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## *Chapter 1*

# **It Takes More Than House Calls: Organizing to Win with a Comprehensive Union-Building Strategy**

*Kate Bronfenbrenner and Tom Juravich*

Until recently, some national and local union leaders still argued that labor should circle the wagons and take care of existing members rather than spend scarce resources on organizing nonunion workers. Today those voices have largely been silenced by the hard numbers of labor's dramatic decline. As expressed in the platform of the new AFL-CIO leadership slate, the American labor movement must "organize at an unprecedented pace and scale." The question unions face today is no longer whether to make organizing a priority but how that can best be achieved.

Yet it is important to recognize that organizing has become increasingly difficult. Under the crushing weight of weak and poorly enforced labor laws, rabidly antiunion employers, and an increasingly hostile political and economic climate, it is no wonder that so few American workers overcome the threats, fears, and delays and go on to actually organize a union and bargain a first agreement. Matters are only made worse when labor leaders are told time and again by their supposed friends in government and academia that American workers are no longer interested in unions but see a more viable and less threatening alternative in management-proffered participation programs.

Faced with an increasingly hostile environment, the labor movement has begun to focus its energy on the one element of the organizing process that it controls—union strategies and tactics. For some organizers, this has meant organizing outside the traditional NLRB process through broader community-based and industry-based organizing campaigns. For others, this has

meant critically analyzing union organizing strategies used during the NLRB election process, from targeting to winning elections to bargaining first agreements.

Unfortunately, although considerable macro-level research documents the magnitude of labor's decline, surprisingly little micro-level research looks intensively at the organizing process itself, particularly the importance of union strategies and tactics. In part, this is because many industrial relations researchers are not convinced that union tactics play a significant role in determining election outcomes. Some researchers, such as William T. Dickens (1983), believe that union tactics are entirely reactive, determined solely by management tactics. Other researchers may believe that union tactics matter but are unable to include them in their research models because they either have a limited understanding of the range of union organizing tactics or lack access to union campaign data. Thus, most industrial relations research on private-sector organizing continues to focus primarily on the election, unit, and employer variables easily accessible in NLRB databases.<sup>1</sup>

Bronfenbrenner's study of private-sector NLRB certification election and first-contract campaigns that took place in 1986 and 1987 provided the first comprehensive analysis of the most effective union organizing strategies (Bronfenbrenner 1993 and 1997). The findings suggest that union success in certification election and first-contract campaigns depends on using an aggressive grassroots rank-and-file strategy focused on building a union and acting like a union from the very beginning of the campaign. Although the research confirmed the prevalence of egregious employer behavior in the private sector and the effectiveness of that opposition in thwarting union efforts to win elections and bargain first contracts, it also showed that unions can overcome even the most intense opposition when they run aggressive bottom-up campaigns.

In the almost ten years since the elections Bronfenbrenner addressed in her study, dramatic changes have taken place in the organizing arena. Many of the largest unions in the country have shifted resources into organizing and have revamped their training and recruitment programs for organizers, putting more focus into conducting more aggressive and more strategic campaigns. Other unions have turned to the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute for help in screening and recruiting new organizing staff. But despite these efforts, NLRB election win rates remain below 50 percent and fewer than one-third of the more than 300,000 private-sector workers who attempt to organize each year end up being covered under collective bargaining agreements. Clearly it is time to reevaluate union campaigns to determine

1. For a detailed review of the literature on union tactics, see Bronfenbrenner 1993 and Lawler 1990.

whether unions have made significant changes in how they organize and, if so, why those changes have not resulted in greater organizing success.

This chapter examines data on 165 NLRB certification election campaigns conducted in 1994 to track the changes that have occurred in union and employer behavior since Bronfenbrenner's study. In so doing we test the hypothesis that unions make significant organizing gains only when they utilize a comprehensive union-building strategy. Simply throwing money and staff at campaigns is not enough to overcome employer resistance and worker fear. Nor does any individual organizing tactic—whether sophisticated media campaigns, stockholder actions, or a blitz house calling of every worker in the unit—guarantee success. House calling, in particular, has in some quarters been offered as the silver bullet, the panacea for all types of organizing campaigns.

But to be successful in today's hostile climate with today's workers, it takes more than just house calls. We suggest that unions will continue to fail in organizing if all they do is graft individual innovative tactics onto more traditional organizing approaches. Further, we hypothesize that these tactics are truly effective only when they are integrated into a comprehensive rank-and-file approach to organizing that focuses on the use of personal contact, leadership development, and a combination of aggressive and creative internal and external pressure tactics.

### **Private-Sector Organizing in 1986–87**

Bronfenbrenner's 1986–87 study (1993 and 1997) was designed to evaluate the influence of several factors that contribute to union success or failure in certification election campaigns. Through a survey of the lead organizers in 261 NLRB campaigns, Bronfenbrenner was able to determine which union tactics had the most positive impact on election outcomes while controlling for the impact of election environment, organizers' background, bargaining unit demographics, and employer characteristics and tactics. A summary of the findings from the original study is presented in the first three columns of table 1.1.

Perhaps the most striking finding of Bronfenbrenner's study was that union tactics as a group play a greater role in explaining election outcome than any other group of variables, including employer characteristics and tactics, bargaining unit demographics, organizers' background, and election environment. This suggests that union strategies not only matter in determining election outcome but that they may matter more than many other factors.

For the labor movement, this means that union strategies and tactics can make a significant difference in whether unions win or lose elections, even

**TABLE 1.1** Summary of NLRB Election Campaigns, 1986–87 and 1994

	1986–87 NLRB Elections			1994 NLRB Elections		
	Sample proportion or mean	Proportion or mean for wins	Percentage win rate <sup>a</sup>	Sample proportion or mean	Proportion or mean for wins	Percentage win rate <sup>a</sup>
<b>OUTCOME</b>						
Election outcome	.43	1.00	.43 (.00)	.42	1.00	.42 (.00)
Percentage union vote	.47	.65	NA	.49	.71	NA
First contract outcome	.35	.75	NA	.27	.65	NA
<b>UNIT BACKGROUND</b>						
Sector: Service	.34	.39	.48 (.39)	.28	.46	.70 (.31)
Manufacturing	.66	.61	.39 (.48)	.72	.54	.31 (.70)
Number of eligible voters	138	105	NA	178	141	NA
Percentage women in unit	.46	.54	NA	.39	.43	NA
<i>Unit at least 75% women</i>	.27	.39	.59 (.36)	.19	.28	.61 (.37)
Percentage people of color in unit	.28	.34	NA	.28	.31	NA
<i>Unit at least 75% people of color</i>	.14	.21	.64 (.39)	.12	.13	.45 (.41)
Average wage	6.31	5.72	NA	8.74	8.35	NA
Other units of employer organized	.46	.52	.49 (.38)	.38	.42	.46 (.39)
Unit different than petition	.22	.12	.22 (.47)	.25	.20	.33 (.43)
<b>EMPLOYER TACTICS</b>						
Outside consultant	.71	.67	.40 (.50)	.87	.81	.39 (.62)
Five or more captive-audience meetings	.33	.22	.28 (.49)	.64	.45	.29 (.64)
Five or more company letters	.40	.36	.38 (.45)	.24	.23	.40 (.42)
Supervisor one-on-ones	.79	.79	.43 (.42)	.76	.71	.39 (.51)
Discharges for union activity	.30	.35	.51 (.39)	.28	.27	.40 (.42)
<i>Discharges not reinstated before election</i>	.18	.19	.37 (.44)	.26	.25	.40 (.42)
Employer gave wage increases	.30	.23	.32 (.47)	.24	.26	.45 (.41)
Employer used layoffs	.15	.18	.53 (.41)	.11	.17	.67 (.39)
Unilateral changes in benefits	—	—	—	.29	.28	.40 (.42)
Leaders promoted out of unit	.17	.19	.47 (.42)	—	—	—
Employer ran media campaign	.10	.13	.52 (.41)	.07	.03	.17 (.44)
Employer assisted antiunion committee	.42	.37	.37 (.46)	.50	.33	.28 (.56)
Employer held social events	—	—	—	.27	.20	.32 (.45)

**TABLE 1.1** Summary of NLRB Election Campaigns, 1986–87 and 1994 (*cont.*)

	1986–87 NLRB Elections			1994 NLRB Elections		
	Sample proportion or mean	Proportion or mean for wins	Percentage win rate <sup>a</sup>	Sample proportion or mean	Proportion or mean for wins	Percentage win rate <sup>a</sup>
<b>EMPLOYER TACTICS (cont.)</b>						
Employee-involvement plan in effect	.07	.04	.22 (.44)	.33	.23	.30 (.48)
Employee involvement set up after petition	—	—	—	.09	.04	.20 (.44)
Employer used bribes	—	—	—	.42	.29	.29 (.51)
Management change after petition	.21	.20	.41 (.43)	.38	.31	.33 (.47)
Number of employer tactics used	4.15	3.74	NA	4.87	4.23	NA
Employer used more than five tactics	.21	.15	.32 (.45)	.39	.30	.32 (.48)
<b>UNION TACTICS</b>						
Percentage on committee	.10	.13	NA	.12	.14	NA
<i>Representative committee</i>	.23	.34	.62 (.37)	.44	.57	.54 (.32)
Percent house called	.36	.45	NA	.58	.64	NA
<i>50% or more house called</i>	.28	.41	.61 (.35)	.39	.39	.42 (.42)
Number of small-group meetings	5.26	5.36	NA	11.16	12.99	NA
<i>Ten or more small-group meetings</i>	.22	.20	.39 (.43)	.39	.46	.50 (.37)
Rank-and-file volunteers did house calls	.18	.23	.52 (.40)	—	—	—
<i>Ten or more rank-and-file volunteers</i>	—	—	—	.17	.20	.50 (.40)
70% or more surveyed one-on-one	.53	.57	.46 (.39)	.21	.28	.54 (.38)
Bargaining committee before election	.15	.23	.64 (.39)	—	—	—
Solidarity days used	.12	.15	.53 (.41)	.56	.58	.43 (.40)
Union held rallies	.03	.04	.50 (.42)	.41	.38	.39 (.43)
Union held job actions	.02	.05	.10 (.41)	.13	.19	.62 (.38)
Community-labor coalitions used	.16	.19	.50 (.41)	.30	.30	.43 (.41)
Union used media	.11	.14	.52 (.41)	.12	.16	.58 (.39)
Dignity, fairness primary issues	.27	.36	.56 (.37)	—	—	—
Total number rank-and-file tactics used	2.12	2.69	NA	3.24	3.49	NA
<i>Union used more than five rank-and-file tactics</i>	.03	.06	1.00 (.41)	.15	.30	.67 (.38)

<sup>a</sup> Number in parentheses is the percentage win rate when the tactic or characteristic did not occur.

NA = Not applicable.

in a climate of intense employer opposition, economic decline, and weak public support. It also means that industrial relations research models that exclude union tactics fail to capture one of the most important elements of the organizing process.

The study showed that unions are most likely to win certification elections when they run aggressive and creative campaigns utilizing a grassroots, rank-and-file-intensive strategy, building a union and acting like a union from the very beginning of the campaign. Thus, campaigns in which the union focused on person-to-person contact, house calls, and small-group meetings to develop leadership and union consciousness and to inoculate workers against the employers' antiunion campaigns were associated with win rates that were 10 to 30 percent higher than traditional campaigns that primarily used gate leafleting, mass meetings, and glossy mailings to contact unorganized workers. These results do not imply that something is inherently wrong with union leaflets and mailings but, rather, that personal contact is necessary to build support for a union and counteract an employer campaign.

Bronfenbrenner's study also found that unions were more successful when they encouraged active rank-and-file participation in and responsibility for the organizing campaign, including developing a large rank-and-file organizing committee representative of the different interest groups in the bargaining unit. The importance of rank-and-file participation extends beyond representation on the committee to involvement in internal and external pressure tactics that build solidarity and commitment to the union and compel the employer to run a less aggressive campaign.

The findings of the 1986-87 study also showed that it is essential that the union develop a long-range campaign strategy that incorporates building for the first contract into the original organizing process. Election win rates were more than 20 percentage points higher in units in which the union conducted bargaining surveys, selected the bargaining committee, and worked with the rank and file to develop proposals before the election rather than waiting until after the election to prepare for the first-contract campaign.

The issues the union focuses on during the campaign also are very important in determining election outcome. Unions that focused on issues such as dignity, justice, discrimination, fairness, or service quality were associated with win rates that were nearly 20 percentage points higher than those that focused on more traditional bread-and-butter issues, such as wages, benefits, and job security.

Finally, unions were also more successful when they developed a culture of organizing that permeated every activity and structure of the union. This included a serious commitment of staff and financial resources to organizing, the involvement of the international in local campaigns, and the train-

ing, recruitment, and effective utilization of rank-and-file volunteers from already-organized bargaining units.

Bronfenbrenner found that individual "rank-and-file intensive" tactics were associated with win rates 10 to 30 percentage points higher than win rates in campaigns that did not use these tactics. She also found that when these tactics were included in a regression equation controlling for the influence of employer tactics and characteristics and unit and election environment variables, many were associated with as much as a 3 percent increase in the percentage of votes received by the union and with as much as a 10 percent increase in the probability of winning the election. Given that so many NLRB election campaigns are lost by only a few percentage points, these results strongly suggest that unions organizing in the private sector could significantly improve their win rates if they used all or most of these rank-and-file-intensive tactics.

Unfortunately, the findings also show that in 1986 and 1987 only a very small number of unions were using a comprehensive union-building strategy in their certification election campaigns. As shown in the first column of table 1.1, fewer than one-third of those unions surveyed had representative committees, house called the majority of the members of the unit, held ten or more small-group meetings, or focused on dignity and fairness as the primary issues. Even fewer had solidarity days, established a bargaining committee before the election, or used such tactics as forming community-labor coalitions or holding rallies, job actions, or media campaigns.

Most striking of all, only 3 percent of the unions ran comprehensive campaigns in which they used five or more of the rank-and-file-intensive union-building strategies. In the small number of campaigns in which a more comprehensive strategy was used, however, unions won every election. This compares with a 41 percent win rate in those units in which the unions used fewer than five rank-and-file-intensive tactics. Further, controlling for the influence of employer characteristics and tactics and unit and election environment variables, the probability of the union winning the election increased by 10 percent for each additional rank-and-file-intensive tactic the union used.<sup>2</sup>

## 1994 Data and Research Methods

As part of his recent study, described in part IV of this volume, on the impact of employee-involvement programs on union organizing campaigns,

2. Tactics included in this variable were whether the union had a representative organizing committee, house called at least 50 percent of the members of the unit, held ten or more small-group meetings, used rank-and-file volunteers from other units to make house calls, had solidarity days, established a bargaining committee before the election, surveyed 70 percent or more of the members of the unit one-on-one about the contract, utilized community-labor coalitions, held rallies, used job actions, and focused on dignity and fairness as primary issues.

James Rundle surveyed a random sample of lead organizers of two hundred single-union NLRB certification election campaigns that took place in 1994 and involved units with fifty or more eligible voters. The 165 campaigns in his final sample represented approximately one-quarter of all the NLRB elections that took place in units of fifty or more eligible voters in 1994. Although the sample contained a slightly higher concentration of blue-collar manufacturing units than the election population and underrepresented units with high concentrations of low-wage women and minority workers, overall the sample was representative across unions, industries, regions, and types of bargaining units.

In addition to collecting data on employer-initiated employee-involvement programs, Rundle asked the lead organizers a series of questions about the demographics of the bargaining units, employer tactics, and union tactics. Although this information is much more limited in scope than the election and unit background data collected in the 1986-87 study, it does provide an important opportunity for comparison.

Descriptive statistics were calculated for each of the variables included in the model to capture the nature and extent of union and employer organizing activities in 1994 and to enable us to make comparisons between those findings and the data obtained for 1986-87. In addition, logit analysis was used to determine whether union tactics variables, both individually and as a group, had a statistically significant impact on certification election outcomes when controlling for the influence of election environment, bargaining unit demographic, and employer tactics variables.

Like Bronfenbrenner's study, this research is based on a theoretical model that sees election outcome as a function of interacting elements, including background variables, union and employer characteristics, and union and employer strategies.<sup>3</sup> It tests the hypothesis that union success in certification elections depends on the utilization of a comprehensive union-building strategy that incorporates personal contact, leadership development, and creative and aggressive internal and external pressure tactics. We hypothesize that although some individual union tactics may have a positive impact on election outcome, significant union gains will depend on a multifaceted, comprehensive campaign that utilizes as many rank-and-file-intensive tactics as possible. Union tactics variables in our model include the following: having a representative rank-and-file committee;<sup>4</sup> house calling of 50 per-

3. For a full description of the theoretical model used in the 1986-87 study, see Bronfenbrenner 1993:137-81.

4. A representative committee is defined as a committee that is representative of at least 10 percent of the eligible voters of the unit and that has at least 10 percent women and/or 10 percent people of color for any units with at least 10 percent women and/or 10 percent people of color.

cent or more of the members of the unit; holding ten or more small-group meetings during the campaign; enlisting the help of ten or more rank-and-file volunteers from already organized units during the campaign; holding solidarity days, rallies, and job actions; launching media campaigns; utilizing community-labor coalitions; and conducting a one-on-one contract survey of at least 70 percent of the members of the unit. When combined in a single rank-and-file-intensive union tactics variable, it is hypothesized that the probability of the union winning the election will significantly increase for each additional tactic the union uses.

In addition to the union tactics variables, we were able to control for election environment, employer characteristics, bargaining unit demographics, and employer tactics with the following variables: number of eligible voters, presence of other organized units, board-ordered or stipulated change in the unit from unit for which the union originally petitioned, unit at least 75 percent women,<sup>5</sup> percentage people of color in the unit, average wage in the unit, and number of employer tactics used. The tactics constituting the employer scale variable include whether the employer used an outside consultant, held five or more captive-audience meetings, sent five or more antiunion letters to employees, discharged workers for union activity and did not reinstate them before the election, enlisted supervisors to campaign one-on-one, gave wage increases, made unilateral changes in benefits, laid off workers during the campaign, ran a media campaign, used bribes, assisted the rank-and-file antiunion committee, set up an employee-involvement program after the petition was filed, held social events, and made changes in management structure and personnel.

## Results

Table 1.1 summarizes the descriptive statistics for both the 1986–87 and the 1994 studies. What is perhaps most striking is how little the data have changed. In the 1990s, as in 1986–87, the win rate in units with more than fifty employees continues to average about 43 percent. The percentage union vote remains unchanged, and the first contract rate has gone down slightly. Although unions continue to enjoy dramatically higher win rates in service-sector units than in manufacturing units (70 percent versus 31 percent), most election activity is concentrated in the manufacturing sector. Similarly, although win rates have been shown to be significantly higher in

5. Seventy-five percent women was used rather than a simple continuous percentage women variable because previous research by Bronfenbrenner (1993) and by Ruth Milkman (1992) found that gender homogeneity has a significant influence on election outcome. Union win rates are highest when a clear majority of the unit are women but are higher in all-male units than in units with 25 percent to 50 percent women.

units in which women and people of color predominate, less than 20 percent of the units being organized include a significant majority of either women or people of color. The percentage of stipulated versus NLRB- and court-ordered changes in the bargaining unit is unchanged.

The data show that unions are attempting to organize slightly larger units. Thus, in 1986-87, there were no elections in units with more than five hundred eligible voters and the average size of the units in which unions won was only 105, whereas in 1994, 5 percent of the organizing campaigns in the sample were in units with more than five hundred eligible voters and the average number of eligible voters in units in which the union won increased to 148. Such an incremental improvement is hardly sufficient to stem the tide of labor's decline.

Employer campaigns have undergone the greatest change, not so much in the tactics being used but in the overall intensity. Just as they did a decade ago, the overwhelming majority of employers use a broad range of aggressive legal and illegal antiunion tactics, including discharging workers for union activity, giving workers illegal wage increases and imposing unilateral changes in benefits, conducting one-on-one supervisor meetings with employees, offering bribes, supporting antiunion committees, holding captive-audience meetings, establishing employee-involvement programs, holding social events, and mailing letters and distributing leaflets. And, just as in 1986-87, most of these tactics are associated with significantly lower win rates.

Many employers have also increased the use of specific tactics. For example, 87 percent of the employers in the 1994 sample used outside consultants as opposed to 71 percent in 1986-87. Similarly, whereas only 33 percent of employers held five or more captive-audience meetings in 1986-87, 64 percent held them in 1994, and 33 percent had established employee-involvement committees, compared with only 7 percent in 1986-87.

What is most striking about the employer tactics, however, is that whereas only 21 percent of employers used more than five aggressive antiunion tactics in 1986-87, by 1994 that number had jumped to 39 percent. Not surprisingly, win rates were significantly lower in units in which employers used more than five aggressive tactics (32 percent) than in units in which five or fewer such tactics were used (48 percent).

The nature and the intensity of union campaigns have also changed. The percentage of campaigns in which the union had a representative organizing committee increased from 23 to 44 percent, while the percentage of campaigns in which the union conducted house calls of the majority of the members of the unit increased from 28 to 39 percent. Likewise, the average number of small-group meetings the union held during the campaigns went from 5.26 in 1986-87 to 11.16 in 1994, and the percentage of units in which the union held ten or more small-group meetings increased by 17

percent. Unions were also much more likely to have solidarity days (56 percent versus 12 percent), to hold rallies (41 percent versus 3 percent), to utilize community-labor coalitions (30 percent versus 16 percent), and to conduct job actions (13 percent versus 2 percent) in 1994. With the exception of house calling of the majority of the members of the unit and holding rallies, all these tactics were associated with higher win rates than campaigns in which these tactics were not used.

Looking more closely at the intensity of the campaigns, however, we find that the change has not been very significant. Fewer than half the campaigns surveyed had representative committees, ran more than ten small-group meetings, actively used rank-and-file volunteers from already-organized units, or conducted one-on-one surveys. The average number of rank-and-file-intensive tactics the unions used was only 3.24, compared with 2.12 in 1986-87. Contrast this with the number of tactics used by employers, which averaged 4.87 in 1994 and 4.15 in 1986-87.

Most striking of all, in 1994 only 15 percent of the lead organizers surveyed ran comprehensive campaigns that used more than five rank-and-file-intensive tactics. Although this is a fivefold increase from 1986-87, the figure still represents an extremely small portion of NLRB campaigns. In those 15 percent, however, the win rate shoots to 67 percent, versus only 38 percent when the unions used five or fewer tactics.

Clearly, the majority of unions continue to run very traditional campaigns that do not involve personal contact, leadership development, and the internal and external pressure tactics so essential to establishing the rank-and-file commitment and support necessary to overcome increasingly aggressive employer campaigns. Even when they do use such tactics as house calling, small-group meetings, and solidarity days, unions tend to use these tactics in isolation, without benefit of a more comprehensive campaign. The question then becomes, how does house calling, for example, which is meant to be part of a larger grassroots effort aimed at reaching workers one-on-one, work in the absence of other tactics, such as forming a representative committee or using internal pressure tactics or building for the first contract during the organizing campaign?

As we can see from table 1.2, the importance of developing a more comprehensive campaign becomes even more apparent when included in a logit estimation controlling for the influence of election environment, bargaining unit demographics, and employer characteristics and tactics variables. Two models were used to estimate the predicted impact of union tactics on the probability of the union winning the election. The first model, A, includes each individual union tactic. The second model, B, combines the individual union tactics into a rank-and-file-intensive scale variable, adding one unit for each additional tactic used.

As predicted, the number of eligible voters, changes in the composition

**TABLE 1.2.** Impact of Union and Employer Tactics on Election Outcome, 1994

Independent variable	Hypothesized sign	Mean or percentage of sample	Percentage union win rate	Model A		Model B	
				Coefficient	Predicted impact on probability of union win <sup>a</sup>	Coefficient	Predicted impact on probability of union win <sup>a</sup>
<b>ELECTION BACKGROUND VARIABLES</b>							
Number of eligible voters	-	178	NA	-1.941 **	<i>no perceptible impact</i>	-1.568 *	<i>no perceptible impact</i>
Other units represented	+	.38	.46	.317	—	.497	—
Unit different than petitioned for	-	.25	.33	-1.779 **	<i>-15% if different</i>	-1.852 **	<i>-16% if different</i>
Average wage	-	8.74	NA	-1.606 *	<i>-2% for \$1 increase in average wage</i>	-1.204	—
Unit at least 75% women	+	.19	.61	1.701 **	<i>15% if 75% women</i>	2.006 **	<i>9% if 75% of women</i>
Percentage minority in the unit	+	.28	NA	1.263	—	1.319 *	<i>2% for 10% increase in people of color</i>
Number of employer tactics used <sup>b</sup>	-	4.87	NA	-4.209 ***	<i>-7% for each additional tactic</i>	-3.897 ***	<i>-7% for each additional tactic</i>
<b>UNION TACTICS</b>							
Model A							
Union had representative committee	+	.44	.54	2.661 ***	<i>20% if had representative committee</i>	—	—
Union house called majority	+	.39	.42	-0.011	—	—	—
Union held ten or more small-group meetings	+	.39	.50	1.392 *	<i>10% if 10 or more</i>	—	—

**TABLE 1.2.** Impact of Union and Employer Tactics on Election Outcome, 1994 (cont.)

Independent variable	Hypothesized sign	Mean or percentage of sample	Percentage union win rate	Model A		Model B				
				Coefficient	Predicted impact on probability of union win <sup>a</sup>	Coefficient	Predicted impact on probability of union win <sup>a</sup>			
<b>UNION TACTICS (cont.)</b>										
Model A										
Union used at least ten rank-and-file volunteers	+	.19	.50	2.153 **	22% if 10 or more					
Union used solidarity days	+	.56	.43	1.233	—					
Union used rallies	+	.41	.39	-1.135	—					
Union used job actions	+	.13	.62	2.228 **	24% if job actions used					
Union used media	+	.12	.58	1.836 **	22% if media used					
Union used community labor coalitions	+	.30	.43	-0.054	—					
70% of voters surveyed one-on-one	+	.21	.54	1.390 *	12% if surveyed					
Model B										
Number of union tactics used	+	3.24	NA			3.902 ***	9% for each additional tactic			
Total Number of Observations		165	.42							
McFadden's Rho-squared				.253	.000 ***	.17	000 ***			
2 (log-likelihood)				56.638		38.23				
Significance levels: * = .10 ** = .05 *** = .01 (one-tailed tests)										

<sup>a</sup> Based on partial derivative for statistically significant variable from logit estimations of election outcome with dependent variable win-lose.

<sup>b</sup> Employer tactics include five or more captive-audience meetings, five or more company letters, supervisor campaigned one-on-one, change in management after the petition, company gave wage increases, unilateral change in benefits, employer held social events, company used media, company used bribes, company assisted antiunion committee, workers discharged and not reinstated before the election, and employer set up employee-involvement program during campaign.

of the unit, and employer tactics were also found to have significant negative impact on election outcome. Employer tactics in particular were found to affect election outcome dramatically. The probability of the union winning the election declined by 7 percent for each aggressive antiunion tactic the employer used when the influence of election environment, bargaining unit demographics, and union tactics were controlled for.

The results also provide support for the argument that unions are more successful in units with a majority of women and/or people of color. As shown in the results for the partial derivatives in model B, the probability of the union winning the election increased by 9 percent in units with at least 75 percent women and by 2 percent for each 10 percent increase in the number of people of color.<sup>6</sup>

The results for the individual union tactics variables included in model A are quite mixed. Although tactics such as having a representative committee, using at least ten rank-and-file volunteers, conducting job actions, and using a media campaign exhibited a strong positive and statistically significant impact on election outcome, other tactics, such as holding ten or more small-group meetings and surveying 70 percent of the unit members one-on-one, exhibited a relatively weak effect (only a 0.10 level of statistical significance). The remaining union tactics, including house calling the majority of the members of the unit, holding solidarity days, having rallies, and forming community-labor coalitions, were not found to have a statistically significant positive effect on certification election outcomes.

Yet when these tactics were combined into a single union tactics variable in model B, adding one unit for each rank-and-file-intensive tactic used, the number of tactics was found to have a strong positive impact on election outcome (statistically significant at 0.001 or better). The results from the logit estimation controlling for the influence of election environment, bargaining unit demographics, and employer tactics variables suggest that the probability of the union winning the election increases by as much as 9 percent for each rank-and-file-intensive tactic the union uses.

These results lend strong support to our hypothesis that whether there is a comprehensive union-building campaign that incorporates person-to-person contact, leadership development, escalating internal and external pressure tactics, and building for the first contract is more important in determining election outcome than whether the union uses individual tac-

6. The relatively weak results for the percentage people of color variable (not statistically significant in model A and significant at only a 0.1 level in model B) may be explained by the fact that Rundle's sample underrepresented low-wage manufacturing- and service-sector units, in which people of color dominate. This is particularly true of SEIU hospital and nursing home campaigns and of UNITE's manufacturing campaigns in the Deep South, which were underrepresented because of difficulties in tracking down the organizers in the short time allotted.

tics. The more union-building strategies are used during the organizing campaign, the greater the likelihood that the union will win the election, even in a climate of intense employer opposition. Given that the probability of the union winning the election is reduced by 6 percent for each aggressive antiunion tactic the employer uses and increased by 9 percent for each rank-and-file-intensive tactic the union uses, these findings once again suggest that union tactics as a group matter more than employer tactics in determining union success in NLRB certification election campaigns.

## **Conclusions**

This examination of recent certification elections provides important insights into the state of organizing in the private sector. The findings not only suggest directions for further research but provide guidance for the labor movement in its revitalization efforts. One of the most fundamental findings for both labor activists and scholars is that union tactics and activities are central to the organizing process. Although many academics and trade unionists traditionally looked only to the deteriorating economic and political climate and antiunion campaigns as the determinants of organizing outcomes, this study underscores that union tactics matter as much, if not more, in determining results.

The data from 1994 give credence to many voices from the front lines of the labor movement who report that employers have intensified their antiunion efforts. As we have seen, employers have not necessarily adopted new tactics, or shifted their behavior in favor of some tactics over others. Instead, they have continued to utilize the model honed throughout the 1980s and early 1990s but with greater intensity. Despite recent cries for labor law reform, our data show only too well the outcome of that effort, as workers face greater and greater risks and pay higher and higher costs for simply attempting to exercise their right to organize a union in their workplace.

The data from 1994 provide further support for the finding of the 1986-87 study that despite the intensity of employer opposition, what unions do during organizing campaigns is what matters most. Unions can still win, as demonstrated in UNITE's string of victories in manufacturing plants in the South, SEIU's success in organizing more than two thousand workers at Crouse Irving and Corning Hospitals in upstate New York, or the Teamsters' national campaign against Overnite. And, in support of the original 1986-87 study, we once again have found that the use of a grassroots, rank-and-file-intensive, union-building strategy is fundamental in significantly raising the probability of winning. Overall, these data suggest that the recommitment of the labor movement to organizing is not a futile effort. If unions use the right tactics, they can still win, despite the odds.

This good news is tempered, however, by current union practice in choos-

ing tactics and running organizing campaigns. Despite increased training, staff, and budgets, unions have made only minor improvements in embracing a more rank-and-file-intensive approach to organizing. The 1994 data suggest that the labor movement has been more tied to traditional top-down, plant gate types of organizing than many have assumed.

The current data indicate the willingness of many organizers and unions to experiment with some grassroots union-building tactics. Clearly, these tactics have been discussed and have begun filtering out to front-line organizers. Yet the approach has been largely piecemeal; organizers have used one or two isolated tactics without incorporating them into a more cohesive and consistent strategy. Only a handful of campaigns have fully embraced a union-building approach, and this is reflected in the overall win rate, which continues to hover at about 50 percent.

Although individual tactics, such as having a representative committee, using rank-and-file volunteers, and conducting media campaigns, are important, our data clearly indicate that the use of individual tactics is not enough. The question this piecemeal approach raises is, what does it mean to have a representative committee, for example, in the absence of other grassroots strategies? Having a representative committee is one thing, but if rank-and-file workers are never trained in one-on-one organizing and if they are never given an active leadership role in the campaign, then the very purpose of developing rank-and-file leadership is defeated. Whether they are conducting house calls, organizing job actions, or rallying community support, rank-and-file organizing committees are effective in overcoming employer opposition or in mobilizing worker support only when they, rather than organizing staff, are doing the primary work of building a union in their workplace. Individual tactics are not effective when they are used in isolation from other union-building efforts.

Similarly, the quality of the tactics being used also matters. A campaign in which every worker receives a house call in a weekend blitz by outside organizing staff that is little more than a ten-minute visit to drop off literature will be much less effective than a campaign in which the union sets up small-group meetings with two or three workers at workers' homes, in community centers, or in the workplace and workers have an opportunity to express their concerns and to be inoculated against the employer campaign, to mobilize for solidarity actions, and, most important, to develop leaders for the long haul to come.

Effecting the kind of sea change in organizing that the new leadership of the AFL-CIO has correctly suggested is crucial for survival will take more than house calls, coordinated campaigns, volunteer organizers, or the use of any individual tactic. It will take an unprecedented commitment of staff and resources. It will also take mass industry- and community-based or-

ganizing that goes far beyond small-scale hot shop by hot shop campaigns. As our data also clearly show, effecting such a sea change requires a commitment to a comprehensive grassroots rank-and-file-intensive model and all the hard work that entails. Only by making such a commitment will unions become truly successful in organizing.

Given the level of employer opposition, and the likelihood that such opposition will continue to intensify until the labor movement has grown enough to enact real labor law reform, our research indicates that it is not enough to tinker with organizing techniques. To win takes nothing short of truly exceptional effort, including an exceptional organization committed to building a union from the bottom up.

In addition to increasing the win rate in individual elections, the use of a rank-and-file-intensive model for organizing has several important long-term benefits. First, if unions are going to organize on a scale unprecedented since the 1930s, they need more than just professional organizers. Given the recommitment by the labor movement to organizing, discussions have occurred concerning the costs of organizing individual workers and the astronomical budgets that will need to be committed to organize at the pace and scale required. It would be incorrect to suggest that the union-building model of organizing is less expensive than more top-down methods. In fact, in the short run, it may be more costly. Yet the long-term benefit of this grassroots model is that it creates a tremendous capacity for organizing. By fully involving rank-and-file members, however, the potential exists to create an army of experienced and committed rank-and-file organizers. There is no better example of this than UNITE's campaigns in its southern region, where recently organized rank-and-file volunteers have played a crucial role in organizing plants in neighboring communities.

Although investing dollars and people in organizing is fundamental to jump-start and sustain organizing efforts, the use of rank-and-file union-building approaches can create an even larger capacity for organizing and, in turn, a mass movement of workers. At this point the calculus of what organizing will cost changes. From this perspective, the use of a union-building model does much more than increase the likelihood of winning an individual election; it also creates a culture, climate, and capacity for organizing in the future.

But there is more at stake in a grassroots union-building campaign than just getting new members and dues payments. Organizing should also not be viewed as independent of the other activities of unions and their members. Particularly in an antiunion climate, organizing is just the first step in creating a strong and viable bargaining unit and local union. The unit must get a first contract and over time build an organization with real power in the workplace. It not only needs to achieve real dignity, justice, and fairness

for its members but it must be ready to stave off the many challenges it will face over time. Thus, not only does the union-building approach allow for victory, it also creates an opportunity for the union to become strong and viable, as workers early in the organizing process gain leadership skills and understand the real power associated with their involvement in the union. There has been much discussion in the labor movement about moving from a servicing to an organizing model; our research suggests that this process should begin during the organizing process itself.

Rank-and-file grassroots organizing strategies are also critical to the development of different kinds of unions. Union efforts during organizing campaigns to create an active and well-informed rank and file are wasted if these workers are squeezed into already existing, service-based organizations in which staff alone negotiate contracts and handle grievances. Particularly for the growing number of women and people of color who are increasingly involved in organizing campaigns, these traditional structures often involve serious obstacles to inclusion.

Newly organized workers need to be seen as more than just members of a special interest group to be accommodated in an existing structure and agenda. Especially given the recent lack of union growth, these new members—their ideas and issues, their dreams, and their desires—represent the future of the labor movement. Their enthusiasm and excitement should not be bridled in a structure that has often been perceived as cliquish and exclusionary. Instead, these newest members must become central to an inclusive and rejuvenated unionism of the 1990s.

Overall, our research demonstrates that there are indeed no silver bullets in organizing. Although some in the labor movement have seen individual tactics such as house calling as panaceas, as we have shown, these tactics are effective only when used in the context of a broader rank-and-file union-building approach. Unquestionably, it will take a great deal of hard work to move away from a reliance on traditional top-down strategies to the use of a more comprehensive grassroots union-building model. Yet, as the history of organizing in places as diverse as Lawrence, Flint, and Memphis have demonstrated, the fruits of this approach are many. More than simply organizing new members, rank-and-file-intensive campaigns will allow for the rebuilding of the labor movement—not simply individual labor organizations but a mass movement poised to regain its rightful place in society.