1 Toward a Framework for the Study of Consumer Advocacy

Consumers are the bedrock of modern capitalist systems. By spending and saving, they provide both the demand according to which goods and services are supplied and the resources needed to fuel the production process. As such, consumers have significant power, for to ignore their basic wishes is to invite a drop in profits or, in the case of governments, defeat at the polls.

Consumers are not interested only in spending and saving, however. Many are also concerned about the impact of the production and consumption processes on the environment and the health and welfare of their families; how economic and political authorities respond to their grievances; the ways in which their voices are incorporated into business and government decision-making processes; and the incidence of corruption in government and business circles. In today's capitalist economies, in other words, consumers recognize that consumption has moral, social, and political ramifications as well as economic ones.

Unfortunately for consumers, producers and their governmental allies are not always willing to acknowledge all their economic and "quality-of-life" concerns, particularly those without an immediate bearing on the profitability of firms or the outcomes of elections. In response, consumers in many advanced industrial democracies have sought power through association in both the marketplace and the political system in order to pressure the economic and political powers that be into addressing their grievances. To that end, consumer activists have met with mixed results, both longitudinally

and across national settings. In the United States, for example, consumer organizations spent years on the periphery of the political system before the mid-1960s, at which time they exploded onto the national political scene and oversaw the introduction of a spate of regulatory controls that brought corporate America virtually to its knees. In Britain and Japan, by contrast, consumer movement gains have been more modest.

The ultimate aim of this chapter is to devise an analytical framework for explaining variations in the strategies and policy-related impact of consumer advocacy organizations both over time and across countries. By way of introduction, I begin with an overview of the features that distinguish those organizations from other political actors and, more important, that handicap them as players in the political process. I then draw on the social movement and historical institutionalism literatures to identify factors that explain the behavior and influence of consumer movements. I conclude with a brief recipe for analyzing consumer advocacy that will be applied in later chapters.

Features of Consumer Advocacy Organizations

No matter what their country of origin, consumer movement organizations that systematically perform political advocacy functions are characterized by a number of features that distinguish them from both other types of social movement organizations and well-established economic-interest groups. These features are particularly important for our purposes because they tend to weaken consumer advocates relative to many other actors in the policymaking process.

First a definition of terms. According to one school of thought, a *social movement* is "a collectivity acting with some continuity to promote or resist a change in the society or organization of which it is a part" (Turner 1981:1). This definition facilitates the analysis of movement impact on political systems by roughly equating movements with the goals and activities of organized groups or subgroups in a society. Definitional utility, however, is achieved at the price of oversimplification, for many social movements are characterized by specific sets of ideas and beliefs that are by no means confined to their representative organizations. It may therefore be more appropriate to define a social movement as "a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the

social structure and/or reward distribution of a society" (McCarthy and Zald 1977:1218). This definition allows for the possibility that social movements may not be represented by organized groups (p. 1218, n.) and that the ideas and opinions of a movement writ large and of the representative organizations of that movement may not always converge.

A consumer movement (or "consumerism")[1] is a social movement characterized by beliefs and opinions that favor the promotion and protection of the "consumer interest" in a society. A highly subjective term often used indiscriminately (Mayer and Brobeck 1997:153) by public personages to enhance the legitimacy of their particular political objectives, the consumer interest is difficult to define.[2] That said, advocates in advanced industrial democracies—including Japan—tend to equate the consumer interest during much of the postwar period with five internationally recognized consumer rights, the first four of which were proclaimed by President John F. Kennedy in 1963: the right to product safety, the right to a range of product choice at competitive prices, the right to consumer-related information, the right to be heard as a consumer by both industry and government, and the right to consumer redress. This list was recently expanded by Consumers International[3] to include the rights to life, to a consumer-related education, and to a healthy environment—a move that reflected the shifting interests of consumers at the end of the twentieth century.

Depending on the particular mix of historical, political, legal, economic, and cultural factors, different countries emphasize different rights over others. Many American consumers, for instance, value low prices and product choice over safety concerns, whereas the reverse is true in Japan, where a cultural premium is placed on safety and cleanliness, particularly for food products. Consumer organizations also uphold additional rights that reflect problems specific to their particular geographical environment. In Japan, for example, advocates in Tōkyō successfully demanded the enactment of a consumer ordinance in 1975 that recognized the right to be free from unreasonable business practices—a reflection of consumer problems that were particularly prevalent in Japan's large metropolitan areas. Finally, even in a specific country or locality, consumer organizations may conflict with other actors in society over which rights are most important and how those rights should be fulfilled. Not surprisingly, those disagreements are most likely to occur between movement activists and business interests. Moreover, they are particularly intense in Japan, where the interests of producers are deeply entrenched in the political system and popular awareness of individual rights

is still comparatively weak. The consumer interest is not, in other words, a uniform and static concept; rather, much depends on how it is defined by representative consumer organizations in specific social, political, cultural, and economic settings—assuming, of course, that such organizations exist at all—and how contending political and economic actors challenge those definitions in their quests to fulfill alternative political, economic, and social agendas.

The consumer interest in advanced industrial democracies is generally represented by three organizational types. *Consumer cooperatives* are economic organizations that combat the negative side effects of market forces by circumventing normal market relations, that is, by providing their members/consumers with opportunities to control aspects of the manufacturing, distribution, and retail processes. *Educational consumer organs*, by contrast, focus on informing their members or a particular population about rational consumption and consumer-related problems in the marketplace. Product-testing organizations fall under this category. Both types of organs vary in terms of size, geographic orientation, and degree of organizational fluidity. This study concentrates on *consumer advocacy organizations*, which represent the consumer interest in the political sphere. Some advocacy organizations, like Britain's Consumers' Association and the United States's Consumers Union, are organized from above by political entrepreneurs.[4] Others, including many Japanese advocacy organizations, begin as more mass-based, grassroots organizations and assume advocacy functions over time. These three types of consumer organs can, of course, overlap. Some consumer cooperatives, for example, assume educational and/or advocacy functions, while many advocacy organs, like Consumers Union and Shufuren in Japan, provide educational services for their members and/or the general population.

Consumer advocacy organizations resemble the environmental, human rights, feminist, and other "new" social movements insofar as they espouse both democratic values and quality-of-life issues that transcend socioeconomic boundaries. Unlike new social movement organizations, however, with their decentralized and democratic modes of decision making, consumer advocacy organizations tend to become centralized and bureaucratized with time. These organizational traits can be explained as follows.

First, consumer advocacy organs tend to have more trouble attracting members than do many new social movement organizations. Consumer constituencies in advanced industrial democracies are extremely large and

diffuse[5] and are characterized by very low levels of solidarity (Nadel 1971:64–65). In the feminist and civil rights movements, groups of individuals set apart from the rest of society on the basis of some social, economic, or political characteristic organize and engage in collective action in response to a collective perception that those lines of differentiation are unjust. In the case of consumerism, it is unlikely that the issues in question will stimulate comparable levels of group solidarity, since the burdens of consumer "injustices" such as high prices and defective products often transcend social, economic, and political divisions to affect all citizens to varying degrees. Except in rare circumstances when problems like inflation and product shortages become acute or affect a particular socioeconomic class disproportionately, consumer grievances do not often motivate individuals to join advocacy organizations.[6]

These mobilizational challenges are further compounded by free-rider problems faced by all social movement organizations involved in political advocacy (see Mayer 1989:6–7). Since consumer advocacy organizations seek the provision of public goods like product safety regulations—regulations that benefit members and nonmembers alike—individuals engaged in rational calculations of costs and benefits have few incentives to join those organizations (Olson 1965). The provision of consumer-related literature and consultation services to individual members may increase overall membership levels, but these increases are likely to be insignificant to organizations that provide those incentives to nonmembers as well.

Free-rider problems can be particularly intense in the consumer case because of the nature of conflicting identities at the individual level. More specifically, even though all individuals are consumers, many are also producers or dependents of producers,[7] and the history of consumerism in advanced industrial democracies indicates that when the two conflict, one's interests as a producer usually prevail.[8]

To compensate for their weak mass memberships, consumer advocacy organizations tend to delegate the tasks of representing the consumer interest to professional advocates like Ralph Nader, who are motivated by a commitment to public service rather than by rational calculations of individual costs and benefits. The need for professional leaders is further strengthened by the nature of the political goals pursued by these organizations. Most consumer advocacy organizations seek the protection of consumer rights from infringements by firms, a goal often achieved through the regulation of industry standards (Bloom and Greyser 1981:131).[9] The introduction of

governmental regulation often requires lobbying by individuals with specialized knowledge of the political, economic, and legal systems, resources that are most easily acquired by groups of full-time, well-coordinated professionals rather than part-time rank-and-file members.

As consumer advocacy organizations professionalize and bureaucratize, divisions often develop between leaders and rank-and-file members (Berry 1977:186–87).[10] This can be particularly problematic for organizations that engage in protest, a tactic that is most effective when carried out by large groups of consumers. Some advocacy organizations compensate for this weakness by eschewing protest and focusing on lobbying and other tactics pursued by well-established economic-interest groups in the policy process, but this approach has limitations as well. First, consumer organizations lack the political clout of economic-interest groups. Whereas labor, business, and professional groups have the power to sanction political decisions by withholding their labor, capital, or services, the only comparable weapon that consumer organs have at their disposal is the product boycott, which is an extremely difficult tactic to carry out given the diffuseness of their constituencies, the relative weakness of consumer grievances, and the resulting collective-action problems encountered while mobilizing supporters.[11]

The fact that consumer organizations do not normally function as vehicles for mobilizing voters[12] weakens their political clout even further. Electoral mobilization is often impossible for these organizations, given the size and diffuseness of the consumer constituency, conflicting political preferences in that constituency, and the fact that consumer issues do not often achieve priority positions on the electoral platforms of individual politicians. This is not to suggest that consumers are not important during electoral campaigns; to the contrary, a politician who ignores the basic wishes of the broad consuming public does so at his or her peril. I simply wish to emphasize that consumer advocacy organizations are more poorly positioned than are business and labor groups, with their well-endowed coffers and their tightly knit memberships, to establish enduring alliances with key policymakers and influence political processes by mobilizing the electorate.

In sum, consumer advocacy organizations are inherently disadvantaged relative to many other pressure groups as a result of (1) the absence of large, politically active memberships that would enhance the effectiveness of the protest tactics common to many other social movement organizations and (2) a shortage of political weapons that would enable them to compete on

equal footing with economic-interest groups and to extract concessions from the powers that be from within routine political processes. As a result of these features, consumer advocacy organizations in all advanced industrial democracies function almost by definition from the fringes of the established political system, applying a mixture of strategies that range from institutional to extrainstitutional, confrontational to cooperative, in their attempts to fulfill their policy-related goals. Although consumer organizations around the world adopt each kind of strategy to varying degrees, their exact mixture and overall impact on policy varies, a phenomenon that in turn depends less on the nature of consumerism as an issue area than on political variables external to movement organizations.

The Resource Mobilization Approach to Social Movements

One explanation for the particular bundle of strategies adopted by an organized consumer movement and the overall effectiveness of those strategies on policy rests on the movement's access to resources.

Political scientists interested in the formation and impact of social movements owe an enormous debt to the so-called resource mobilization perspective[13] formulated by sociologists during the 1970s. Originally devised as a critique of social-psychological or "classical" models, which view the formation of social movements as products of mass discontent,[14] resource mobilization theorists base their arguments on the premise that grievances cannot beget effective social movements without "organization": the mobilization of economic and political resources by rational movement leaders. No matter how intense their members' grievances may be, in other words, social movement organizations will not last long unless their leaders have access to financial support, specialized knowledge of the specifics of the political and legal systems and of pertinent issue areas, and allies elsewhere in the political system (see McCarthy and Zald 1977). With its practical and prescriptive overtones, the model serves almost as a blueprint for movement leaders on how to overcome the problems of collective action and identify the objective conditions for political effectiveness (see, e.g., Freeman 1979). The ultimate message, moreover, is similar to one long held by interest-group theorists: without money, expertise, and connections, societal groups are doomed to political obscurity—assuming, of course, that they have managed to form at all.[15]

While it is now universally acknowledged that social movements cannot survive without organizational support, knowledge, money, and friends, the resource mobilization perspective is not without theoretical ambiguities. How, for example, does one decide whether a particular resource is necessary for a specific movement organization? What are the criteria for assessing the relative contributions of different resources on a movement's influence? More to the point, what is the exact operational definition of a "resource"? As Doug McAdam points out, some analysts use the term to refer to such diverse intangibles as moral commitment and trust, as well as more identifiable factors like money and political alliances (McAdam 1982:32). Definitions like these may very well be the product of *ex post facto* speculation and are so all-encompassing and arbitrary as to weaken the overall usefulness of the model.

More important to our purposes, the resource mobilization approach may be useful for explaining the mobilization of social movement organizations, but it does not tell us much about variations in the strategies and policy impact of either a particular type of social movement organization (SMO) across multiple country settings or different (but comparable) SMOs in the same national context. As students of feminist movements in the United States and Europe have shown, for example, there is no direct correlation between the size and wealth of women's organizations and the progressiveness of national feminist policies (see, e.g., Katzenstein and Mueller 1987). Herbert Kitschelt's cross-national research on antinuclear movements also reveals a lack of fit between the level of movement organization and the movement's impact on policy (Kitschelt 1986:73–74). In the case of Japan, the resource mobilization perspective does not adequately explain why environmental and consumer organizations pursued different strategies in the past, even though they shared members and alliance networks and faced similar financial problems. Clearly, organization may be a necessary component of particular movement strategies and a prerequisite for movement success, but it is not a sufficient one.

The Political Opportunity Structure Perspective

The missing link between a movement's resources and its particular strategies and policy-related impact, many social movement theorists now argue, is the nature of the movement's "political opportunity structure" (POS): vari-

ables specific to an SMO's external environment that function as filters between movement resources and the ultimate impact of those resources on the social and political environment (Kitschelt 1986:59).

While theorists working in this genre acknowledge that political opportunity structures are complex, multivariate entities, they differ on which variables should be included under the concept. Sidney Tarrow defines a POS as "consistent—but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national—signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements" (Tarrow 1996:54). He identifies four such signals: the opening of access points into the political system; the development of unstable political alignments caused by such factors as electoral instability; the appearance of influential allies; and divisions in elites (pp. 54–56). McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald operationalize opportunity structures in a similar fashion save for one important difference. Instead of "divisions in elites," a variable that seems to be subsumed under the notion of "elite alignments," the authors highlight "the state's capacity and propensity for repression" (McAdam et al. 1996b:10). Finally, Kitschelt offers an even broader definition by including "historical precedents for social mobilization"[16] alongside "specific configurations of resources" and "institutional arrangements" (Kitschelt 1986:58, 62).

Kitschelt's analysis of antinuclear movements in Western Europe differs from that of many other studies of the POS genre in that it is mainly concerned with the policy effects of social movement activism, as opposed to the initial formation and subsequent lifecycles of movement organizations. Accordingly, Kitschelt devotes much of his study to analyzing the institutional arrangements that influence both the strategies available to social movement organizations and the impact of those strategies on the broad political environment. Paying particular attention to the number and nature of access points into the political system and to the capacity of states to control the implementation of policy, he hypothesizes that social movement organizations are most influential in open and strong political systems, as opposed to closed and weak ones. He also argues that both the degree of permeability and the strength of the state in terms of its ability to implement policies determine whether social movement organizations choose to operate inside or outside established channels of interest articulation (Kitschelt 1986:63–67).

Differences in political opportunity structures as defined by Kitschelt go a long way in explaining cross-national variations in the political behavior

and impact of social movement organizations—why some European feminist organizations, for example, often achieve more progressive policy outcomes than do their American counterparts, even though they are comparatively less well endowed with resources (Katzenstein and Mueller 1987). The approach also helps explain changes in a particular movement's behavior over time. Broadbent, for example (1998), points out shifts in the political opportunity structure to explain the evolution and impact of the postwar Japanese environmental movement.

The positive contributions of Kitschelt and other POS theorists to the study of social movements notwithstanding, the concept of political opportunity structures is open to criticism as a deductive analytical device. First, analysts working in this perspective run the risk of losing their theoretical persuasiveness by incorporating too many variables under the conceptual heading of "opportunity structure." As Gamson and Meyer argue, the notion of opportunity structure "threatens to become an all-encompassing fudge factor for all the conditions and circumstances that form the context for collective action" (Gamson and Meyer 1996:275). In a similar vein, McAdam notes that analytical problems arise when resources are subsumed under the category of political opportunity structures, a practice that often leads to treating political opportunities as "just another resource" (McAdam 1996:26).

These criticisms pose a challenge to the study of social movements. On the one hand, locating and analyzing social movement organizations in a broad political context in order to explain these organizations' particular strategic choices and policy-related impact is intuitively very appealing. If we are to acknowledge the inherent complexity of social movement activism, moreover, it is reasonable to include as many variables as possible in the analysis in order to make sense of that complexity. At the same time, however, it may be counterproductive to apply the language of political opportunity structures to concrete social movement organizations when we are still uncertain about exactly how those structures should be defined from a comparative, cross-national perspective. The process of theory application becomes particularly problematic when we apply the concept to our empirical analyses in a deductive fashion, thereby running the risk of neglecting important empirical details or unanticipated variables that play a role in some political contexts or time periods but not others.

How, then, can we explain the strategies and policy impact of social movements in a way that incorporates such variables of the POS approach as resources, institutions, political alignments, and historical forces while pre-

serving the analytical distinctions among those variables? How, moreover, can we accommodate additional variables that may crop up unexpectedly in our empirical work without losing the analytical persuasiveness of our research methods?

Insights from the Historical Institutional Approach

One way to meet some of these analytical and methodological challenges is to disaggregate the concept of "political opportunity structure" and extract political institutions as an analytical lens through which we can observe the workings and dynamic interrelationships of the numerous variables that affect the strategies and political influence of social movement organizations operating in policymaking processes. The literature on historical institutionalism can give us some insights into how we can accomplish that task.[17]

Before progressing, we should define exactly what we mean by the term *institution*. Although institutions occupy an important position in the POS literature, theorists working in this genre are not as precise as institutionalists are in defining the term. That said, there are a few differences in the definitions employed by historical institutional theorists as well.[18] Some scholars, like Peter Hall, define the concept largely in terms of rules and norms: "institutions are the formal rules, compliance procedures, and standard operating practices that structure the relationship between individuals in various units of the polity and the economy" (Hall 1986:19).

Others, like Robert Putnam, include concrete organizational structures as well as abstract rules and norms in their definitions (Putnam 1993:8). As noted later on, this study combines elements of both definitions by distinguishing among structural, formal, and informal institutions and recognizing the capacity of each to shape "the relationship between individuals in various units of the polity." These distinctions can help us explain (1) variations in movement behavior across countries that may look very similar structurally and (2) idiosyncrasies in movement behavior in a particular political context that cannot be explained simply by referring to that system's organizational structure.

Social movement scholars have yet to compare the similarities of and differences between the political opportunity structure approach and the historical institutionalism perspective,[19] both of which developed contemporaneously but largely independently of each other during the 1980s and

1990s. Some of the differences are simply a matter of degree but are nevertheless significant for the purposes of this study.

To begin, both the political opportunity and historical institutional perspectives share the following two assumptions regarding the impact of institutions on societal actors. First, and in marked contrast to the resource mobilization approach, the two perspectives recognize the capacity of state institutions to influence the distribution of resources among contending interests and to control the degree of access into decision-making fora by nonstate actors over time. That is, the state is treated as an important determinant of who gets what in terms of political perks and spoils, as well as who gets a hearing in the policy process.[20]

Second, students of both approaches posit that institutions—state or otherwise—shape societal group behavior over the long term by rendering some political strategies more viable than others. The short-term effectiveness of those strategies in the policy process is in turn ascribed to strategic openings in the political system that enable certain interests to influence policy outcomes. Some of those openings occur as a matter of course, but others may arise unexpectedly in response to the denouement of a particular policy-making process.

These basic similarities notwithstanding, the POS and historical institutional approaches differ both analytically and methodologically. One such difference pertains to the actual objects of academic inquiry. While the analytical tools devised by theorists of the POS approach were primarily intended to explain the emergence and subsequent life cycles of social movements,[21] the historical institutional perspective was largely fashioned to explain a phenomenon that is central to this study, namely, the relationship between political actors and public policy (Cammack 1992:402).

Accordingly, the two approaches differ in their research methods. Much of the recent research on political opportunity structures suggests that theorists working in this tradition aspire to perfect a deductive theory that can be applied across social movement types and national contexts. Historical institutionalists, on the other hand, "generally develop their hypotheses more inductively, in the course of interpreting the empirical material" (Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992:12)[22] on a case-by-case basis and from a broad historical perspective. Furthermore, particular institutions are subjected to analysis in response to the political outcomes that are to be explained (Steinmo et al. 1992:6). Historical institutionalism is, in sum, problem driven rather than theory driven.

The analytical implications of this methodological focus are significant. First, the issue-specific, long-term historical perspective of historical institutionalism enables us to incorporate, systematically and effectively, the phenomenon of institutional change into our analysis. This is especially important to the comparative study of social movements over time, since changes in the structural, formal, and informal institutional setting of a particular country can have a profound effect on the resource configurations, strategies, and ultimate policy impact of constituent organizations.

Second, the inductive focus of the historical institutional perspective makes it less deterministic than the POS approach. To quote Immergut, "Institutions tell us what courses of action are likely to bring success or failure, but they do not predict the final choices made by [political] actors" (Immergut 1992b:85). To restate the argument from the perspective of consumer movement activism in the policy sphere, institutions condition the menu of strategic choices available to advocates but do not necessarily determine it, nor do they tell us how advocates will choose from among those strategies.

The nondeterministic nature of the historical institutional perspective makes it flexible enough to accommodate other variables that condition the boundaries of social movement activism and influence in the policy realm. One such variable that is particularly important to the study of consumer movements in all national contexts is policy change, a phenomenon that can have both a direct and an indirect impact on a movement's behavior and ultimate effectiveness.[23]

Paul Pierson (1993) argues along these lines with reference to interest groups.[24] According to him, public policies are important to the study of both institutions and interest mobilization because they "establish rules and create constraints that shape [the] behavior" of political actors (p. 608). More specifically, the outputs or "spoils" of many public policies can motivate interest groups to mobilize either for or against the maintenance or expansion of those policies (pp. 599–600). Public policies can also influence the activities of interest groups by altering access points into the political system or enhancing the availability of such resources as funding and political allies (p. 601). Finally, public policies can shape many of the political conditions that make some interest-group strategies more politically feasible than others (p. 598). In short, "policies create politics" by arming organized interests with disproportionate levels of power, by rendering certain goals and strategies more viable than others, and by opening or closing institutional arenas for conflict resolution.

Studying the effects of institutions *and* policy change on the activism of social movement organizations has several analytical benefits. First, by tracing policy developments and their impact on institutions, we are in a better position to explain the phenomenon of institutional change and its long-term effects on movement activism. Second, and in keeping with the key research interests of social movement theorists, attention to policy change can enhance our understanding of the historical trajectories of organized social movements. As Pierson contends, the impact of policy on mass publics is "likely to be most consequential in issue-areas . . . where interest group activity is not yet well established" (p. 602). It is particularly fruitful, therefore, to establish the connection between institutions and public policies and the creation of specific configurations of movement resources and political strategies at "critical junctures" or "formative moments" in a movement's development (p. 602).[25]

Together, institutions and policy change can explain a great deal about the strategic menus available to consumer activists in the policy process and the impact of strategies on actual policy outcomes, but they do not explain everything. They do not, for example, tell us why consumer representatives champion some issues over others at particular times. This is a phenomenon, I believe, that has more to do with stages of economic development, prevailing ideas about how best to articulate and fulfill the consumer interest, and even cultural considerations. Nor do institutional configurations and policy change explain why consumer organizations choose some strategies over others from their menus of strategic options. To explain such choices, we would have to analyze the personal histories and proclivities of both the organizations in question and the individuals who run those organizations. In this regard, cultural considerations can be particularly important insofar as they help shape notions of consumer identity, notions that in turn can influence what consumer activists want from the political system and with whom they are willing to ally in order to get it. As I argue in chapter 3, notions of consumer identity are particularly important in the Japanese case.

In sum, the political opportunity structure and historical institutional perspectives complement each other in terms of the importance attached to the role of political institutions in shaping the nature and consequences of political participation by societal interests. They differ, however, in their research objectives, methodologies, and the range of variables incorporated into the analysis. While the POS perspective tends to employ a deductive methodology and a relatively small number of variables to explain the origins

and evolution of social movements, historical institutionalism tends to be an inductive perspective that, while focusing on the pivotal role of institutions, encompasses a larger palette of variables in order to highlight the complex and evolving relationship between political actors and the public policy process. As the following section shows, the framework of analysis used in this study accepts the points of commonality between the two approaches while incorporating the methodological perspective (and hence theoretical flexibility) of historical institutionalism.

Toward a Composite Framework of Analysis

To explain differences in the strategic behavior and policy impact of consumer advocacy organizations both cross-nationally and over time in Japan, I adopt a methodology of inductive historical analysis and in-depth case studies that rests on the following interrelated assumptions and propositions.

First, I assume that consumer advocacy organizations are distinctive forms of social movement organizations that are politically weaker than most economic-interest groups and even some mass-based social movement organizations. This is largely because advocacy organizations lack the inherent ability to leverage concessions from governmental policymakers and, therefore, to compete on more or less equal footing with other interests on the demand side of the policymaking process.

Since consumer advocacy organizations are intrinsically handicapped within the policy process, we should expect them to score few policy-related victories. Why, then, do these organizations occasionally manage to wrest concessions from pro-business policymakers? Why are they more successful in this regard in some countries and time periods but not others? Finally, how can we explain variations in the strategic behavior of these organizations both longitudinally and across national settings?

Part of the answer to these questions lies in movement access to resources. While it is impossible to predict with precision which resources are necessary ones for consumer organizations, I believe it reasonable to assume that like all politically active social movement organizations and interest groups, these organizations require money, legal and political expertise, and allies in the political system. We can also assume that in order to compensate for their membership deficiencies and inability to effectively sanction the decisions of powerful policymakers, advocates are more dependent on media attention

and broad public support than are, say, economic-interest groups. Finally, we can expect consumer organizations that, for one reason or another, have adequate access to financial and informational resources and allies in the system to be more likely—ceteris paribus—to emphasize assimilative (or "insider") strategies like lobbying and litigation. Those lacking such resources are more apt to lean on media attention, public opinion, protest, and other extrainstitutional channels of interest articulation. No matter what their strategic choices are, however, even the best-endowed organizations will be politically powerless if the relevant political institutions are closed to effective consumer participation.

As we observed earlier, the resources and strategic choices available to consumer advocates are influenced by the nature of the institutional configurations of the consumer policymaking process. To clarify this point, it is helpful to distinguish among three types of institution: institutional structures, formal rules, and informal norms and conventions.

Examples of institutional structures—the most straightforward of the three—are the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. How these three branches are balanced against one another can have a major impact on the strategies of consumer advocates. As chapter 2 illustrates, for example, American advocates have access to a much broader menu of strategic options—as a result of the institutional separation of powers and availability of multiple access points into the policy process—than they do in the British and Japanese parliamentary systems, where policymaking is far more centralized.

Formal rules, which are superimposed on these structures and subject to enforcement according to prescribed procedures, include electoral rules and the codified operating procedures of bureaucratic advisory councils that deliberate on consumer issues. As the Japanese case shows, electoral rules can influence whether politicians become advocates of the consumer cause and, by logical extension, whether they are amenable to forming political alliances with private consumer advocates. These alliances can increase the likelihood that advocates will choose assimilative strategies over extrainstitutional ones when trying to influence policy decisions.

Informal norms, which are much more difficult to identify because of their cultural overtones, include styles of decision making and methods of informal contact among various groups or individuals in the consumer policy process. Norms differ from formal rules in that they are not subject to formal enforcement procedures, although they can be informally enforced

through peer pressure. I should also add that in Japan, where much of the wheeling and dealing of politics takes place outside mainstream channels of interest articulation and where informal institutions are often used to compensate for the perceived inadequacies of formal ones (Curtis 1999:4), attention to informal institutions can help us understand why consumer advocates do what they do in the policy process. For example, norms governing bureaucratic advisory council (*shingikai*) deliberations that stifle consumer demands help explain why advocates put so much emphasis on activating or manipulating public opinion when these councils are in session.

In accordance with the historical institutional perspective, I pay close attention to policy and institutional change, both of which can explain sudden shifts in the strategic behavior of consumer advocacy organizations. I am therefore careful to point out "critical junctures" or "formative moments" in a movement's development, which I define as periods in which advocates discover new opportunities for political activism resulting from policy and/or institutional shifts, gain or lose access to key resources, and reassess their strategic behavior. The Occupation period (1945–1952) and the years immediately following the enactment of the Consumer Protection Basic Law are two examples of critical junctures that had positive long-term effects on the Japanese movement.

Although I put great store in the potential of institutions to shape the strategic behavior of consumer advocacy organizations, I do not assume that institutions explain everything. As we noted earlier, institutions *condition* the menu of strategic options available to advocates, but they do not necessarily determine them. Nor do institutions always tell us how advocates will choose from among their strategic options. To fully explain the options and choices of consumer advocates, therefore, we must also consider socioeconomic developments, the nature of consumer issues, the preferences of individual consumer leaders, and cultural factors.

Finally, I argue that even though movement strategies are conditioned over the long run by a range of institutional and other variables, the impact of those strategies on policymaking is ultimately determined by one of the most important informal institutions of consumer politics: alliances between government and business actors at specific points in the policy process. The effects of elite alignments on movement leverage vary according to whether those alignments are characterized by consensus or conflict. Specifically, consumer organizations that are well equipped with human and financial resources and that operate within "open" institutional structures will have

virtually no power over the policy process if business and government actors are closely allied in opposition to movement demands. Consumer organizations that are less fortunate politically and financially and that have little or no formal access into the policy process, however, may find themselves exercising leverage over that process when business and government representatives are poorly organized and/or at odds with each other.

Analyzing the behavior and influence of consumer organizations within the public policy process is admittedly a complicated task. As the reader has no doubt inferred from the preceding pages, my theoretical aim in this book is *not* to derive simple explanations of causation from the complex and often contradictory details of consumer politics in Japan or other advanced industrial democracies. Rather, I hope to use the theoretical insights outlined in this chapter to identify major patterns in the relationship between Japanese consumer movement activism and the broader political system while simultaneously highlighting the political and social meaning of those patterns. By injecting an element of cross-national comparison into the analysis, I also intend to show that Japanese consumer organizations are logical and even influential reflections of their historical and political circumstances.