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Between Atomistic and Participatory Democracy: Leverage, Leadership and Legitimacy in Israeli Civil Society

Abstract

While a great deal of research on civic engagement has been based on representative survey responses regarding individual behavior, there is emerging consensus for the need to better understand the civic opportunities provided by a given organizational context. This article develops a conceptual model to examine why organizations would choose to invest in a membership-recruiting strategy despite the significant investment this strategy requires. The case study analysis of interest group associations in Israel confirms the hypothesis of an increased use of membership as an organizational strategy for building policy influence. The organizations are shown to be more interested over time in developing political *leverage* for influencing policymaking processes. Membership is viewed primarily as a strategy for formal *legitimation* for one organization, but even this organization uses membership as a tool for gaining greater leverage resources. Yet, the findings are not optimistic regarding the focus on developing civic *leadership*.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Significance of Membership Associations

Civic associations based on active citizen participation have long been credited for supporting and strengthening democracy by venerable political theorists such as John Stuart Mill, Alexis de Tocqueville and Max Weber. The first cross-national empirical test of this hypothesis indeed demonstrated that one of the important components necessary to sustain a vibrant democracy is a healthy network of civic organizations (Almond & Verba, 1963). Since Robert Putnam's seminal research in Italy (1993), social capital theory has drawn our attention to the importance of "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p.19) for "making democracy work." The mechanism of the contribution of voluntary associations to democratic performance is considered to be two-fold: internally they educate their members on the practice of civic skills and inculcation of civic values; and externally they aid in interest coordination and overcoming barriers to collective action.

Putnam noted the often overlooked research question that motivated Tocqueville in his famous exploration of democracy in America: A Frenchman writing about forty years after the 1789 revolution, Tocqueville was concerned about the tendency for a communally-oriented society like France to become a non-mediated individualistic society. Concerned about the potential for civic tensions to disintegrate into civil war, Tocqueville suggested that democracy could take two forms: an atomistic despotism where citizens tend to their own self-interests such that rulers are free to centralize their power; or a participatory democracy where public-spirited institutions can serve as a check on the centrifugal forces of democracy (Putnam, 2004; Tocqueville, [1835-1840] 1969). Tocqueville saw membership-based civic associations as a central mechanism for transforming the atomistic form of democracy into the participatory one.

Putnam's argument of the worrying decline in social capital in the U.S. in recent years has provoked a flurry of academic investigations into different aspects of civic engagement and social capital: Is participation in voluntary associations linked to trust? Does voluntary association membership correlate with political participation? Is there indeed a connection between voluntary

association membership and democracy? What about trust and democracy? And finally, is social capital indeed declining? A summary of a sample of the most rigorous empirical studies of these questions in the past decade demonstrates the depth and breadth of these inquiries, which are largely based on cross-national representative survey samples [See Appendix 1].

Yet, there is emerging consensus that individual motivations and behavior do not explain enough; rather, being given the opportunity to participate matters a great deal (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998; Rosenstone & Hansen, 2003; Skocpol, 2003). Recent research elegantly tests the classical Tocquevillian hypothesis that varying levels of civic engagement are important predictors for the production of trust, political participation, and life satisfaction (Howard & Gilbert, 2008). These findings beg the question: what is the meaning of membership from the perspective of organizations that are providing the opportunity for citizens to become engaged? Hence, this article investigates why a given organization would choose the strategy of membership recruitment and persist in the use of this strategy over time, despite the significant investment this strategy requires.

While Putnam's research celebrates apolitical and horizontal networks of civic engagement, this approach overlooks one of Tocqueville's central observations: he specifically identified associations involved in political life as the key to the rich democracy he celebrated in the U.S. in 1832 (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). A growing body of research has demonstrated that politically-oriented and translocal organizations have played an important role in fostering a vibrant civic life (Foley & Edwards, 1996; Minkoff, 1997; Skocpol, Ganz, & Munson, 2000; Stolle & Rochon, 1999). Therefore, this study focuses specifically on membership-based associations that aim to influence policy and act as sources of popular and political leverage to reach their goals.

1.2 Israeli Civil Society as Case Study

While the growth of civil society across the globe has been termed an "associational revolution" and an "advocacy explosion" (Berry & Wilcox, 2007; Salamon, 1994), Israeli associations provide a particularly rich historical and empirical basis for inquiry due to the rapid expansion of civic life in recent years (Levi-Faur, Sheffer, & Vogel, 1999; Silber & Rosenhek, 2000). Since the institution of the Associations Law in 1980 as the first national legislation governing the third sector¹, an average of

1,600 NGOs have been founded each month with more than 30,000 NGOs registered in 2004. With educational and religious-oriented organizations topping the list, the Israeli third sector has been documented as one of the largest in the world, per capita (Gidron, Bar, & Katz, 2004). Organizations that focus specifically on achieving policy change are a relatively small proportion of NGO activity in Israel, but comprise the fastest growing category of civic activity (Kaufman & Gidron, 2006). In the early 1990s only 3% of all new organizations were registered as advocacy organizations, whereas 9% were registered in this category by the end of the decade (Gidron et al., 2004). In addition to growing in size, there is evidence that the influence of civil society upon political decision-makers is increasing as well (Nachmias & Menachem, 1999).

Regarding citizen participation, an up-to-date audit of Israeli democracy presents a central puzzle (Arian, Atmor, & Hadar, 2006; Arian, Barnea, Ben-Nun, Ventura, & Shamir, 2005). Israelis are known to exhibit a high level of interest in politics that has only increased in recent years, coupled with a low belief in their capacity to influence public policy (Arian et al., 2006; Ben-Eliezer, 1993; Wolfsfeld, 1988). Yet, demonstrating an exaggerated version of the prevailing trend in most modern democracies (Dalton, 2000), Israel has experienced a significant weakening of the party system and traditional forms of political participation, with a steady decline of party membership from 18% in 1969 to 5% in 2006. In international comparative measures of advanced democracies, Israel – once considered a proverbial “party state” (Akzin, 1955) – has declined in party membership rate to the middle of the pack (Arian et al., 2006, p.82). In addition to these downward trends regarding traditional political participation, popular esteem for the Knesset has greatly decreased, union participation has steadily declined, belief in the representative capacity of government has lessened, and the public perceives a higher degree of corruption among public leaders (Arian et al., 2005, 2006; Chazan, 2005).

The findings to this point are quite similar to trends in other advanced democracies; yet, Israelis are seemingly unusual in concurrently professing an increase in their ability to influence policy, as documented in a democratic audit survey (Arian et al., 2006, p.35). The survey upon which this data is based began only in 2003, requiring caution in interpreting the findings. Yet, the data presents an apparent contradiction for which researchers of advanced democracy suggest a possible

explanation: the growing inclination of citizens to resort to alternative, extra-parliamentary channels to influence issues of public concern (Dalton, 2006; Norris, 2002). Hence, the assumption is that while traditional political participation is on the decline, Israelis' increased participation in non-traditional and extra-parliamentary political activity has led to an increased belief in their capacity to influence policy (Arian et al., 2006, p. 56). A brief overview of the development of Israeli civil society will contribute to our understanding of the nature of this supposed increase in organized civic engagement.

Israel lays claim to a unique civic history in that a vibrant civil society preceded the founding of the state (Horowitz & Lissak, 1989; Yishai, 2003). Membership in the Histadrut – the primary Israeli labor union – was the paradigmatic associational experience for the majority of the populace in the early years of the state, and is a crucial starting-point for understanding the practice and conception of civic membership in Israel. In 1920, approximately 11% of the adult population belonged to the Histadrut; this proportion steadily increased decade by decade to 62% in 1970 and 66% in 1989 (Galnoor, 1982; Yishai, 1991). The main function of the union became that of providing access to crucial basic benefits such as employment services and health care. Similarly, the political parties were all-encompassing membership entities that regulated people's daily lives in a manner that was significantly more intensive than the accepted norm in most democracies at the time (Akzin, 1955). Party membership afforded access to participation in almost every public realm, including sports clubs, labor federations, and youth movements. Israel's party membership rate – estimated to range between 15%-33% of the populace in the 1950s – was significantly higher than those of seven leading Western countries during the same time period (Galnoor, 1982; Nie & Verba, 1977).

Government resistance to independent extra-parliamentary activity was fierce in the early years of the state. A historical overview of the thwarted attempts to legislate the Associations Law in 1954 and 1964, and its final successful implementation in 1980, demonstrates the government's effort to use this legislation to subject associational activity to executive control (Hermann, 1996; Yishai, 1991). In addition to a high rate of party membership, the percentage of Israelis who were official members of organized interest groups was also comparatively high (Yishai, 1991). Yet, until the 1970s, this high level of associationalism was largely subordinated to the party and Histadrut

organizational structure, and did not translate into independent, group-based political access (Eisenstadt, 1972; Etzioni-Halevy, 1975). Civic associational activity in the early years of the state largely demonstrated citizens' efforts to advocate on behalf of the freedom of association, in contradistinction to the government's tendency to restrict this right (Kabalo, 2006).

A number of well-known events mark the path from Israel's 1950s and 1960s party state to today's comparatively vibrant civic life. After the Six Day War in 1967, widespread support for statist ideology began to wane at a time when the Histadrut and political parties were beginning to weaken. These developments led to a greater liberalization regarding the regulation of civic associations and their role in Israeli society. Civil unrest in the early 1970s led by the Black Panthers movement and citizen protest following the Yom Kippur War in 1973 increased the legitimacy of citizen influence on public affairs. During this period, an oppositional voice to governmental authority began to gain legitimacy in Israeli political discourse. An overview of a variety of historical periodization analyses demonstrate scholarly agreement that Israeli civil society activity has become consistently more vibrant since the founding of the state [See Appendix 2].

2. Hypotheses

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Why and Whither Membership?

Based on a review of research regarding membership-based organizations in advanced democracies, I posit a theoretical framework which explicates three main reasons why an organization would adopt a strategy of membership recruitment: **leverage, leadership and legitimacy**. First, an organization would recruit members for reasons of "**leverage**" so that the membership base would provide desired organizational capacity and political power to enable it to reach its policy change goals. This concept is related to two main bodies of organizational theory: *resource mobilization* theory and *political opportunity structure* theory. *Resource mobilization* theory arose in response to Mancur Olson's (1965) theory of collective action which stated that rational, self-interested individuals will only contribute to collective action if they receive selective benefits (e.g. membership discounts); otherwise they would be subject to having their good intentions be taken advantage of by "free riders." Resource mobilization theory noted the empirical trend (particularly in the American setting

in the 1960s) that movements were overcoming the free rider problem by offering collective incentives of group solidarity and moral purpose, thereby mobilizing a variety of resources to reach their organizational goals (Jenkins, 1983; Thomas, 1993). *Political opportunity structure* theory hones in on how these resources can be parlayed into political power given the opportunities and constraints in a given political environment (Eisinger, 1973; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004).

Second, an organization would recruit members for reasons of “**leadership**” because it aims to increase the Tocquevillian “knowledge of how to combine.” This choice could be part of a strategic effort to build leverage, but the distinction between the concepts of “leverage” and “leadership” as defined here is clarified by research on social movement organizations (Minkoff, 1997). Even though social movement organizations are committed to advancing participatory democratic principles, they are not necessarily structured as participatory institutions that focus on the systematic development of civic leadership.² This distinction can operate in both directions: a membership-based civic association which has a policy change agenda may choose to recruit and develop members because of its interest in developing them as a source of leaders who will advance the organization’s agenda in their daily lives – not primarily in order to develop political leverage for policy change *per se*.³

Third, an organization would choose to recruit members for reasons of “**legitimacy**” because the organizational form in and of itself provides authority and authenticity which advance the organization’s interests. This concept is developed from new institutional theories in sociology that emphasize the cognitive dimension of institutional form (Hall, 1996; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). This concept is distinct from “leverage” in that members do not provide political power based on their contribution as a quantitative resource. Rather, the contribution is primarily one of public legitimation, organizational positioning and reputation-building. Hence, the very fact of being an organization with members is more significant than how many members have joined, what these members contribute to the organization, or what they gain from their participation.

While the concepts of leverage, leadership and legitimacy aid us to understand “why membership”, we are also interested in understanding “whither membership” – that is, trends over time. Shedding light on this question, a theoretical framework was developed to investigate why the amount and type of voluntary association membership vary dramatically between nations (Schofer &

Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001). Breaking out the “liberal democracy” concept into its constituent parts, two dimensions of democratic polities were found to be responsible for much of this variation: statism and corporatism. Statism was shown to constrain individual associational activity of all types, especially “new” social movement associations.⁴ On the spectrum between these two “ideal type” models of statism versus non-statism, Israel is considered to have been a strongly collectivist state in its early years, with a consistent development over time in the direction of liberal democracy (Ben-Eliezer, 1993; Lehman-Wilzig, 1999; Lijphart, 1993).⁵ Thus, we would expect temporal trends to reveal increased levels of membership over time in interest group associations in Israel.

2.2 Why Not Membership?

Despite arguments that Israeli civil society is on the rise, there are a number of convincing reasons why civic associations would not turn to membership development as a key organizational strategy. First, there is a **political culture** bias against the use of membership due to the negative perception in the Israeli populace of its nearly compulsory usage in the past by the Histadrut and political parties in order to gain access to basic rights and services. Second, the **political opportunity structure** of the governmental system in Israel does not encourage the development of strong local and national membership organizations in civil society. The use of a single nation-wide electoral district means that there is no geographic constituent medium through which voters can exert influence on their elected representatives (Rahat & Hazan, 2006). Therefore, the benefit of the painstaking work of developing a rooted membership base that learns how to influence its locally elected leaders – as in the U.S. and British political systems – is not self-evident. In addition, the relatively low threshold of 2% for political party formation encourages civic groups that gain a significant membership to become an official political party, despite the low returns this strategy tends to yield in terms of influence on the policymaking process in the long run (Rahat, 2005; Yishai, 1991).

Third, the increased influence and financial capacities of international **foundation funding** in recent years has been singled out as one of the reasons for the decline in membership-based civic associations internationally (Putnam, 2004; Skocpol, 2003). We would expect this trend to be even more pronounced in Israel due to the relatively late development of civil society, coupled with the

relatively high degree of availability of international foundation funding (Gidron, Elon, Schlanger & Schwartz, 2006). Finally, a **general decline in membership** as an organizational strategy has been documented starting in the 1970s, particularly in the U.S. (Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003). While there is evidence that contradicts these trends in general, and beyond American borders in particular, this claim continues to merit scholarly attention (Norris & Davis, 2007; Stolle & Hooghe, 2005).

2.3 Research Hypotheses

Despite these convincing arguments, a number of leading civic associations in Israel have chosen to use the organizational strategy of membership recruitment and development. The following hypotheses re-articulate the theoretical model of “why membership?” in order to posit possible explanations for why organizations might make this seemingly anomalous choice.

Hypothesis 1: **Leverage**. Organizations are willing to invest in membership recruitment in order to gain political power for influencing policy issues.

Hypothesis 2: **Leadership**. Membership recruitment is adopted as an organizational strategy in order to develop the leadership skills of the organization’s constituency.

Hypothesis 3: **Legitimacy**. Membership as an organizational strategy is based on mimetic influences which lead to importing this organizational form from the international arena.

Hypothesis 4: **Increased Membership over Time**. Decreased statism in Israeli democracy over time is expected to lead to increased membership in associational interest groups.

3. Research Methodology

A historical-institutional case study model is utilized, building on Theda Skocpol’s “U.S. Civic Engagement Project” (Pierson & Skocpol, 2002; Skocpol et al., 1999; Skocpol & Oser, 2004). The three historical case studies in this research provide a methodological framework for pursuing a broader inquiry in the Israeli setting, in which there are no centralized data sources regarding organizational membership or generalized patterns of membership over time.⁶ The first methodological step in this research entailed generating a list of membership-based associations currently active in Israel based on academic research and on expert advice from those active in the field. A number of key categories of membership organizations emerged from this initial list [see Appendix 3].

The U.S. Civic Engagement Project studied associations from a wide range of categories, with the single criterion for inclusion being a rigorous test of large membership size. Due to the lack

of readily available membership data for use as a criterion for case study selection in the Israeli context, this article focuses on a single category in order to lay the groundwork for further research. Since we aim to better understand groups that desire to advance policy change, interest group associations were chosen as the appropriate unit of analysis; they meet the standard of being overtly interested in influencing the public policy arena while remaining organizationally distinct from governmental institutions.

Within the universe of interest group associations, a list of the most prominent membership-based organizations was compiled. Case studies from this initial list were selected with an eye towards focusing on organizations that aim to include the whole of the Israeli population (i.e. not explicitly sectoral or regional); display a variety of aims and purposes; developed during different time periods; strive to achieve policy change; and are considered to be relatively successful in achieving policy change goals.⁷ These criteria ensure that the organizations will have public purposes in mind, while making no presumption to demonstrate that the membership base is the definitive factor in their successful policy change efforts – a question that is notoriously difficult to definitively research (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004; Norris, 2007)

There was little hesitation in selecting the three organizations which best meet these criteria: the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), and the Movement for Quality Government (MQG). Following the selection of the three associations, a case study model was developed based on two main source of data: primary and secondary documents which flesh out the historical trends of associational membership, along with interviews of key organizational leaders over time to clarify the question of “why membership?”

4. Case Study Findings [See Appendix 4 for details regarding structure and data of findings]

4.1 Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI)

4.1.1 Organizational Structure and History

SPNI was founded in 1953 by a handful of nature lovers and university students. The invitation to participate in SPNI’s founding conference in 1954 listed a fairly activist set of official goals: To recruit the largest possible number of members to receive information on nature protection; to activate

the members of SPNI in their areas to prevent harm to plants and animals; and to run local councils to deal with legislation and public relations (Regev, 1993). Yet, the founders' interest in membership activation and legislative change was overshadowed by the early struggle for financial and organizational viability. SPNI's early years were focused on public education through field schools and touring services. The field schools were developed in close cooperation with government bodies, enabling SPNI to reach out to millions of Israeli youth to share this mission. The eventual reliance on governmental funding for major portions of the organization's budget meant a decreased focus on legislation and policy change in comparison to the founders' vision.

In 2006, the organization's budget totaled 136.5 million NIS, funding an estimated 800 full-time-equivalent workforce, over 20 operational departments, 13 regional field schools, and four regional environmental protection branches. This is an impressive scale and scope even by international standards. For example, in 1999 SPNI employed over 600 workers – roughly three times the personnel of the biggest environmental organizations in the U.S. at the time (Tal, 2002, p. 114). As demonstrated in the following chart, the proportion of the budget that is derived from governmental sources has declined significantly over time to approximately 1/5 of its financial resources in 2006.⁸ Income from foundation grants and membership dues are a comparatively minimal source of financial resources for SPNI, while its primary source of funding is from self-generated revenue through tour-guide and educational programming.

- Chart 1 Here -

In 1974 the organization commissioned research to evaluate the potential of SPNI's involvement in urban environmental policy advocacy, and recommendations were submitted regarding the organizational changes required in order to for this to take place. These recommended changes were not implemented until the early 1990s when newly founded environmental organizations began to challenge SPNI's hegemony in the field. Urban environmental issues that concerned the general public became more prominent in public discourse and SPNI began to transition toward emphasizing its environmental activist agenda as a way to win back its defecting membership base. Investment in its activist Environmental Protection Department subsequently

increased from 3.4 million NIS in 1993 (3.9% of overall budget) to 5.6 million NIS in 1997 (4.2%) to more than 11 million NIS in 2006 (8.1%).

More than 20 branches have developed, largely beginning as independent locals with a focus on traveling and hiking, and not on civic and political involvement *per se*. Over the years, the urban branches became involved with local environmental issues, led by the Haifa branch's involvement in the 1980s as a leading player in coalitions advocating for improved air quality. The three largest branches – Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem – have developed locally elected leadership councils since the mid-1990s, a model that the organization is working to replicate throughout its branch structure. National board elections are independent of those held at the branch level such that locally elected leaders are not automatically linked to a nationwide leadership structure. Yet, a number of the leaders at the local level are also members of the national board, a phenomenon which has become more widespread in recent years.

By the late 1990s, overt political advocacy became mainstream with an organization-wide 1999 campaign called “Find Your Knesset Members” through which the membership base of the whole organization was called upon to cast its vote on the basis of candidates' commitment to environmental issues. Communications once designated only for the activist network became integrated with materials shared with the entire membership base. While the average SPNI member may still be more interested in colorful tour-books than in political organizing, the membership base is increasingly called upon to sign petitions, work with local political leaders and planners, and mobilize fellow citizens for the occasional rally and demonstration.

4.1.2 Why Membership? Data Profile and Analysis

Largely due to its provision of discounted touring and lodging rates for nature lovers and travelers, SPNI quickly became Israel's largest membership organization outside of the political parties and the Histadrut. SPNI did not systematically gather membership data until 1989, but based on interview and membership dues data prior to this time, one can assume a steady and gradual increase of membership from the organization's founding until the late 1980s.

- *Chart 2 Here* -

As evident from this chart, membership in SPNI has gone through a series of ups and downs in recent years that correspond to the changing meaning of membership. The answer to the question “why membership?” in SPNI’s early years was straightforward: to gain financial benefits for SPNI’s educational and touring services. When SPNI began to face competition for membership recruitment from newly founded organizations in the early 1990s, membership began to decrease.

In the mid-1990s, tensions rose between SPNI’s traditional leaders and the organization’s elite education corps, whose leader was considered to be an aggressive land developer. A concerted membership drive was initiated to prevent a potentially hostile takeover of the organization’s leadership, leading to a temporary and artificial upsurge in membership. During this period, SPNI conducted internal surveys and research to decide whether and how to continue with the membership-building efforts of the organization. In light of the organization’s shift towards environmental activism, it was decided to redouble its efforts to build a stronger and more extensive membership base. From a financial perspective, the organization’s leadership saw membership dues as an under-exploited source of non-earmarked income for policy change activity. From a political perspective, it was decided that a renewed membership base would be an important source of political leverage to reach SPNI’s policy change agenda. Hence, beginning in 2000 SPNI redoubled its membership recruiting efforts, which has yielded a consistent increase in membership levels in recent years.

4.1.3 Conclusions Regarding Research Hypotheses

SPNI membership was initially consistent with Olson’s theories regarding collective action: members joined largely in order to gain selective benefits. Development over the years, however, has shown that SPNI has gained an interest in developing **leverage** for its policy change efforts. Those involved with policy change in the organization note that SPNI’s successful achievements would not be possible without the political legitimation they gain from representing tens of thousands of voting citizens.

SPNI demonstrates some interest in developing the **leadership** of its constituency, particularly members of its urban branches. While the relationship between the branches and the headquarters have gone through periods of tension due to different interpretations of organizational

priorities, SPNI has shown an interest in developing an autonomous leadership base at the local level. Of the tens of thousands of members a few hundred are active enough to consider themselves to be organizational leaders. Finally, there is no indication that **legitimacy** plays an important role in SPNI's strategy of membership recruitment.

4.2 Association for Civil Rights in Israel

4.2.1 Organizational Structure and History

ACRI was founded in 1972 by young lawyers, largely of Anglo-Saxon origin, who became prominent figures in the legal establishment in Israel. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) was the inspiration and institutional model upon which the organization was founded. ACRI quickly established branches in each of Israel's four major cities, and showed particularly rapid growth in the late 1980s with a focus on protesting the deterioration of civil rights in the occupied territories. For the first 15 years of its history, it was the only human rights organization in the field, and continues to be considered the leading human rights organization in Israel (Gordon, 2005).

In 2006 ACRI employed more than a 40-person staff working to develop legal and legislative strategies for advancing human rights, along with educational programming and public activities to educate key sectors in Israeli society. ACRI emphasizes its independence from governing bodies and political parties, noting the freedom this affords the organization in pursuing its goals. The following chart demonstrates that international foundation funding constitutes the great majority of its financial income.

- Chart 3 Here -

The role of the branches has gone through several evolutions. They were founded in order to identify and address human rights issues on the local level, but by the early 1990s they had become centers of volunteer activity for lawyers and community activists who became invested in the organization's operations. Democratic elections were held for leadership boards of the local branches without a direct link to the national organizational structure. This resulted in tension between the national staff and elected board on the one hand, and the leadership of the branches on the other. In

the early 1990s, elections to boards at the branch level were canceled and authority was centralized in the hands of the paid staff of the organization.

In the two decades since its first case in the High Court of Justice, ACRI has built an impressive track record in general, and in comparison to other Israeli human rights groups in particular. Research on interest group success in litigation demonstrates that of the 70 High Court of Justice cases ACRI submitted by 2000, it won eight of them with a success rate of 11.5%, whereas other human rights organizations won only 2.8% of their submitted cases (Dotan & Hofnung, 2001). ACRI has gained standing representation at Knesset committees, and has had a significant impact on more than thirty pieces of legislation. ACRI has also been responsible for dozens of key legal precedents protecting fundamental human rights, such as the right of non-Orthodox Jewish representatives to serve on local Religious Councils, the right of women to serve as air force pilots, and the right of security detainees to be represented by legal counsel.

4.2.2 Why Membership? Data Profile and Analysis

The following chart demonstrates that ACRI membership levels have hovered between 500 and 1,600 official members since the mid-1980s. The 2006 budget devoted one part-time staff position to membership recruitment, and one part-time position to the coordination of membership retention-oriented activities like public lectures and conferences.

- Chart 4 Here -

The question of “why membership” seemed a timely one for organizational leaders in 2006 who were in the midst of debating internal proposals regarding the future of ACRI as a membership organization. These proposals ranged the gamut from canceling membership altogether to launching initiatives for operating significant outreach programs to gain a mass membership base. The consistency of ACRI membership levels over time and the intensity of the debate over the issue today might lead one to believe that this is a new issue facing the organization’s leadership. Yet, investigation into protocols from the annual General Assemblies since the early 1980s demonstrated that the question of “why membership” has been a perennial question for the organization.

There are three main reasons why ACRI was founded as a membership organization, as noted in interviews and archival research. First, ACRI's founding was inspired by the American Civil Liberties Union, and membership recruitment is one of the many organizational practices that were copied from the U.S. model. Second, membership recruitment was a first instinct for founding members regarding how to run a social change organization given their experience in similar organizations in other countries.⁹ Third, one of ACRI's founding goals was to challenge the non-democratic nature of the state's functioning, which motivated the organization to serve as an example through demonstrating its own internal democratic practices.

There are two reasons cited for why ACRI continues to be a membership-based organization today. First, in the Israeli political arena the fact that ACRI is a membership organization – regardless of the numbers of people it can claim to represent – continues to be a source of leverage for ACRI as a democratically run and supported body. In fact, even organizational leaders who supported canceling membership in principle have refrained from doing so in practice due to the concern that this step would lead to unnecessary negative publicity regarding the elite nature of the organization. Second, and most significant to those familiar with financial operations, the fact that ACRI is a membership organization is important to its international funders.

ACRI's focus on demonstrating its membership base to its foreign donors is evidenced in the emphasis it places on being a membership organization in its English-language annual reports compared to the relative obscurity of this fact in its Hebrew-language material. While listing sources of financial support, the rhetorical phrase has not changed since the early years of the organization: membership dues are always mentioned first, followed by Israeli donations, and concluding with foundation grants. As shown in the budget trend above, this formulation starts with what is most ideologically or rhetorically important, and concludes with what is most practically significant.

4.2.3 Conclusions Regarding Research Hypotheses

The main importance of membership in ACRI is **legitimacy**. This legitimacy is derived primarily from the authority that membership grants the organization in its international fundraising efforts, but also in terms of the moral authority in Israel provided by the cadre of official supporters of the

organization. It is noteworthy that ACRI has successfully created a public image of being a membership based organization with a large number of supporters, despite the relatively small number of official members in practice.

This legitimacy, in turn, provides the organization with a source of **leverage** in the narrow sense through its capacity to mobilize financial resources from abroad in order to carry out its legal and advocacy agenda. Leverage in the broader sense of mobilizing electoral power to influence elected policymakers is not evident. Finally, while there was evidence of the importance of **leadership** development of members in the early years of the organization, the subsequent focus on professionalization and centralization outweighed initial ambitions of educating Israeli citizens on the knowledge of how to combine.

4.3 Movement for Quality Government

4.3.1 Organizational Structure and History

The Movement for Quality Government was founded in the aftermath of the coalition negotiations of the 1988 national elections, and controversial political party maneuvering in 1990 which became known as “the stinking exercise.”¹⁰ Considerable public protest followed these events, even considering Israel’s relatively high standards of the “politics of provocation” (Wolfsfeld, 1988). Some of these demonstrations drew more than 100,000 participants, with the largest protest reportedly attended by approximately 200,000 people. The Movement for Quality Government is one of the organizations that grew out of this period of unrest. Founding documents indicate the considerable ambitions of the founders following “the huge wave which swept up the whole country,” ranging from working to prevent traffic accidents to increasing religious tolerance. Today the organization’s official mission is to combat corruption, protect democracy and the rule of law, and to promote transparency in government administration.

In 2006, MQG employed a staff of more than 20 full time workers, and the budget totaled 5,303,000 NIS. In addition to its legal department, MQG runs departments for membership recruitment, a research division, and an organizing department that works to activate current members around specific projects and issues. An organizationally distinct “Quality Government Community

College” was founded in 2000 to lead public education efforts. Past and current organizational leaders note that the MQG did not use any existing organizational model as a guide in developing the organizational model. Founding documents demonstrate an initial ambition to reach out to the public, but it was not until an official board decision in 2002 that MQG began to significantly invest in membership recruitment and development with the declared intention of becoming “a mass movement.” As evident in the following chart, membership dues have become an increasingly significant part of the organization’s budget, currently providing about 20% of its income.

- Chart 5 Here -

Consistent with its efforts to serve as an independent voice of critique on behalf of quality government, MQG does not accept government funding. Until recently a large portion of its operating budget consisted of donations from wealthy Israeli families and from international foundation funding. In 2002, MQG made a strategic decision to limit these sources of income and to develop a more financially contributing membership base for two main reasons. First, MQG had become more outspoken in its critique of the wealthiest families in Israel and their close working relationships with governmental leaders on a range of issues, which decreased the organization’s ability to raise money from this population. Second, the organization began to count on certain funding streams from international foundations, and encountered moments of organizational crises when major expected grants did not come through. At times this lack of financial support was the direct result of new campaigns initiated by organizational leaders that were not supported by their foundation supporters.

Examples of successful petitions are numerous and diverse, helping MQG make a name for itself in recent years as an effective initiator of policy change. Successes include a decree ordering the exposure of coalition agreements which used to be confidential; a ruling regarding inspections of nominations to the public sector to prevent political nominations; and provisions for the protection of whistleblowers. MQG has also succeeded in campaigns to cancel pensions for Knesset Members who did not complete their terms of office, and to require a mandatory provision of legal liability of local authority leaders to combat their lack of accountability regarding the misallocation of funds.

4.3.2 Why Membership? Data Profile and Analysis

Efforts were made in the late 1990s to recruit a larger membership base, but initial attempts were fairly similar to ACRI's declarations of the symbolic importance of membership. Yet, MQG has moved toward more substantive efforts to build a membership base following a board decision in 2002 declaring the organization's intention to transform itself into a social movement. A membership recruitment department was founded which uses a combination of tactics such as recruiting in public squares, telephone follow-up to petition-signers, and expanded media campaigns. MQG has set an ambitious goal of reaching financial "self-sufficiency" – i.e. fully funding its operations from membership dues – in the next decade of its activity. The chart below demonstrates MQG's success in expanding the number of members in recent years.

- Chart 6 Here -

MQG has combined its legal advocacy with the submission of public petitions. For example, in recent efforts to eliminate the discrimination in army recruitment processes, a 25,000 signature petition was submitted to the High Court of Justice. MQG views its membership base as one of the main reasons for its successful policy change activities. The organizing department, also founded in 2002, encourages existing members to become actively engaged in a range of activities. Similar to ACRI, the branches of MQG have experienced fluctuating involvement of members over time. In 2006 there were no elected leaders at the local level, and no plan to develop in this direction. The most active members were those who participated in the "municipal monitoring teams" that operated in almost a dozen different localities. These teams receive training from the national staff regarding the use of local authority reports and public information in order to monitor the activity of local governmental bodies.

Internal democracy, however, has been less of a focus of the organization. The founding chairperson of the organization has remained in the same position, and is widely regarded as the dominant voice in organizational decision-making. There has been high turnover in board and staff members, and members have little formal opportunity to influence organizational priorities. MQG has submitted foundation grants requesting support to develop regional branches as a tool for reaching its desired financial and political independence. Even if these grant are received, however, it is unclear

whether the organization would be capable of successfully incorporating member-led branches into its centralized organizational structure.

4.3.3 Conclusions Regarding Research Hypotheses

MQG's recruitment of members is focused on **leverage** in both the financial and political realms. Yet, this leverage is one that is largely defined and used by key board leaders and the paid staff, with the members themselves playing a small role in decision-making processes regarding the organization's agenda. Regarding **leadership**, despite sporadic attempts to develop local chapters, the main achievement in this area has been the development of municipal monitoring teams. While members of these teams are becoming more active in their local communities, they fulfill a primarily practical function for the organization, and are not elected or developed as organizational leaders. **Legitimacy** as defined in the membership hypotheses does not seem to play a significant role for the organization.

5. Conclusion

Regarding the question of "whither membership?" (Hypothesis 4), the hypothesis generally holds true. In comparison to the U.S. context, where membership organizations have primarily decreased in size over the past 20 years, the organizations which are the focus of this research either held steady or increased the number of official organizational members over time.

Turning to the hypotheses regarding "why membership," a number of patterns emerge. Regarding **leverage**, SPNI and MQG present clear cases of the use of membership to build political capacity for influencing policymaking processes. ACRI's membership base relates to leverage in a narrower and more indirect fashion, but there is an important connection between its use of a membership recruiting strategy and the organization's ability to influence the policy arena. Without its status as a membership organization, ACRI would have more difficulty establishing its moral authority in Israeli society and recruiting funding sources that allow it to challenge the status quo regarding civil rights. Hence, ACRI is the only organization in this study which seems to regard **legitimacy** as a primary reason for its membership recruitment.

More surprising – and more concerning for those who care about democratic development in Israeli civil society – is the lack of the importance of **leadership** for these membership-based interest

groups. Only SPNI operates significant political activities for members on the local level, but even these activities are not institutionally linked to the organization's national decision-making processes. One of the main findings of the U.S. Civic Engagement Project was that translocal chapters of national membership organizations mirrored the U.S. government's formal structure, with constitution-based local chapters electing scores of organizational members into official leadership positions. Taking into account only the largest 20 voluntary federations in the U.S. Civic Engagement Project study in 1955, an estimated three to five percent of the adult population served in these organizations' leadership positions (Skocpol, 2004). This was the kind of civic organization that Tocqueville was referring to in his celebration of the knowledge of how to combine. Basic democratic skills of recruiting support, defining agendas, operating elections, and influencing the next level of the leadership hierarchy were systematically taught to hundreds of thousands of American citizens through the broad network of these classic civic associations.

Similar to the U.S. context, these organizations are mimicking the national governmental structure. While the U.S. Civic Engagement Project gathered hundreds of dog-eared constitution booklets from local chapters, the Israeli organizations copy the government's lack of a constitutional structure, leading to amorphous battles between local and national authority. The lack of opportunity for influencing constituent-based local leaders seems to encourage the centralization of authority with the national staff.

While much concern is expressed about the relative decline of opportunities to develop civic skills in recent years in the U.S., it is startling to note that such opportunities never truly existed in Israel's civic organizational history distinct from state-sponsored and state-run institutions – and they seem to barely exist today. Recalling the motives of Tocqueville's study of democracy, this finding raises concerns regarding the transition of Israel's collectivist polity toward an atomistic one in which political leaders are capable of concentrating significant power in their hands in the face a quiet, disorganized citizenry.

Appendix 1: Summary of Empirical Research of Civic Engagement and Social Capital

Author	Data	Countries	VA & Trust?	VA & PP?	Trust & Dem?	VA & Dem?	SC Decline?
Armony 2004	WVS 1991	28	No		Yes	No	
Brehm & Rahn, 1997	GSS	1 (US)	Yes				
Curtis, Grabb & Baer, 2001	WVS 1991-3	33				Yes	
Dekker & van den Broek, 2005	WVS, all waves	12	Yes	No			No
Delhey & Newton, 2005	WVS 1990 & 1995	60	Yes (small)		Yes		
Howard & Gilbert, 2008	ESS & CID	20	Yes	Yes			
Knack, 2002	GSS+	1 (states)			Yes	No	
Newton, 2001	WVS 1991-5	42	Yes (small)		Yes if..		
Newton, 2006	WVS 1999-2002	79 (+4 cases)			Yes if...		
Newton & Montero, 2007	ESS 2002	22		Yes			
Norris, 2002	WVS 1995	47			Yes	No	
Norris & Davis, 2007	ESS 2002 & GSS	23					No
Paxton, 1999	GSS	1 (US)					Mixed
Paxton, 2002	WVS 1994	48			Yes if...	Yes if...	
Paxton, 2007	WVS 1994	31	Yes if...				
Rotolo, 1999	GSS	1 (US)					Mixed
Stolle & Rochon, 1999	WVS 1982&1991	3 (US, G, Swe)	Yes	Yes			
Welzel, Inglehart & Deutsch, 2005	WVS, all waves	12				Yes (weak)	No

Acronym Key

CID – Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy (U.S. equivalent of ESS)

ESS – European Social Survey

GSS – General Social Survey

PP – Political participation

SC – Social capital (generally operationalized as voluntary association + trust)

VA – Voluntary Association

WVS – World Values Survey

Appendix 2: Civil Society in Israel, Selected Historical Periodization Analyses

Sprinzak, 1984	Lehman-Wilzig, 1990	Hermann, 1996	Yishai, 1998a
1948-1957: Decline of legacies of the past	1949-1954: Age of acculturation of protest (mostly related to immigrant absorption)	1948-mid 1950s: generally unripe political opportunity structure (POS)	Founding to late 1960s: Active inclusion by the state of civil society
1957-1967: Golden age of parliamentarism	1955-1970: Age of extra-parliamentary quiescence (i.e. overall decrease of protest)	Mid-1950s to late 1960s: almost completely unripe POS	Late 1960s to early 1980s: Active exclusion by the state of civil society, delegitimizing challenging groups
1967-1973: First, unsuccessful revolt of the periphery	1970-1978: Age of renewed mature protest (i.e. 2 nd generation immigrants)	Late 1960s to mid-1970s: mellowing era	Late 1980s to 1998: Passive exclusion by the state – optimal balance between state and society, with society maintaining autonomy from the state
1973-1977: Second, successful revolt of the periphery	1979-1986: Age of protest normalization	Mid-1970s to 1996: era of maturation	
1977- 84: Maturation of protest			

Overview of Sources

- Sprinzak: 1984 focused on the aspects of legality and legitimacy of extra-parliamentary activity.
- Lehman-Wilzig: 1990 researched the quantitative aspect of protest and categorized different acts according to their core issues.
- Hermann, 1996: analyzed the “ripeness” of the political structure of opportunities for protest.
- Yishai, 1998a: summarized different stages in the state’s relationship to civil society.

Appendix 3: Categories of Membership-Based Civic Associations in Israel

Category	Examples
Interest Group Associations	Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the Movement for Quality Government
Trade Unions	Histadrut, Union of State Employees, Hotel Workers Federation
Political Party Associations ¹¹	Shas, Islamic Movement
Social Movement Organizations	Black Panthers, Peace Now, Bloc of the Faithful
Professional Associations	Israeli Medical Association, Union of Veterans
Fraternal/Sororal Associations	WIZO, Na'amat, Hadassa, B'nai Brith
Immigrant/Ethnic Associations	Union of Ethiopian Immigrants, Association of Americans and Canadian Immigrants in Israel

Appendix 4: Notes Regarding Findings Structure and Data

1. Research findings structure:

1. Organizational Structure and History: *description of organizational structure and funding base, founding and development over time, and significant events of change, growth, or policy change achievements.*
2. Why Membership? Data Profile and Analysis: *presentation of membership trends over time including data and interpretation regarding the changing meaning of membership for the organization.*
3. Conclusions Regarding Research Hypotheses: *analysis of research hypotheses regarding leverage, leadership and legitimacy in light of the case study findings.*

2. Data sources: All charts in this section are based on the author's gathering of original data from primary and secondary sources. A complete record of financial and membership data, as well as sources upon which the findings in this section are based, are available from the author upon request.

3. Reporting of financial data: Financial data is reported in New Israeli Shekels (NIS) unless noted otherwise, and is not standardized across years. This reporting of raw data per year is justified because this research is focused on broad trends over time. Although data exists for SPNI and ACRI before 1985 exist, charts in this section include systematic financial data only from 1985 onward. This is due primarily to the lack of standardization of financial reporting until the mid-1980s when the 1980 Association Law began to take hold, and secondarily to reporting challenges of hyperinflation in Israel in the early 1980s.

Notes

¹ Until 1980, activity in the third sector was regulated according to the 1909 Ottoman Law, and data regarding the pre-1980 period is not systematic.

² An example in the U.S. context is the organization “Common Cause.” With approximately 300,000 members aimed at “holding governmental power accountable” the organization has been criticized with the claim that it lacks internal democratic practices. Hence, the claim continues, it lacks governing accountability just as much as the public institutions it aims to reform.

³ An example in the U.S. context is the Boy Scouts, which has almost three million youth members and over one million adult members. The organization has an impressive policy change agenda, including suggestions for the advancement of constitutional rights of young people in their encounters with the government, and a proposal for investing in values-based education in public education frameworks. Yet, the main focus of its membership recruitment is on instilling civic values and developing the leadership skills of its members.

⁴ The authors developed and tested research hypotheses regarding both statism and corporatism. The hypotheses regarding corporatism are related primarily to what they term “old associations,” such as labor unions and churches. Therefore, I report here only to their findings on statism which relates to the “new associations” that are the focus of this article.

⁵ The degree to which Israeli democracy conforms to the collectivist model is a matter of dispute. In a comparative analysis of interest group regulation, Israel is analyzed as a non-liberal case study on par with Turkey for purposes of comparison with Australia and Canada as liberal states (Yishai, 1998b). This analysis potentially overemphasizes Israel’s non-liberal character, as evidenced by a 1993 ranking of the liberal democratic character of more than 150 countries, which used a variety of empirical indicators to develop a rating for states on a scale of 1 to 100 with the higher score indicating a more liberal democracy. Western, liberal democracies – for example, the U.S., U.K. and Australia – scored 100, while Israel was close behind with a score of 96. In comparison, Turkey merited a score of 11, and the average score for Middle Eastern countries was 27 (Bollen, 1993).

⁶ Examples of such data sources in the U.S. context include the tracking of organizational membership by the “Encyclopedia of Associations” published by Thomas Gale; and the tracking of generalized patterns of membership in surveys like the General Social Surveys and the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research Surveys.

⁷ Despite the usefulness of these criteria for defining the research scope, accompanying drawbacks are worthy of note. First, this approach categorically eliminates the examination of organizations at either end of the political extreme or those which purport to speak for only a certain segment of the citizenry. Given the nature of Israeli political and social cleavages, the case study sample is then inevitably biased towards the left end of the political spectrum which declares to work on behalf of the whole of the Israeli public. Second, membership-based interest group associations are examined in order to better understand the phenomenon itself without comparing them to other forms of associational life.

⁸ This decline is estimated to be even more pronounced than the data reveals because it was not until the mid-1990s that the NGO Registrar required that income for services provided to the government (like educational activities for the Education Ministry) be included as “income from the government” rather than as “fee for services” along with private contractors.

⁹ While these two reasons are related in practice, there is an important theoretical distinction. The first relates to mimetic practices of organizational copying and modeling; the second relates to what is known as the “collective action repertoires” available to organizational leaders themselves (Clemens, 1997). Exemplifying membership-building as a collective action repertoire of ACRI founders, in response to the question of why ACRI decided to recruit members, Prof. David Kretzmer responded: “It was just a given for us. We were familiar with the practice. We never considered the possibility of *not* having members” (personal interview, December 6, 2006).

¹⁰ Following a dispute regarding possible peace negotiations, a no-confidence vote was passed for the first time ever in Israel. The controversy regarded competing efforts of the two largest parties to build a stable coalition by attempting to recruit the support of Shas and other right wing swing parties. “So ugly were the negotiations between the large and small parties during this dramatic coalition crisis that Rabin himself described the maneuver of his own party as a ‘stinking exercise’” (Diskin & Diskin, 1995, p. 40).

¹¹ While these organizations are difficult to distinguish from the traditional political parties, research has pointed to their unique behavior as civic associations as well.

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Chart 1: SPNI Budget Trend

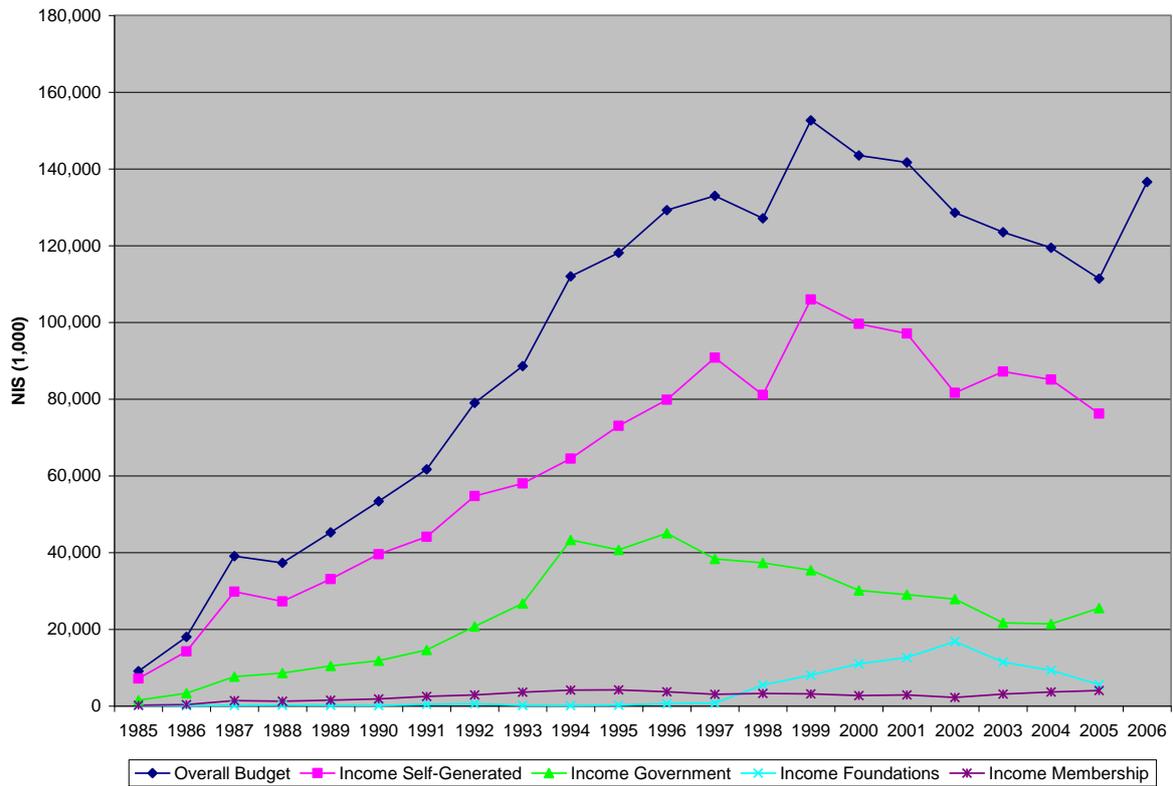
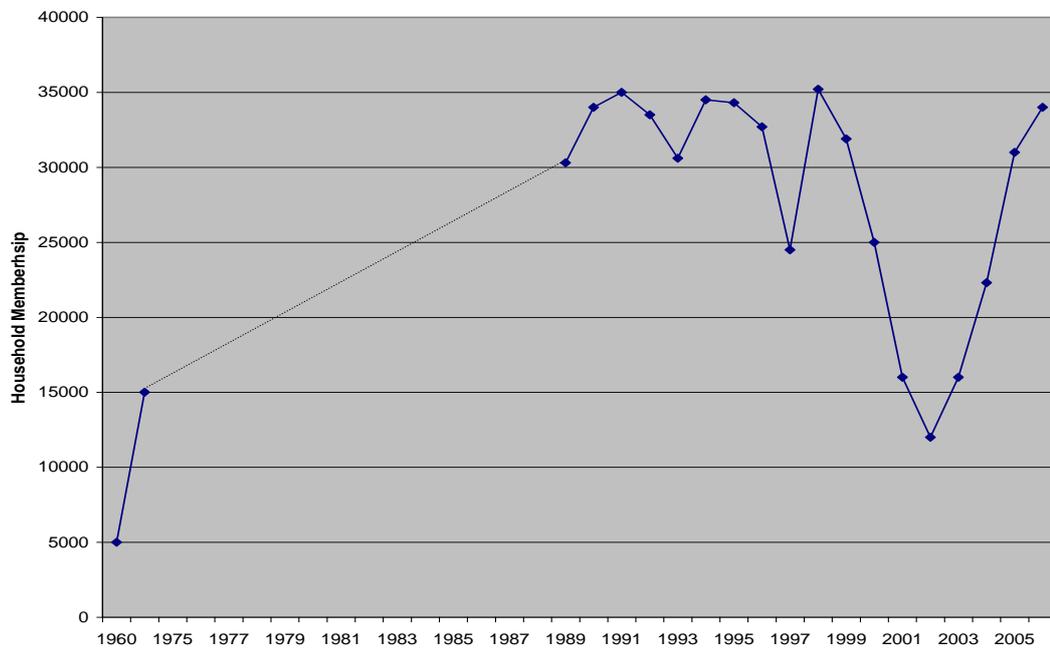


Chart 2: SPNI Household Membership Trend*



* SPNI gathers membership data **by household**, not **by individual** as is the case with ACRI and MQG. When asked to report on total members, they generally multiply these numbers by a factor of three or four, but there is no consistent record regarding the changing proportion of single versus family membership over time. Therefore, this chart is reported in the more accurate measure of “household membership.”

Chart 3: ACRI Budget Trend

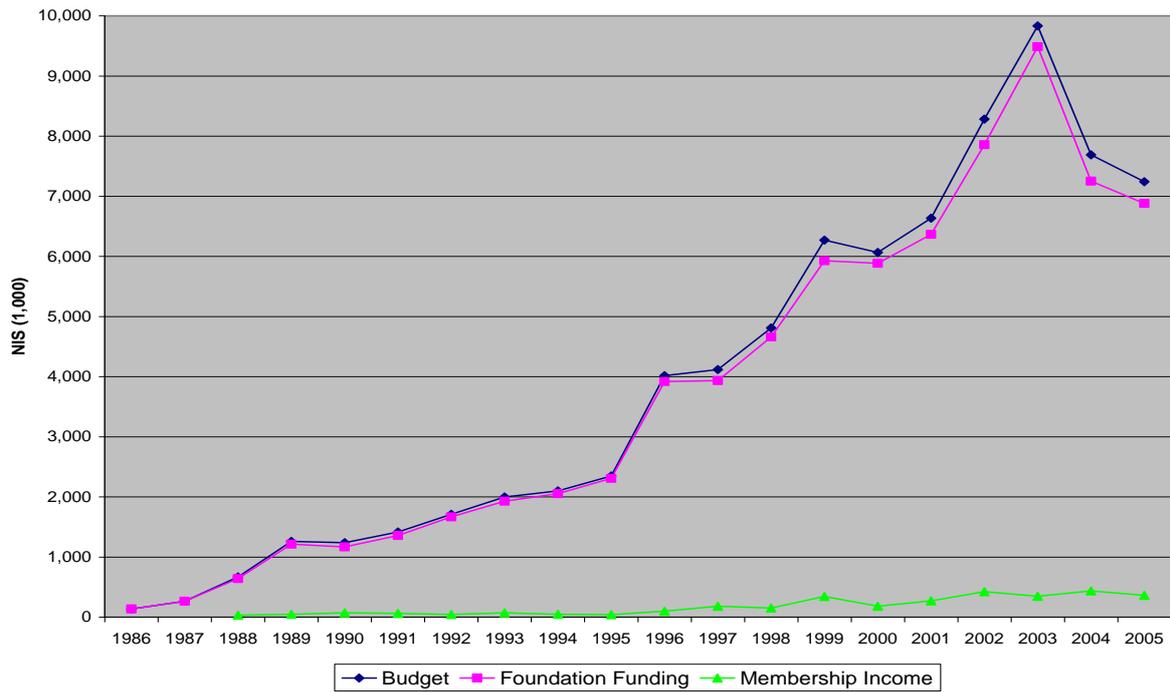


Chart 4: ACRI Membership Trend

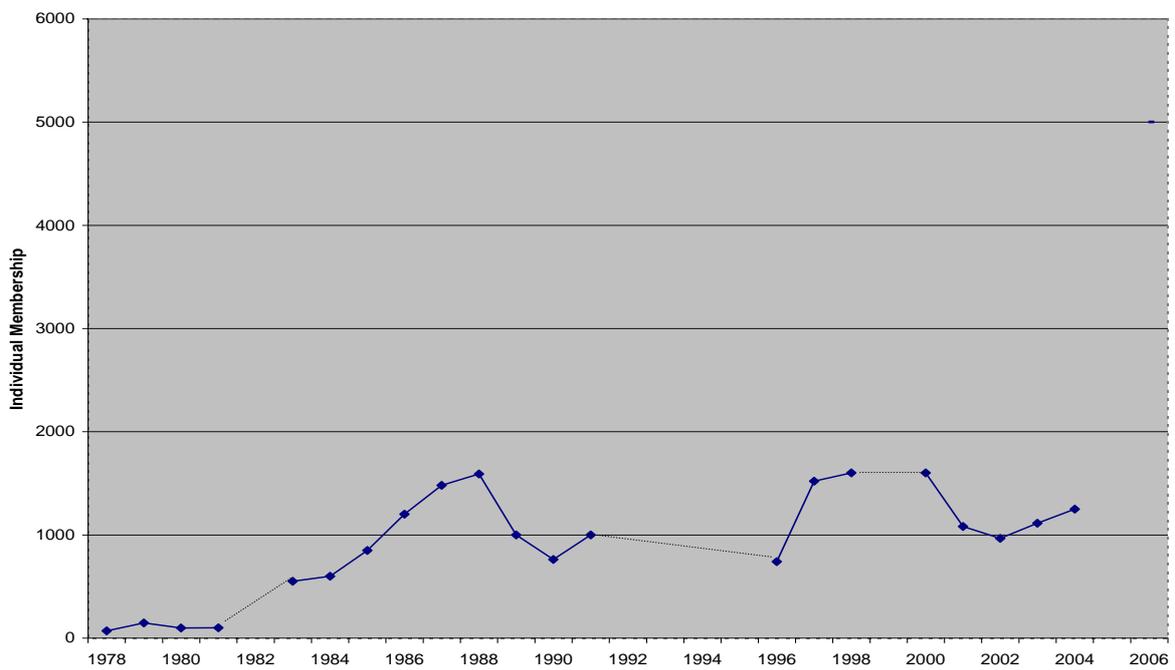


Chart 5: MQG Budget Trend

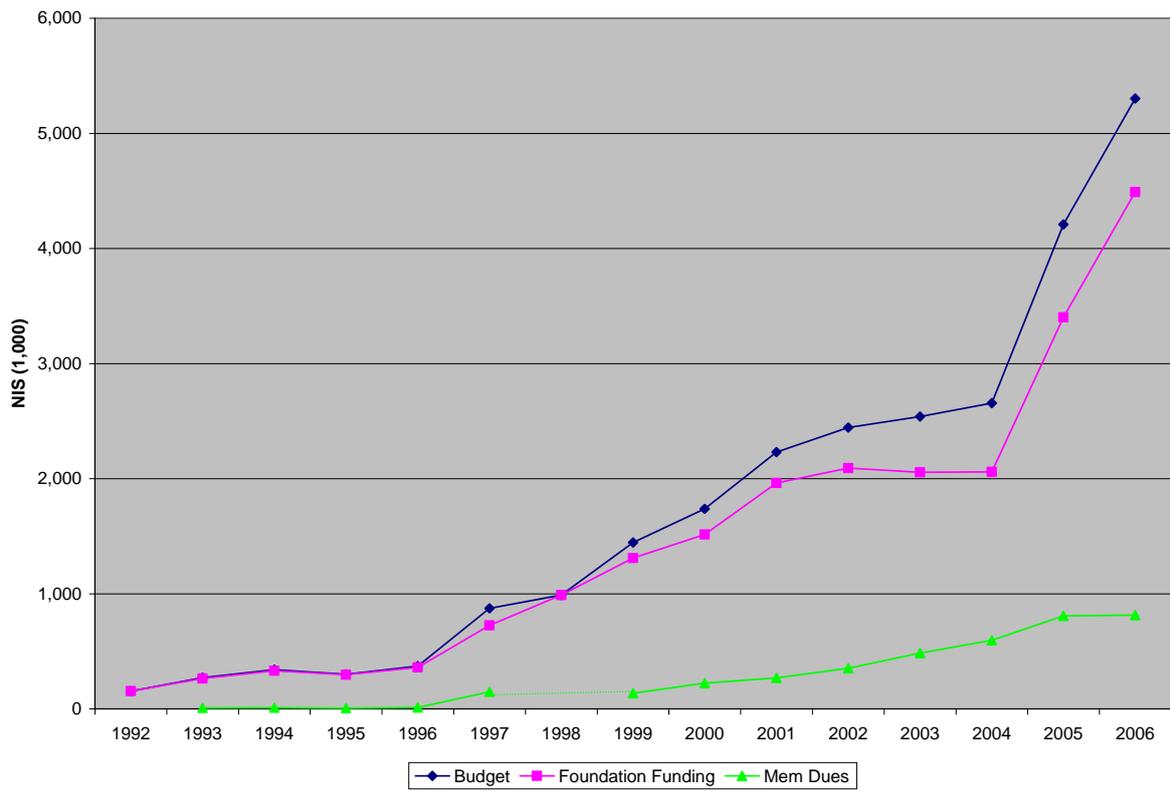


Chart 6: MQG Membership Trend

