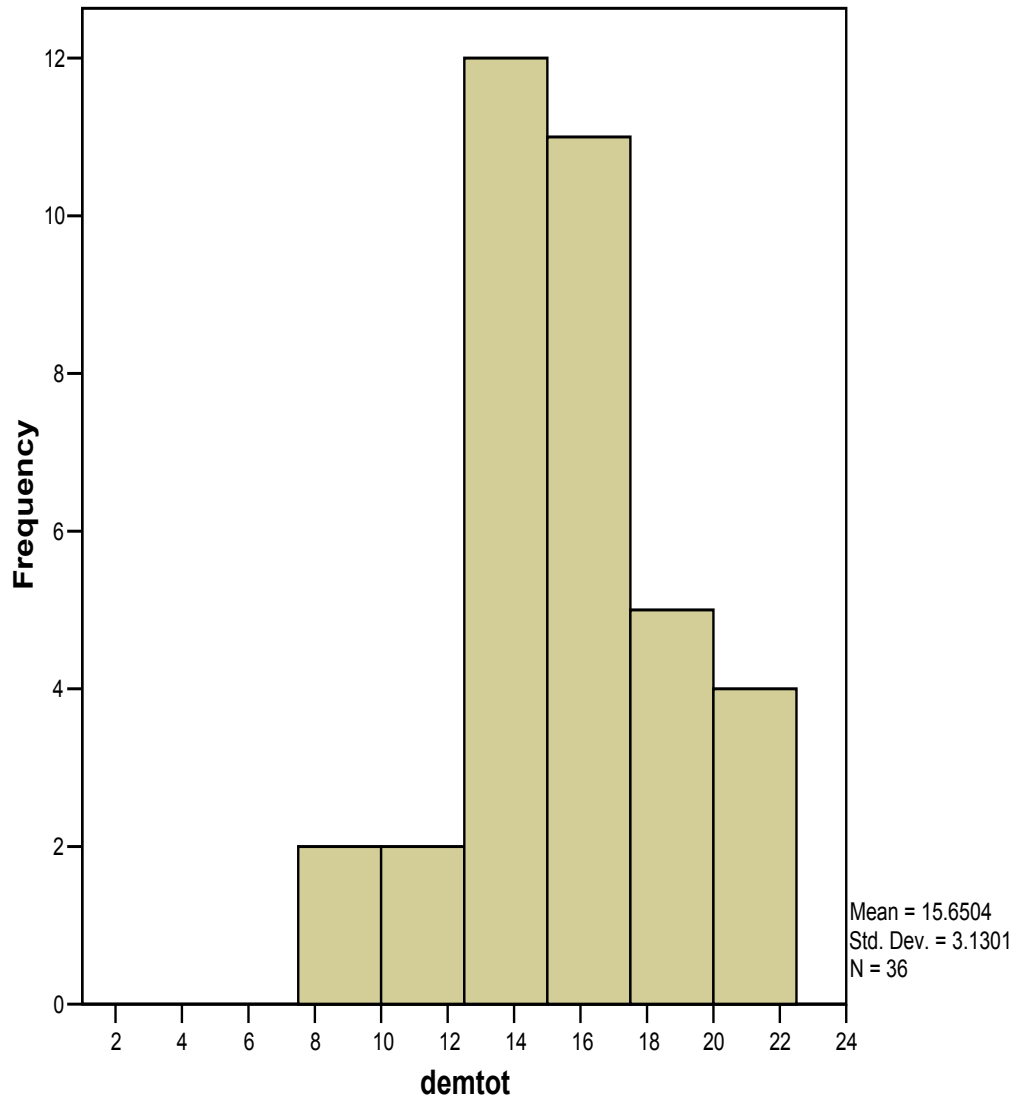


Figure 6. Distribution of Overall Democratic Activity (DEMTOT: maximum score = 24) across unions

## Relationships Between Demographics and Democratic Activity

In order to investigate what relationships exist, if any, between demographic variables and levels of democratic activities, simple and partial correlations (two-tailed Pearson product-moment correlations) were performed.

Neither gender nor racial and ethnic variables are correlated with levels of democratic activity. Male membership is correlated with the estimate of membership turnout to the 2002 general election ( $r = .492$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ): that is, election turnout estimates increase as male membership increases. A significant positive correlation was also found at the  $p < .05$  level between union size and: nonelectoral political activities ( $r = .441$ ); electoral activities ( $r = .458$ ); and overall democratic activity ( $r = .471$ ). There is no significant correlation between union size and internal activities. There are also no significant correlations between the general election turnout estimate and democratic activities.

In examining relationships between kinds of democratic activity, positive correlations were found between nonelectoral political activities and electoral activities at the  $p < .001$  level ( $r = .546$ ). No correlations were found between internal activities and either nonelectoral political activities or electoral activities.

To take a closer look at the relationships between union size and nonelectoral political activities and electoral activities, partial correlations were performed. When controlling for any variation shared with size, there is a large, significant, positive correlation between nonelectoral political activities and electoral activities ( $r = .432$ ,  $p = .006$ ). When holding either activity type constant, the significant correlations disappear. This means that any shared variance between nonelectoral political activities and union size is

a result of the relationship between nonelectoral political activities and electoral activities. The same is said for electoral activities, that any shared variance with union size can only be explained as a result of the relationship between electoral activities and nonelectoral political activities. Finally, the relationship between union size and overall democratic activity can also be directly attributed to the fact that overall democratic activity is a conglomerate of nonelectoral political and electoral activities (in particular because internal activities, the only other element of overall democratic activity, is not correlated with union size). For a visual depiction of all correlations performed, see tables 3, 4, and 5.

#### A Word on Statistical Power

The correlations reported in this section vary widely on the number of respondents (since not all participants answered every question), and make it difficult to provide a uniform assessment of power, or the probability of discovering that any correlation is statistically different from a zero correlation. As a general reference point for these analyses, listed below are the criterion correlation sizes, or critical values of  $r$ , for the largest and smallest sample sizes at three significance levels.

For a sample of 40, the criterion correlation size needed to reach significance at the .10 level is .264; at the .05 level is .312; and at the .01 level is .403.

For a sample of 28, the criterion correlation size needed to reach significance at the .10 level is .317; at the .05 level is .374; and at the .01 level is .479.

Table 3. Correlations of union demographics

Variables:		Size	Female	Caucasian	African American	Asian American	Hispanic/Latino	Native American	Other
Size	r		.217	-.046	.030	.045	.078	-.144	.124
	Sig.		.198	.794	.864	.794	.650	.403	.470
	N		37	35	35	36	36	36	36
Female	r	.217		<b>-.633</b>	<b>.726</b>	.320	-.089	-.040	.262
	Sig.	.198		<b>.000</b>	<b>.000</b>	.061	.612	.818	.129
	N	37		<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	35	35	35	35
Caucasian	r	-.046	<b>-.633</b>		<b>-.910</b>	<b>-.593</b>	<b>-.559</b>	-.258	-.267
	Sig.	.794	<b>.000</b>		<b>.000</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>.000</b>	.134	.121
	N	35	<b>34</b>		<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	35	35
African American	r	.030	<b>.726</b>	<b>-.910</b>		<b>.415</b>	.225	.009	.095
	Sig.	.864	<b>.000</b>	<b>.000</b>		<b>.013</b>	.193	.959	.586
	N	35	<b>34</b>	<b>35</b>		<b>35</b>	35	35	35
Asian American	r	.045	.320	<b>-.593</b>	<b>.415</b>		.307	<b>.647</b>	<b>.371</b>
	Sig.	.794	.061	<b>.000</b>	<b>.013</b>		.069	<b>.000</b>	<b>.026</b>
	N	36	35	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>		36	<b>36</b>	<b>36</b>
Hispanic/Latino	r	.078	-.089	<b>-.559</b>	.225	.307		.301	.224
	Sig.	.650	.612	<b>.000</b>	.193	.069		.074	.189
	N	36	35	<b>35</b>	35	36		36	36
Native American	r	-.144	-.040	-.258	.009	<b>.647</b>	.301		<b>.539</b>
	Sig.	.403	.818	.134	.959	<b>.000</b>	.074		<b>.001</b>
	N	36	35	35	35	<b>36</b>	36		<b>36</b>
Other	r	.124	.262	-.267	.095	<b>.371</b>	.224	<b>.539</b>	
	Sig.	.470	.129	.121	.586	<b>.026</b>	.189	<b>.001</b>	
	N	36	35	35	35	<b>36</b>	36	<b>36</b>	

Note: Numbers in **Bold** indicate significance.

Table 4. Correlations of union demographics and activities

Variables:		Size	Male	Caucasian	Gen. Election	IA	NPA	EA	DEMTOT
Size	r		-.217	-.046	-.276	.050	<b>.441</b>	<b>.458</b>	<b>.471</b>
	Sig.		.198	.794	.147	.772	<b>.004</b>	<b>.003</b>	<b>.004</b>
	N		37	35	29	29	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>36</b>
Male	r	-.217		<b>.633</b>	<b>.492</b>	-.168	.069	.267	.126
	Sig.	.198		<b>.000</b>	<b>.008</b>	.350	.684	.110	.485
	N	37		<b>34</b>	<b>28</b>	33	37	37	33
Caucasian	r	-.046	<b>.633</b>		.212	-.135	-.011	.166	.016
	Sig.	.794	<b>.000</b>		.288	.468	.949	.340	.932
	N	35	<b>34</b>		27	31	35	35	31
General Election	r	-.276	<b>.492</b>	.212		-.169	-.026	.263	-.118
	Sig.	.147	<b>.008</b>	.288		.411	.893	.168	.566
	N	29	<b>28</b>	27		26	29	29	26
IA	r	.050	-.168	-.135	-.169		-.166	.066	.532
	Sig.	.772	.350	.468	.411		.334	.703	.001
	N	29	33	31	26		36	36	36
NPA	r	<b>.441</b>	.069	-.011	-.026	-.166		<b>.546</b>	.572
	Sig.	<b>.004</b>	.684	.949	.893	.334		<b>.000</b>	.000
	N	<b>40</b>	37	35	29	36		<b>40</b>	36
EA	r	<b>.458</b>	.267	.166	.263	.066	<b>.546</b>		<b>.837</b>
	Sig.	<b>.003</b>	.110	.340	.168	.703	<b>.000</b>		<b>.000</b>
	N	<b>40</b>	37	35	29	36	<b>40</b>		<b>36</b>
DEMTOT	r	<b>.471</b>	.126	.016	-.118	.532	<b>.572</b>	<b>.837</b>	
	Sig.	<b>.004</b>	.485	.932	.566	.001	<b>.000</b>	<b>.000</b>	
	N	<b>36</b>	33	31	26	36	<b>36</b>	<b>36</b>	

Note: Numbers in **Bold** indicate significance.

Table 5. Partial correlations between union Size, Nonelectoral Political Activity (NPA), and Electoral Activity (EA)

Control Variable:	Variables In:		Size	NPA	EA
EA	Size	r	-	.256	-
		Sig.		.116	
		N		37	
	NPA	r	.256	-	-
		Sig.	.116		
		N	37		
NPA	Size	r	-	-	.289
		Sig.			.075
		N			37
	EA	r	.289	-	-
		Sig.	.075		
		N	37		
Size	NPA	r	-	-	<b>.432</b>
		Sig.			<b>.006</b>
		N			<b>37</b>
	EA	r	-	<b>.432</b>	-
		Sig.		<b>.006</b>	
		N		<b>37</b>	

Note: Numbers in **Bold** indicate significance.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### Conclusions

The purpose of the current study was to explore both organizational components and demographic variables of Kansas City area local labor unions to assess the ways in which unions were providing opportunities for democratic activity. General findings organized by research question are below.

- *What is the gender and racial/ethnic composition of Kansas City union locals?*

This sample of 40 unions contains some organizations that are highly diverse in gender and racial/ethnic representation, but overall the membership is still homogeneously White and male, and the more White, the more male these unions tend to be (and vice versa).

- *To what extent do Kansas City area labor unions engage in democratic activities, i.e., What is the political landscape of Kansas City locals?*
- *How do local unions vary in detail based on the hypothesized ideal model of internal, nonelectoral political, and electoral activities (Figure 1)?*

Area locals spend their time mainly concentrating on membership meetings and committee meetings, discussing current issues at union meetings and events, creating opportunities to meet with politicians, voter registration, and handing out campaign literature. They are on average spending the least amount of their time on fund drives for members, labor-related pickets and protests, lobbying politicians using phone banks,

hosting educational workshops on national and international issues, fundraising for campaign contributions, and phone banks for elections.

Average levels of internal democratic activity based on the survey measurement were at approximately 40.5% of maximum activity; some unions reported as high as 58.18% and others as low as 19.59%. Average levels of nonelectoral political activity were at 53.3% of maximum activity, from a high of 76.75% to a low of 21.88%. Average levels of electoral activity were reported at 49.1%, with some unions as high as 96.3% and others as low as 11.11%. Thus, unions on average are spending their time on nonelectoral political activities, electoral activities, and internal activities in that order.

Correlations between internal activities and both nonelectoral political and electoral activities were not statistically significant. Nonelectoral political activities and electoral activities were found to be positively correlated so that those engaging in nonelectoral political activity are also highly likely to engage in electoral activity.

When all democratic activities were combined, the average level of overall democratic activity across local unions measured 65.21%. The highest level of overall democratic activity recorded was 92.29%, and the lowest was 32.63%.

- *How are demographic variables related to organizational activities?*

Correlations between gender and racial/ethnic variables and democratic activities were not statistically significant. Union size was found to be positively correlated with both nonelectoral political activities and electoral activities such that, as union size increases, we see an increase in nonelectoral political activities as well as electoral activities.

However, this correlation between activities and union size is contingent on the combination of activities – when controlling for either activity type using a partial



correlation, the correlation with size diminishes. Correlations between internal activities and both gender and race were not statistically significant. Finally, gender and estimates of membership turnout in the national 2002 general election were found to be positively correlated; unions with a higher proportion of males were estimated to turn out a higher percentage of their members at the polls.

## Implications

### *For Labor Unions*

The major implication from this study for local labor unions is in regards to the larger context of union decline and divided attentions. When the study first began, many labor leaders interested in participating did so because they felt that local unions were primarily investing their time and efforts in internal activities, and thus isolating themselves and their members from the larger political world. This was a problem, they thought, because unions cannot afford to ignore the sociopolitical factors that can either support or discourage the growth of organized labor. By examining only the measure of specific activity levels, the leaders' hunches seem to be borne out: more time is spent overall on internal activities.

However, once other measures of democratic activity are taken into account (including contract renewal, steward representation, committee participation, grievance procedures, access to media, and organizations that engage nonunion members in electoral activities), the picture changes. Instead, internal activities appear to become the last priority, and nonelectoral political activities appear to take primacy. In addition,

when member meetings and committee meetings, being on average the most frequent internal activity (at 4.97 and 4.3, respectively), are compared with the estimates by labor leaders of participation levels, the news for locals is worse. The average estimate for percentage membership meeting participation was 11.67, and for committee participation, 5.17. Thus, simply because the locals are providing opportunities, we cannot assume that union members are attending and/or participating (an important qualification that must be made for all of the results reported here).

This state of affairs supports the researcher's experience that unions as autonomous organizations are failing in Kansas City. During this study, the researcher worked hard to gain entrée with various factions of the labor community and came across multiple stumbling blocks. Most difficult was the competition within the local labor culture. Some major schisms and rifts between groups of unions had occurred recently before the study began, and appeared to be centered on the personalities of a few leaders. The built-in support structure of area labor councils seemed to be in jeopardy, and individual unions were being forced to take sides. A contentious election for a labor council president added fuel to this fire.

In addition, as the local economy changed over the course of this study, local unions seemed to disappear. Many unions just previously in existence were completely unreachable for this study, leaving no trace behind. The potential participant list shrank by about 40% over a matter of months. This situation is consistent with trends in labor organizations across the country.

In light of these data and the patterns found in previous research regarding declining strength and momentum, an important consideration for these unions and the

labor community at large is to bring the focus back to the internal organization and the health and maintenance of internal democracy. These unions and their supporting structures may have felt so compelled to attend mainly to the external political context that their own wellness and existence has suffered. Further research with more unions may in fact bear this out: in this study, a nonsignificant negative correlation does exist between internal activities and nonelectoral political activities, suggesting that with a larger sample size, a negative linear relationship may be evident. Such a shift in focus would require labor leaders to face the music, that their own infighting and insistence on politicking may be distracting from the collective union cause, and that they might have to set aside personal differences in order to save the labor movement, in Kansas City as well as the U.S. In the end, it may be the better gamble to invest in bolstering local unions first; as the previous literature showed, the Sisyphean requirements of political action have hardly seemed to pay off.

Despite these findings, local unions in Kansas City can be proud of their levels of overall democratic activity: they are finding numerous and frequent avenues to engage their members with the democratic process. It must be said, then, that although more democracy is better for the nation, for unions to benefit it must be in all the right places.

In addressing any implications regarding demographic data, the conclusion to be drawn by the positive correlation between male membership and the general election estimate might suggest that more males (and thus white males) will lead to greater voter turnout. However, we can also interpret this link as a result of homogeneity, that the more similar your membership, the greater the comfort a leader might have in predicting behavior for the group. In addition, as we learned in the literature review, actual behavior

once the members get to the polls is unpredictable and so an argument of strength-in-numbers is hard to make. Another consideration related to demographic variables is that although this sample may not be representative of national gender and racial/ethnic populations, it may be representative of the local industries these unions represent. Thus, without further inquiry, conclusions and implications for unions surrounding gender and racial/ethnic demographics are tenuous at best.

#### *For Other Mediating Structures*

A contiguous aim for this study is that these findings can contribute to existing knowledge about mediating structures, how they work, what they look like, and be put to use by nonlabor organizations that are mission-driven. Such organizations comprise the not-for-profit sector, also known as the voluntary sector, where humanitarian causes are the *raison d'être* but often are not integrated in the organizational culture or internal structures and processes. Although these organizations are precluded from participating directly in partisan politics, they can approach the democratic process more generally, and by emulating local union activities, this is possible. In particular, by focusing on those activities that unions reported spending most time on, and/or choosing activities that are less partisan in nature. These activities and structures include member meetings, committee meetings, regular communication through various media, inclusion of other voices via committees, grievance procedures, practice with negotiations and actions for collective power, and connecting members to external power players.

In addition, this glimpse into the organizational life of a mediating structure highlights important considerations for all community groups working for change. That

is, it can be extremely difficult to attend adequately to both internal functioning and external action. Sustaining a democracy, even on a small scale, can be labor-intensive. To take on additional charges such as voter mobilization, political education, lobbying, fund-raising, and more, may require further support and supplemental structures. No organization can do it alone, no matter how well intentioned or knowledgeable. Also, having a larger organization may aid in the external efforts (more people power), but may not facilitate internal processes of decision-making as well.

A final recommendation of this author is for nonlabor organizations to reconcile the labor concept that democratic processes for the participation of organization members is integral to larger humanitarian missions. By honing the topic of dialogue to organizational components and activities tied to results rather than divisive ideology or partisan politics, perhaps these non-for-profits can begin to see some common ground in instrumentality and function.

### Limitations

Community research often presents major challenges to design, methodology, and follow-through. This study is no exception. Although some labor leaders were involved in the creation and implementation of the study and worked hard to boost participation, many elements steered the study in unintended directions. Below is a brief description of some of these elements.

### *Methodological Issues*

As discussed above, this study is reliant only on self-report data from the survey. It is also based on a smaller population than was originally expected. In addition, the eventual response rate of 50% raises questions regarding the generalizability of any results, limited the range of potential analyses, made many correlations nonsignificant, and presents a possible selection bias in those unions who chose to participate. On one item, the response dipped as low as 28 out of 40 (this was the estimate of general election turnout, which mentioned earlier was expected to be low and meant to supplement objective archival data). With only names and addresses of the nonparticipating unions, this researcher can discern no pattern of bias, which is not to say one doesn't exist.

Due to personal circumstances, the timeliness of the current study's completion and write-up were not ideal. The labor community in Kansas City has already changed much, and in addition our nation has undergone some spectacular events surrounding elections and democratic activities in the time since this study began, including a steep rise in voter turnout for presidential elections. Finally, the survey measure itself has not been validated (although it was piloted) and is not easily transferable across other organizations for comparison.

### *Archival Data*

Perhaps most obvious and discouraging is the fact that this researcher set out to learn much more about the local labor community in Kansas City. The initial conception of this study was to gather appropriate data to set up a multiple regression equation such that the self-report data from the surveys might be matched with an objective dependent

variable of voter turnout for each local union. The hope was that a predictive equation for high voter turnout could be constructed based on demographic variables and types of democratic activity. The voter turnout data exist and are housed by the national AFL-CIO. The researcher had received verbal agreement for access to these archival data, contingent upon particular protocol being followed to obtain participating locals' written consent on an information release form (this form was included in every survey packet; see appendix H). Despite the fact that consent from most participants was obtained (36 of 40 participating unions signed and returned the information release form), the data were not made available. Even after numerous persistent attempts by the researcher and labor leaders, high interest from participating parties, as well as the promise of a highly beneficial learning outcome for organized labor, the voter turnout data were never delivered.

The final compromise for this study was thus to describe organizational characteristics and activities using only survey data, with the hope that at the least, such information would be useful for other organizations to spur democratic participation, as well as important feedback for the Kansas City labor community (as a rare peek inside their locals).

This turn of events highlights another challenge faced by this researcher. The local labor community in Kansas City proved to be especially reluctant and therefore difficult to research. As mentioned previously, the shifting political climate in addition to the shrinking local union population made establishing trust and finding a working population for participation hard. Also, within the labor community nationally, there is an historic mistrust of outsiders, particularly researchers, because of the damage done in

the past by antiunion activists. The fight organized labor has faced throughout its life in America by infiltration and direct confrontation has been well documented (Levitt & Toczynski, 1993; Norwood, 2002), and academic researchers and professionals are often found on the side of antiunion forces. In addition, workers have risked their own lives to see the union movement continue, and therefore a small bit of research for a student's master's thesis seems to hardly be worth the threat posed by sharing information. For these reasons, the researcher worked hard to illustrate the usefulness of this study for organized labor, to prove she is a sympathetic voice for the union movement, and to find strong allies within the community. Retrospectively, it seems a powerful testament to that groundwork and the vision of allies and participants that even this much knowledge was achieved.

In the end, these lessons learned lead to an important caveat about the current study: the information reported here could do more harm than good for the state of organized labor. This study contains a bird's eye's glimpse into working locals and how they spend their time, and such information might be very useful for antiunion efforts. Being aware of this, the researcher will thus be highly intentional in the way this information is disseminated, and to whom.

#### Directions for Future Researchers

Future research surrounding local labor unions as mediating structures in the democratic process would be well advised – a wealth of information is still to be learned about plugging in citizens to structures of power and distribution. First, creating a survey that is internally valid would be useful for next steps. Also, J. Ance (personal



communication, August 6, 2002) has suggested that in-depth qualitative research to be done about locals and democratic participation, so that the union movement can know more about what's happening "on the ground." To date, even union insiders are unsure of how business is handled from local to local because of their guarded nature.

A clear direction from this experience is for any future researcher to get directly and intimately involved with the national AFL-CIO system, because they are the ultimate gatekeepers of information on local unions, to which they hold tight. In addition, working for a union or a labor council and doing research specifically for that organization would grant any researcher much more access to participants and information. Such insider work would also allow a researcher to be more participatory in her approaches.

Finally, the implications of this research could be greatly enhanced by a connection to existing civic education literature as well as organizational theory.

Organizational theory, specifically in the area of management and administration studies, has recently had much favorable to say about internal democracy and the participation of workers/organizational members. Scholars have examined practical and theoretical rationales for such forms. For example, Collins (1997) explored ethical foundations from political, economic, and organizational theory, as well as recent public sentiment against autocracy, to make the case for participatory management structures. Cafferata (1982) used a model of embryonics to illustrate how bureaucracy and democracy in organizations may develop in dialectical patterns. In a thorough review of the literature on organizational democracy to date, Dow (2003) argued that participatory management and worker control is best for capitalism, not inimical to it.

Researchers have also studied living examples of democratic organizations for information on how they evolve and what implications arise for all parties involved. Rothschild and Whitt (1986) studied contemporary cooperatives to determine what exemplars of democratic organization look like, and under what conditions these forms might flourish or fail. Using a brief anecdote from the perspective of a real-life manager, Spragins (2004) shows her readers the inside of a participatory business organization and how the workers' good will can become the company's good fortune.

Lastly, some of the most persuasive literature has detailed specific methods and structures to be employed when democratizing the workplace. In Nigro and Bellone's 1979 article, "Participatory Management: Making it Work," the authors cataloged four management approaches on a continuum of power sharing, described the payoffs and drawbacks of each, and suggested the contexts in which each might fit best. Manville and Ober (2003) used the example of the ancient Athenian polis to extract particular democratic structures, values, and practices to be employed in contemporary workplaces. The current study of Labor unions and the activities can make an important contribution in this area to the understanding of how internal organizational democracy might be fostered, and what is involved in the day-to-day to engage members. In addition, it would be important to investigate the implications of management-driven democratization in the workplace on union efforts and roles.

The field of civic education has also addressed the link between organizations and democracy. Two major areas of study seem to emerge from the body of literature, one that focuses on a concept known as *political socialization* as a process undergone by

individuals that is mediated by particular structures, and one that focuses on organizations themselves as potential stewards of democracy.

Recent literature on political socialization has worked to expand the definition of the concept that was originally developed in 1959 by Herbert Hyman, and to apply the concept to current trends in civic education (Dudley & Gitelson, 2002). For example, Kirlin (2002) used the concept along with empirical findings showing that adolescent participation in organizations is predictive of adult civic engagement to argue for service learning programs that include the building of civic skills. Flanagan (2003) explored the concept using a developmental psychology lens, dissecting the values and beliefs involved in the process. Future research on local labor unions would do well to look more closely at those mechanisms through which members become socialized politically, and exactly how that process works.

Literature on organizations involved in civic education and engagement has been concerned mainly with the creation or rehabilitation of organizational forms to promote increased citizen participation. For example, Connor (2003) suggested that community support organizations, or CSOs, be created as impartial, ever-present facilitators of collaboration between local efforts for engagement and development. Gibson (2004) advocated the launch of a “civic renewal movement” to be driven by broad-based, national organizations with local chapters, and whose agendas are not focused on issues, but the democratic process instead. Finally, in a seminal work on community organizing, Tjerandsen (1980) detailed the Emil Schwarzhaupt foundation’s attempts to engage marginalized groups in the political process, and documented interactions with Saul Alinsky regarding the Community Service Organizations program, as well as endeavors

of the Highlander Center in citizen education. Many local labor unions are already involved in community collaborations and networks, in addition to national efforts for citizen engagement. Subsequent research might involve the examination of these partnerships in the context of civic education and the connection to process-based movements.

Pursuing further inquiry in either of these directions could shed new and revealing light on the research contained here, and expand the importance of understanding local labor unions as mediating structures for democratic participation.

APPENDIX A.

Initial contact letter  
(On Appropriate Letterhead)

May XX, 2003

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

A few days from now you will receive in the mail a request to fill out a brief survey for an important research project being conducted by Ms. Carrie E. Hanlin, a graduate student at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, in collaboration with our office.

The study is exploring the role of local union-sponsored activities on member voter turnout. The survey asks about the local union you currently lead, and some of the activities that your local sponsors for its members. You will also be asked to sign a waiver to release your local's voter turnout numbers, collected by the AFL-CIO, to her for the purpose of this research.

Ms. Hanlin will ensure that individual surveys will be viewed by her alone, and kept in a secure location. No names of leaders or unions will be released, or paired with survey or voting data. Finally, all information provided by you and the AFL-CIO will be kept **confidential**; only aggregate or group findings will be used in reports.

This study has also received the approval of both an interdepartmental supervisory committee to make sure that all standard confidentiality procedures are followed.

I am writing you in advance to request that you keep an eye out for the survey in your mail and take the time to complete it. I also want you to know how important I feel this project is for our unions. Using this survey, we can learn what kinds of activities are most important for getting members out to vote, and what kinds of activities we should most heavily concentrate on in the future to get Labor's voice heard. In light of current election outcomes, I can't think of work that is more necessary for organized labor, and for America.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

In solidarity,

<SIGNATURE>

APPENDIX B.

Survey packet cover letter  
(On UMKC Letterhead)

May XX, 2003

Dear Labor Leader,

A short time ago, you received a communication from \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_, informing you of a study I am conducting on local unions and political participation. Specifically, I am interested in learning what union-sponsored activities contribute to member voter turnout in a general election. My hope is that we will find out what local labor unions need to do to get members out to vote. As a local union leader, your input is essential to the success of this project.

Please complete and return the enclosed *Union Democratic Activities Survey*. The survey is easy to fill out and should take only 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Also, be sure to sign the information-release form for important voter turnout data. Without these data, we will not be able to know how best to increase voter turnout! Please return these materials no later than June 30, 2003. A stamped, addressed return envelope has been provided for your convenience.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose not to answer any specific survey item. Further, all information provided will be kept strictly confidential. No names of leaders or unions will be released, or paired with survey or voting data. Only aggregate or group findings will be used in reports. By completing and returning the survey you are agreeing to participate in this study. I will provide you with a summary of the results by October 30<sup>th</sup>.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, please call me at (816) 756-3824, or you can write to me at the address on the letterhead.

**Thank you** in advance for helping me with this important study. Information from this study will help to identify ways to increase union membership voter turnout.

In solidarity,

<SIGNATURE>

Carrie E. Hanlin  
Community Psychology Ph.D. Program  
University of Missouri-Kansas City

APPENDIX C.

Thank you/Reminder postcard

May XX, 2003

Last week you received the *Union Democratic Activities Survey* and were asked to participate in a study about the activities sponsored by your local union. You were chosen to receive this survey as the leader of a local labor union.

If you have already completed and returned the survey to me, please accept my sincere ***thanks***. If not, please do so today. I am especially grateful for your help because when people like you share your experience, we can come to understand how labor unions do what they do so well.

If you did not receive a survey, or if it was misplaced, please contact me today at (816) 756-3824, or email me at [hanlingirl@yahoo.com](mailto:hanlingirl@yahoo.com), and I will get another one in the mail to you right away.

Once again, ***thank you*** for your assistance with this project.

In solidarity,  
<SIGNATURE>  
Carrie E. Hanlin  
Community Psychology Ph.D. Program

## APPENDIX D.

### Telephone contact script

**PI:** Hello, my name is Carrie Hanlin from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Is this \_\_\_\_\_? During the last few weeks, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of labor council leader) and I sent you several mailings about an important study that I'm conducting. The study involves local labor unions and the activities that they sponsor for union members. Have you received any of these mailings? RESPONSE.

IF THEY'VE ALREADY MAILED BACK A SURVEY, THANKS AND GOODBYE.

Well, I'm looking at different kinds of activities that local unions sponsor for their members, and how these activities are related to membership voter turnout. I want to find ways for unions and other organizations to increase voter turnout, and I think that this study will give us a good clue.

I need your input to find out how we can increase voter turnout. I know you're very busy, but if you still have the survey, it would be great if you could fill it out and send it back to me. Or, if you don't have the survey anymore, I can send you another.

IF YES, THEN VERIFY ADDRESS AND THANK.

FOR ANSWERING MACHINES/VOICE MAIL:

Hi, my name is Carrie Hanlin from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and I am calling for \_\_\_\_\_. During the last few weeks, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of labor council leader) and I sent you several mailings about an important study I'm conducting to find out what kinds of union activities were related to member voter turnout in the 2002 general election. The outcomes of this study could help labor win important future elections, so your input is vital. I know you're busy, but if you still have the survey and information-release form, please fill them out and send them back to me. Just in case you've misplaced the survey or release form, I'll be sending you another set. If you have any questions, call me at 816.756.3824. Thanks for your time!



APPENDIX E.

Final contact cover letter  
(On UMKC Letterhead)

June XX, 2003

Dear Labor Leader,

During the last few weeks, you may have received several mailings and a telephone call regarding an important research study I am conducting about labor unions and political participation. The purpose of the study is to collect vital information from local labor unions about methods for increasing voter turnout. Specifically, the study examines the kinds of activities that are most important for getting members out to vote.

The study is drawing to a close, and this is the last contact that I will be making with local labor union leaders. You are receiving this letter because I have not yet received your completed survey or information-release form. If you have already completed and returned the survey and information-release form to me, please accept my sincere *thanks*. If not, please do so today. Remember, the accuracy of results from this study depends upon the participation of all local labor leaders in our area.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose not to answer any specific survey item. Further, all information provided will be kept strictly confidential. No names of leaders or unions will be released, or paired with survey or voting data. Only aggregate or group findings will be used in reports. By completing and returning the survey you are agreeing to participate in this study. A summary of the results will be available by October 30<sup>th</sup> at your labor council (or mailed directly to you if you are not a member of a local labor council).

If you have any questions or comments about this study, I would be happy to talk with you. The telephone number where I can be reached is (816) 756-3824, or you can write to me at the address on the letterhead.

Finally, I appreciate your consideration of my request as I conclude this effort to learn more about local labor unions, and how they have been successful in mobilizing their members to vote. *Thank you very much.*

In solidarity,  
<SIGNATURE>  
Carrie E. Hanlin  
Community Psychology Ph.D. Program  
University of Missouri-Kansas City

## APPENDIX F.

### Revised telephone script

Hello, is \_\_\_\_\_ available?

Hi, \_\_\_\_\_? My name is Carrie Hanlin, and I am a graduate student at UMKC. In May and June, I sent out surveys to local labor unions as part of my master's thesis. Do you remember receiving any of those mailings? ("Great" or other follow up.) I received a lot of surveys and was grateful for the response, but unfortunately I don't yet have enough to give me an accurate picture of organized labor in Kansas City.

As you may know, the study is about what activities labor unions sponsor for their members, and how the activities are related to voter turnout. The information that comes from this study could be very helpful for unions and our working families.

At this point, I'm asking for your help to finish the study. I'd like to send you another survey and information release form if you'd be willing to fill it out and send it back to me. The survey is short and should only take about 20 minutes of your time, and all postage is paid. Can I send you another survey?

If yes, verify address.

If no, inquire why.

Thank you so much for your time!

APPENDIX G.

Revised final contact cover letter  
(On UMKC Letterhead)

August XX, 2003

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_,

We recently spoke over the phone regarding the continuation of my study of local labor unions and voter turnout. As I told you then, I had sent out surveys in May and June to Kansas City labor unions as part of my master's thesis. I have received many surveys in return, but I do not yet have enough to get an accurate picture of organized labor in Kansas City. I am writing today to ask for your help in finishing the study. With your participation, I hope to learn what union-sponsored activities contribute most to member voter turnout in a general election. This way, we may find out how local labor unions can best spend their time and money to get members out to vote. As a local union leader, your input is essential to the success of this project.

Please complete and return the enclosed *Union Democratic Activities Survey*. The survey is easy to fill out and should take only 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Also, be sure to sign the information-release form for important voter turnout data. This form will be submitted to the Regional AFL-CIO office. Without these data, we will not be able to know how best to increase voter turnout! Please return these materials no later than September 12, 2003. A stamped, addressed return envelope has been provided for your convenience.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose not to answer any specific survey item. Further, all information provided will be kept strictly confidential. No names of leaders or unions will be released, or paired with survey or voting data. Only aggregate or group findings will be used in reports. By completing and returning the survey you are agreeing to participate in this study. I will provide you with a summary of the results no later than December of this year.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, please call me at (615) 292-8550, email me at [hanlingirl@yahoo.com](mailto:hanlingirl@yahoo.com), or you can write to me at the address on the letterhead.

**Thank you** again for helping me with this important study. Information from this study will help to identify ways to increase union membership voter turnout.

In solidarity,  
Carrie E. Hanlin  
Community Psychology Ph.D. Program  
University of Missouri-Kansas City

APPENDIX H.

Information release form for archival voter turnout data

As the current leader of this union, I give my permission for voter turnout data (the number of our members who voted in the 2002 general elections) to be released to Carrie E. Hanlin, for the purpose of completing her study, Local Labor Unions as Mediating Structures: A Correlational Study of Union Activities and Membership Voting Turnout in General Elections.

I understand that these data will not be used by anyone else for any other purpose. I also understand that all information provided will be kept *strictly confidential*. Raw data will be viewed by Ms. Hanlin alone, and kept in a secure location. No names of leaders or unions will be released, or paired with voting data. Only aggregate or group findings will be used in reports.

By signing this form, I am authorizing your release of my local union's voter turnout data. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Local Union

APPENDIX I.



**Union Democratic Activities Survey**



Please help us learn more about our local labor unions by filling out this short survey.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and all information you provide will be kept strictly confidential

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**Section I: General Information**

Please provide us with the following information about your local union. Remember, the information you provide will be kept confidential; only aggregate or group findings will be used in reports.

1. What is the name of the local union that you represent? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What occupation(s) does your local union represent? \_\_\_\_\_
3. In what city is your local union located? \_\_\_\_\_; And what state? (circle): **MO / KS**
4. How many members are in your local union? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many "stewards" (i.e., worksite representatives, committee persons, building representatives, etc.) are in your local union? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Out of all your members, what percent are \_\_\_\_\_ (Please estimate if you do not have the data)
 

a. Male _____%	b. African American _____%
Female _____	Asian American _____
<b>1 0 0 %</b>	Caucasian _____
	Hispanic/Latino _____
	Native American _____
	Other _____
	<b>1 0 0 %</b>
7. To the best of your knowledge, what percent of your members
  - a. show up to meetings? \_\_\_\_\_%
  - b. voted in your last **union** election? \_\_\_\_\_%
  - c. voted in the 2002 **general** elections? \_\_\_\_\_%

**Continue**





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**Section IV: Electoral Activities**

For the following questions, please circle how many times *during the 2002 electoral season* your local union sponsored the following electoral activities, using the 6-point rating scale of:

1 = Not at all      2 = Once      3 = A few times      4 = Every other month      5 = Once a month      6 = Two or more times a month

38. A hand-out of campaign literature	1	2	3	4	5	6
39. Fundraising for campaign contributions	1	2	3	4	5	6
40. Phone banks	1	2	3	4	5	6
41. Voter registration	1	2	3	4	5	6
42. Opportunities to meet with candidates	1	2	3	4	5	6
43. Placement/handout of yard signs	1	2	3	4	5	6
44. Opportunities to work with a political party	1	2	3	4	5	6
45. Get-Out-The-Vote drives	1	2	3	4	5	6
46. Utilizing the worker-to-worker network, doing "one on one"	1	2	3	4	5	6
47. Other: _____	1	2	3	4	5	6
48. Other: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _____	1	2	3	4	5	6
49. Other: _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

For the following questions, please circle your answer.

**During the 2002 electoral season:**

50. Did your local union have organizations to get family members involved in these activities?      YES      NO
51. Did your local union have an active retiree organization?      YES      NO
52. Did your local union have members handout candidate endorsements at the polls?      YES      NO

***Thank you!***

**Please return this survey on or before June 30, 2003.**

A self-addressed, stamped envelope has been provided for your convenience.

☆ ☆ ☆

4



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