The P³ Lab
at Johns Hopkins University

Case Study

Practicing Internal Democracy to Build Potential Power:
A Case Study of Electoral Strategy in Kentucky

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A Domino of Crashing Elections

In January 2016, members of Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC)'s Steering Committee — representing several regional chapters across the state — came together to debrief the 2015 state election, in which Republican gubernatorial candidate Matt Bevin, a Tea Party proponent, had defeated Democratic candidate Jack Conway 52.5 to 43.8 percent.[1] Bevin's victory was significant: Democrats had held the governor's office for all but four of the previous 44 years, and Kentucky was the only remaining state in the South where Democrats held a legislative chamber (the Kentucky House).[2] Now, even that precarious hold was at risk.

KFTC members were deeply worried about what this result would mean for their strategic agenda focused on economic justice, voting rights, and clean energy transition. Jessica Hays Lucas, KFTC Organizing Co-Director, describes a sense of shock in the room, not at the gubernatorial election results directly, but rather what the result would mean for KFTC and its work: "The fact that Bevin won was not necessarily a surprise, but it did completely shift how we were going about our work and how we looked at the next two years ... you could see that he really grabbed hold of an energy in the state that he would be able to orchestrate over [the] next couple years. We were one of the states that had not flipped to be entirely Republican-controlled for a while, but we were feeling it creep up. And I think a lot of our members were staring it in the face and thinking, 'Oh my god, this wave is coming, and how do we keep staving it off?'"

In any organizational context, answering that question would require a complicated analysis of strategies, opportunities, and threats. KFTC had historically leveraged its organizing power to engage in issue campaigns pushing for corporate accountability or economic justice legislation. Given that agenda, the organization's electoral work had also typically taken place at the local or state legislator level. The results of the 2015 election, however, would force KFTC to consider an urgent pivot into deeper electoral work — including intensive voter outreach and engagement — on the upcoming Presidential and Senate elections. And while at other organizations, strategic shifts of this nature are commonly decided upon solely by staff leadership or the board, KFTC decided to follow a much rarer path that centered the perspectives of members themselves. Due to KFTC's decades-long commitment to internal democracy, any change in strategy would first need to move through an explicitly democratic process requiring several layers of input and decision-making. As the organization aimed for ground-up consensus as well as a coalition spanning disparate member viewpoints, KFTC would also find itself reflecting debates

1   Stolberg, Sheryl Gay, and Alan Blinder. "Matt Bevin, Republican, Wins Governor's Race in Kentucky." *The New York Times,* The New York Times, 4 Nov. 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/11/04/us/republican-wins-governors-race-in-kentucky.html.

2   Phillips, Amber. "Democrats Aren't Dead Yet in Kentucky. They Just Held Their Last Southern Legislative Chamber." *The Washington Post,* WP Company, 29 Apr. 2019, www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/30/democrats-are-now-in-danger-of-becoming-extinct-in-the-south.

taking place nationally amongst factions of the left — establishment and radical, moderate and progressive, historians and reformers.

What changes did KFTC need to make to its organizing strategy and to its actions across the state? Who among KFTC's membership would have a say in those changes? What tradeoffs might occur as the organization grappled with its past and future? This case outlines the evolution of KFTC's power-building strategy in the aftermath of the 2015 election and leading up to the 2020 election, as they sought to answer these questions and more. Specifically, we will look at how a unique and complex governance structure that centers collective decision-making and accountability drove that evolution. With this approach, members largely continued to experience KFTC as a "social home" — a vision, membership, and an organization they felt deeply rooted to — even during a time of significant transition and complicated conversations among constituents. KFTC was also able to leverage this interconnectedness and retention to build significant potential power within Kentucky that continues to evolve today.

KFTC Origins: Grassroots Organizing in a Changing Kentucky

Coal has fueled Kentucky's economy, culture, and history since the first commercial mines opened there in the early 1800s. In 1980, the Appalachian Land Ownership Study confirmed many Kentucky residents' suspicion that valuable coal property was owned primarily by out-of-state corporations that paid virtually no taxes to the local host counties. That juxtaposition — resource-rich land fueling a profitable industry while leaving Kentuckians working in and adjacent to the mines in extreme poverty — served as a rallying cry for a group of 26 residents from 12 counties that came together as the Kentucky Fair Tax Coalition in August 1981.

On the group's agenda was a key question: "Does a coalition of groups, organizations and/or individuals, organized within the coal region or statewide to work on land ownership issues through the tax issue, make sense for Kentucky?"[34] The answer was not straightforward — while the individuals who came together knew one another, each represented different regions and interests across the state. As the group held community meetings to connect with additional residents and organizations across the state, participants "agreed to keep KFTC's structure loose (although there were a few people who agreed to comprise the 'steering committee,' the meetings and decision-making were really open to everyone)." Members made several structural decisions at the time that continue to constitute the backbone of KFTC's governance structure:

- KFTC would be an organization of individual members, not a coalition of groups;
- Members would relate to KFTC's work primarily through a local or county chapter, and then through the chapter with the statewide organization;

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3   30th Anniversary Booklet. Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, 2011, www.kftc.org/sites/default/files/docs/events/kftc_30th_anniversary_booklet.pdf.

4   Ibid.

- The Steering Committee would consist of one representative from each chapter, elected annually by the chapter, plus statewide officers.

This internal structure ensured members had power and a democratic process to implement a platform for KFTC's work. Local groups that were already engaged with their community's issues could choose to become KFTC members and then form a local chapter; this system allowed for more cross-county collaboration on shared concerns. "The leaders also wanted to make sure members had the power in the organization. It was decided that the organization's work would be guided by a platform developed and approved by members. Internal decision-making would be open and democratic, and it would be the members, not the staff, who would speak publicly for the organization. The chapter structure recognized the work being done by a number of local organizations while providing a structure for these local groups to work together across county lines on shared concerns and issues." This model enabled KFTC to focus on local organizing while also ensuring commitment to a longer-term, statewide vision.[5]

This commitment to democratic structure and local organizing within a statewide civic engagement organization was uncommon in the 1980s and would grow even rarer over KFTC's next few decades of growth.[6] Over the next decade, members utilized these principles alongside a combination of direct action organizing and political education to navigate advocacy spaces and win several campaigns: reversing a law that exempted coal companies from paying property tax on their coal holdings; stopping strip mining taking place without landowners' permission; and establishing protections related to mining, drinking water, and waste incinerators. During this time, the organization also launched local chapters in counties across the state and changed its name, in 1987, to Kentuckians for the Commonwealth.

At the time of KFTC's founding and growth, Kentucky was undergoing a political reorganization seen in several states across the United States. Following World War II and prior to the significant social shifts of the 1960s, Kentucky had been a reliably purple state — with voters predominantly selecting Democrats in local and state elections but Republicans in national elections. Voting patterns began to change after the so-called "culture wars," which resulted in many Kentuckians with more socially conservative views aligning with the Republican party from the 1980s onward.

Against the backdrop of these shifts, KFTC continued to push for additional policies its chapters and members surfaced, building upon the collective power of the base that had assembled around early policy wins in the prior decade. In 1991, legislation for local control of solid waste management was approved, and in 1994 the General Assembly passed a KFTC bill to protect landowners from oil and gas drilling, along with energy conservation measures and a water replacement rights bill. In the mid-1990s, the organization shifted focus to broader issues of economic justice and the role of finance in politics. Beginning in the early 2000s, KFTC members also pushed the organization's platform toward issues of voter rights and racial justice.

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5 *Ibid.*

6 Skocpol T. Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press; 2003.

KFTC Today: Exercising Internal Democracy in an Era of Centralization

Today, KFTC is a statewide, grassroots organizing entity that continues to utilize direct action to challenge unfair systems and work toward a new balance of power. While the organization's vision and agenda have extended far beyond its initial focus, a commitment to local organizing, quality of life, and corporate accountability all remain, as demonstrated by the full vision statement in **Figure 1**:

KFTC has more than 12,000 members and 14 chapters across the state, ranging significantly in size (see **Figure 2**).

The organization utilizes several strategies to achieve its vision, including chapter building, fundraising, strategic communications, alliance building, litigation, and as always, direct action. Its past and present campaigns span a variety of issues including:

- **Coal and Water** – protections for coal workers and banning mountaintop mining;

- **Economic Justice** – advocating for tax reform that benefits people over profit;

- **New Energy and Transition** – shifting to a more just and sustainable energy economy;

- **Voting Rights** – restoring the right to vote, particularly for former felons.

FIGURE 2.
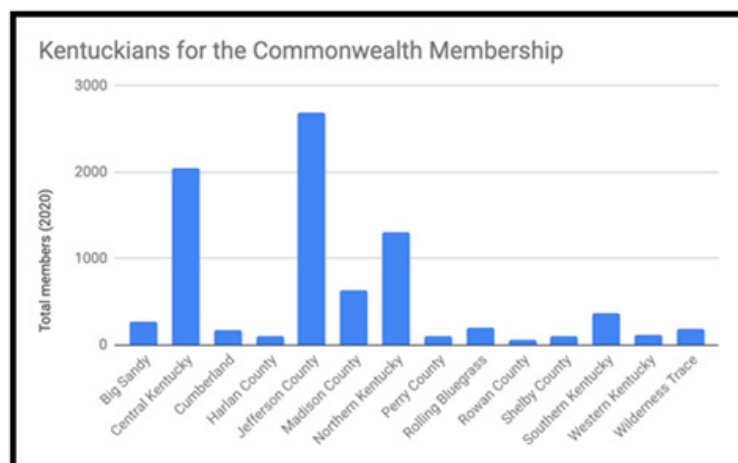**KFTC Chapter Membership**

FIGURE 1.
KFTC Vision

We are working for a day when Kentuckians – and all people – enjoy a better quality of life.

When the lives of people and communities matter before profits.

When our communities have good jobs that support our families without doing damage to the water, air, and land.

When companies and the wealthy pay their share of taxes and can't buy elections.

When all people have health care, shelter, food, education, and other basic needs.

When children are listened to and valued.

When discrimination is wiped out of our laws, habits, and hearts.

And when the voices of ordinary people are heard and respected in our democracy.

Beginning in 2015, KFTC added Racial Justice as a fifth issue area to ensure that the organization itself integrates anti-racist approaches into its strategy and work.

In line with KFTC's history and governance structure, chapter leaders and members prioritize which local, regional, and statewide policies they support across these areas. Executive Director Burt Lauderdale describes this programmatic agenda as being enabled by the organization's commitment to representation and internal democracy: "[In terms of] building power as a democratic organization and staying democratic … there has been from day one a real commitment to shared leadership and shared decision making … [This] has been the glue that holds such a disparate and diverse group of people and interests together … We have all these rural and urban [issues], all across the state: housing, taxes, broad-form deeds, solar energy, voting rights, criminal justice. We have this remarkable array."

This commitment to a democratic structure has diminished significantly within the United States. Research from Theda Skocpol, Marshall Ganz, and others has demonstrated that since the 1960s, governing models for civic engagement organizations in the United States grew increasingly closed — run by paid management staff rather than distributed networks of members. Even within entities focused on community organizing and building power, the pressure to centralize strategic decisions and governance has challenged movements.

By contrast, KFTC retains its unique governance structure — stemming from those founding conversations in the early 1980s — that centers internal democracy, distributed decision-making, and accountability to the member base. The core of its governance structure is its Steering Committee, which includes representatives and alternates from local chapters as well as statewide officers. In addition to the Steering Committee, KFTC has statewide committees that recommend and implement programming, including Land Reform, Economic Justice, Racial Justice, and New Energy and Transition. Operational committees include Personnel, Finance, and Leadership Development. Chapters choose representatives for the statewide committees each June at the chapter's annual meeting.

Members form chapters, which are typically located by county (although they can occasionally be multi-county). When a group of 15 or more people are interested in becoming a formal part of KFTC, they can undertake the chapter formation process and petition to form a new chapter at the KFTC Annual Meeting or at a Steering Committee meeting. A majority vote of the organizational membership or of the Steering Committee is necessary for recognition as a chapter. Chapter responsibilities include, at minimum, electing a Steering Committee representative and alternate, conducting chapter fundraising, supporting KFTC's statewide issue campaigns, and using nonviolent direct action organizing methods.

According to KFTC's new chapter materials, "once accepted by KFTC's Steering Committee, chapters are connected to the organization's resources (staff, information, power), decision-making process and responsibilities." One example of this decision-making process is the mechanism that KFTC utilizes to design its platform as well as its program of work. Organizing Co-Director Lucas describes the relationship between these two documents and how that ties to chapter autonomy: "The platform is kind of a statement of what KFTC believes that makes it

possible for chapters to open up work, or the organization to open up work on that area ... but that fact that it's in the platform does not mean that KFTC then is going to have an active area of work around that issue."

Figure 3 (below) demonstrates KFTC's platform development process. It begins with annual chapter meetings in June, where each chapter reviews the platform and makes recommendations to the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee then discusses these suggestions and accepts, revises, or declines each recommendation. At the annual meeting in September, members then recommend adopting (or not adopting) those suggestions. At that same meeting, all recommendations are explained, and members can make additional recommendations or modifications to existing ones. All members in good standing can vote on each recommendation. Finally, there is a vote to accept the entire platform as proposed or to amend it.
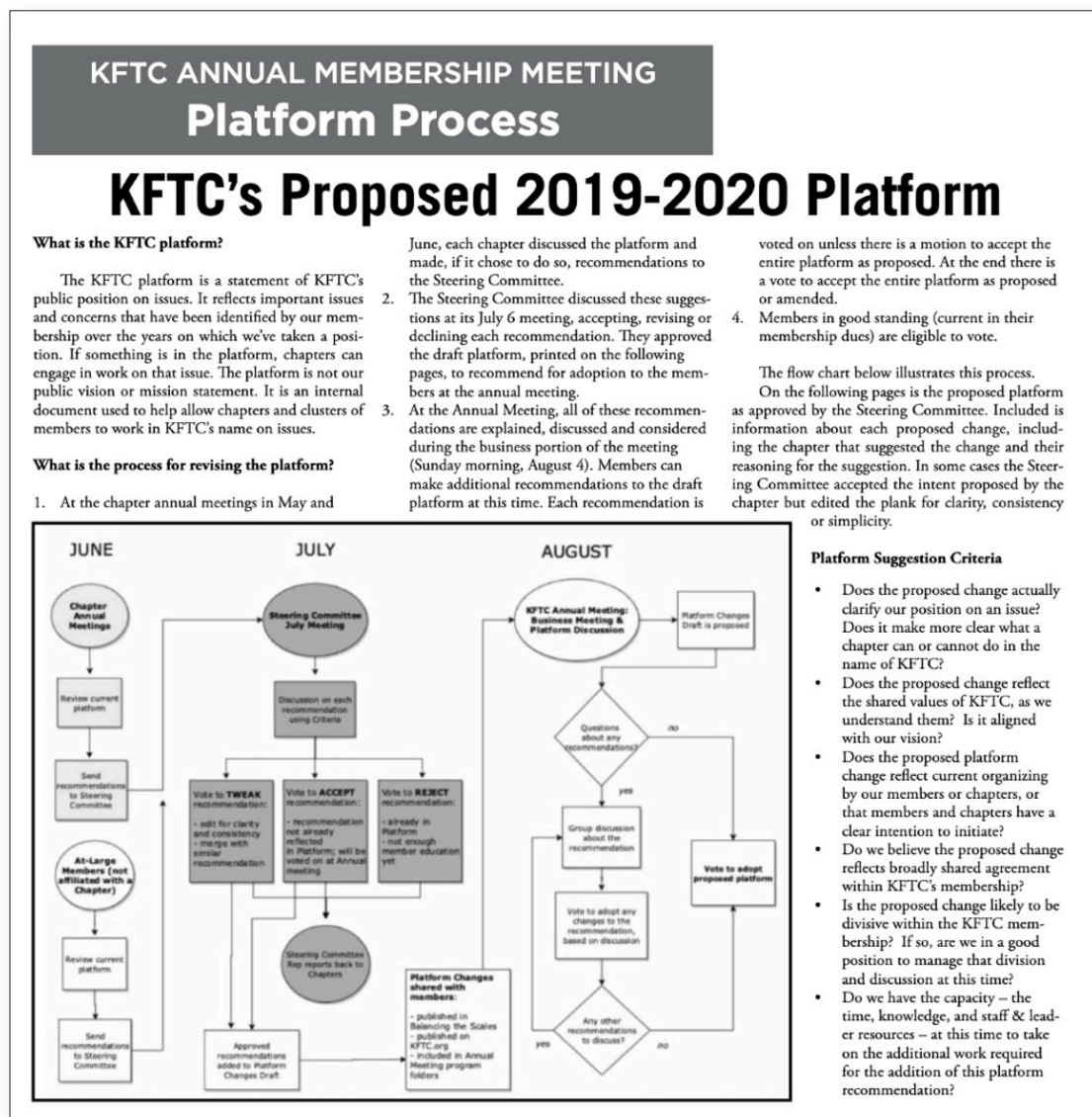

FIGURE 2.
KFTC Platform Decision Flow Chart

Entering into the 21st century, the culture war divergences that began emerging throughout Kentucky in the 1960s started to intersect directly with KFTC's democratic structure. Meta Mendel-Reyes, a member-leader at the time and a past Chairperson of KFTC's Executive Committee, describes a conversation inside of the organization regarding gun control and its place in the platform: "We know a lot of our members are in favor of gun control while others [are not] — it's a hunting culture. So when we decided to add to our platform something about gun control, which a specific chapter had recommended, we decided to take a year so that people could discuss with their chapters what they thought. At the end of that year, we came up with a platform — it's not the strongest thing, but it's definitely for gun control. What's interesting to me is that people didn't necessarily leave — my experience of organizations is usually when you have a conflict like that, people leave. But with KFTC, people stick around. It's that hanging in there despite disagreement that I have a lot of admiration for."

The Challenge: Organizational Reckoning after 2015 Election

KFTC's commitment to internal democracy had historically resulted in a strong focus on legislative change and less emphasis on electoral strategy. This started to shift in the early 2010s and reached a significant pivot point following the 2015 gubernatorial election. Leading up to that election, KFTC members advocated for a bill to restore voting rights for former felons (Kentucky was one of just three states at the time to impose a lifetime voting ban on felons). For several years, the bill had passed the Kentucky House of Representatives with bipartisan support, only to fail in the Republican-controlled State Senate. KFTC conducted extensive mobilization around the bill, building on its chapter structure to ensure that supporters from across the state contacted their legislators. In spring 2015, KFTC held a voting rights vigil that brought out more than 200 members and partners. Subsequently, Jack Conway, the Democratic candidate for governor in the upcoming state election, added restoring voting rights for nonviolent offenders to his policy platform.

After Matt Bevin's 2015 gubernatorial win, outgoing Democratic Governor Steve Beshear, in part due to KFTC and coalition partners' influence, issued an executive order that granted the right to vote to roughly 150,000 nonviolent felons who had completed their sentences. Upon taking office, however, Governor Bevin reversed the voting rights restoration, citing the desire for a legislative rather than executive solution. This reversal caused deep concern among KFTC members. Several members were directly impacted: Mantell Stevens, who lost his right to vote in 2000 after spending 30 days in jail and three years on probation for a drug possession charge, shared in a KFTC blog post following Bevin's decision: "I don't know why anybody in their right mind wouldn't want anybody to have the right to vote ... the only thing I needed to do was get it notarized. It's really weird because I'm literally sitting here looking at the envelope. It's stamped."

Concern over the need to focus on state elections grew after the results of the 2016 election, in which Kentuckians voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton by a margin of 30 percentage points. Additionally, Republicans won both chambers of the state legislature. Lauderdale describes the aftermath of the 2016 election: "We had a leadership summit three weeks later as a KFTC response — we had five days' notice and 75 people from all over the state [showed] up for the day. Out of that, I grabbed this list of lessons and called them the imperatives ... the number one imperative was build grassroots power. I had somebody then ask me, 'Oh yes, that sounds great.' I've been thinking about it as ... three elements: grassroots leaders, a politically conscious organized base, and compelling progressive narrative."
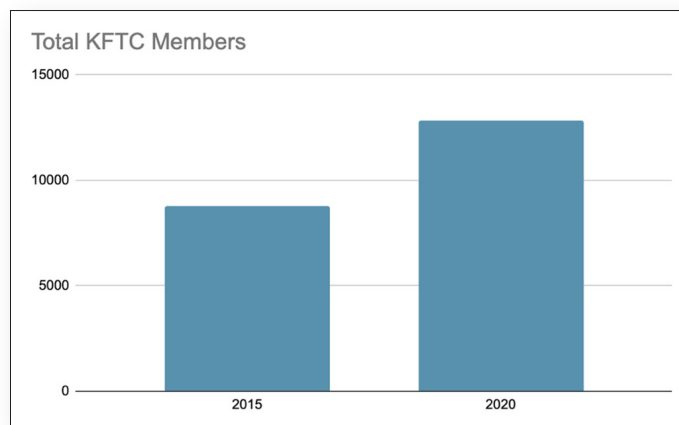
While KFTC had historically focused on grassroots power to push for reforms at the local and state legislative levels, it was now clear that this power needed to be wielded to influence gubernatorial, senatorial, and presidential electoral outcomes as well. Broadly, KFTC sought a policy agenda for Kentucky that aligned with its vision. Members and leadership reflected on the historical moment they were in, far from the days where the organization had been in the 1980s. Lauderdale describes the shift within the organization over the 40-year period: "We used to cover a very broad political spectrum within our grassroots membership ... always mostly Democratic, but that was in large part because the state was mostly Democratic. But large populations of members [back then] were also Republicans, especially in traditionally Republican counties. That was part of the richness, because people really learned and grew from each other. I think that's less so now, which is more a reflection on the country, and [of] the intentional sort of polarization that has been utilized by [Senator Mitch] McConnell and others. It does mean we are in a different situation than we were."

I. Debating Pivot

This shifting reality tested KFTC's internal decision-making structure. Some chapters were skeptical about leaning into a more robust electoral strategy, worried that it would detract from the organization's bread and butter: concrete policy campaigns focused on their four issue areas. This conflict was further complicated by the organization's changing demographics. After the 2016 presidential election, several new members joined the organization, seeking a space to engage politically. These new members were not necessarily tied to the decades-long history or focus of KFTC.

FIGURE 4.
KFTC Membership 2015 v. 2020

Both existing and new members began viewing KFTC as a crucial social home in which to process and engage with one another after the 2016 election. Organizing Co-Director Lucas describes the moment: "Just so many people were looking for a social home after the Trump election, especially, and came to roost in KFTC for a minute ... [the election] created some really challenging times for people ... and then we're in this space where it's obligated us to look at this question of culture and belonging and agency and

Total KFTC Members

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ownership and power within KFTC and think about how we can be homes for folks even as we're transitioning ... growing and changing." The organization experienced nearly 50 percent growth in membership between 2015 and 2020, as shown in **Figure 4.**

The January 2016 Steering and Executive Committee meetings represented key turning points for the organization. Leaders in the room shared several concerns (see **Figure 5**) as captured in a live agenda process that added members' feedback in real time.

Members debated the appropriate role for KFTC, reflecting on the importance of gearing up for the 2016 state and federal elections. Some members expressed concerns that it would be difficult to mobilize constituents toward an electoral strategy, particularly given deep-seated feelings of powerlessness and suspicion regarding elections. While the organization had decades of expertise in mobilizing residents across the state, engaging in extensive voter outreach and empowerment would require quickly scaling up new programs and competencies. Dana Beasley-Brown, a Bowling Green City Commissioner and past Chairperson of KFTC's Executive Committee, describes the meeting:

> *"We came together in a church basement in Berea, people from all over the state, all different issue areas. It was a hard conversation. We have 75 people in here; there's going to be people who are super loud and super opinionated. But we care so much about processes of consensus — and when I say consensus, I mean really valuing the dissenting process. So, we were going into small groups and giving people a chance to have longer in-depth conversations and then reporting out, then going back into them and coming back and reporting out. So just really taking the time to listen to each other. And that builds the foundation to then when it's [time to say] 'Okay, where do we want to go and how do we get there,' it just helps that everybody is kind of getting there together. You were heard. The way it happens at other places is 'Okay, here's what we're doing.' It's totally opposite [to KFTC's approach]. So that really intentional listening, listening, feedback, feedback, coming together, and then coalescing — it helps build that trust for that shared experience and ownership of where we end up."*

Of course, consensus-building can also yield tensions. Members questioned whether the organization had the capacity and the resources to lean into electoral strategy without sacrificing other priorities. Mendel-Reyes — a member who joined the organization in 2000, bringing an extensive history of organizing in other parts of the country and studying social movements over decades — describes her skepticism with pouring energy into an electoral strategy: "In terms of electoral politics, we had been ... involved because of lobbying, which is a big thing that we do. I was initially kind of personally doubtful about [electoral work] because it's not systemic change, it's not revolution. On the other hand, when the Republicans have a supermajority, a lot of our lobbying is ... reactive."

Mendel-Reyes describes participating in KFTC's internal democracy procedure on that day in Berea despite this skepticism:

FIGURE 5.
KFTC Steering and Executive Committee Analysis Notes

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

- Tough landscape; new administration

- House may flip

- 2016 big election year

- Apathy

- KY Dems are weak

- Bevin undid voting rights and is dismantling Kynect.

- 2016 elections are important. Presidential elections-both Dems have transition strategies. Will Jim Gray run against Rand Paul and what will that look like?

- It's not so much apathy as powerlessness and hopelessness.

- The media seem more interested in our voice. We have a bigger platform.

- Fear is bringing folks to action.

- Could be some interesting local races.

- Bevin swept money from various funds.

- People feel the system is rigged. We need to clean up elections.

- Hal Rogers won't be A&R chair after this term.

- Be mindful of our firewalls.

- Time is ripe for opening up voting (early voting, etc).

BLACK = Key themes from November Steering Committee meeting
BLUE = New analysis / info added by Executive Committee, 1/16/16
GREEN = New analysis / info added by Steering Committee, 1/30/16

> "*After 2016, we were astounded and unbelievably disappointed, like progressive groups were around the country. But we decided to have a summit and our priorities, to some extent, are what I think of as the beloved community approach, which is: you try to live according to your values. You don't ignore what's going on outside of you, but the emphasis is, we do the best we can ourselves. And then the other angle is, we have to all do something at a higher level. It became real clear in this summit that there was more interest than there'd even been on electoral work. I think we all just felt kind of backed into it from the sense of, what choice do we have? Trump is the president; Bevin is the governor. We can't just push issues if we don't do something about the people that are making decisions on those issues. I remember that because it was one of those real, for me, KFTC moments when everyone is together dealing with the really tough issues, but also drawing on the warmth of the community.*"

II. Operationalizing Pivot

Following these discussions, KFTC began deploying strategies to engage voters, grounding them in the same principles of local organizing that were core to the organization's values. "To get to that place where we wanted to go, we doubled down on our voter empowerment work, our engagement work of changing who is showing up and who believes that they can have a voice in our democracy through voting," explains Beasley-Brown. "If all the politicians, elected officials are saying, 'Well, the voters want this, and I'm going to do what the voters want,' what about the fact that only 50 percent of Kentucky's voting? What about the other half of the pie? Maybe if we start trying to increase the pie … we have voters that look different. So let's start spending time and conversation with people who have checked out [of the electoral process]."

KFTC began hiring short-term voter empowerment organizers to focus specifically on prospective voters. Each chapter developed democracy teams — members that would guide that chapter's electoral strategy and make recommendations to the executive and steering committees and tie outreach for local races to statewide efforts. KFTC viewed this as key to ensuring higher turnout rates in lower turnout areas that would be crucial for statewide electoral work.

Chapters also started to engage those who were looking to KFTC as a social home in the aftermath of the 2016 election by supplementing voter engagement with creative local organizing and solutions development. "In the lead-up to 2019, our chapters did some really incredible work that was hyper-local visioning processes and these really beautiful town hall meetings," says Hays Lucas. "We did some as KFTC, and the chapters also did their own, and then we also put together tool kits if folks wanted to organize their own town hall."

In 2018, the KFTC Steering Committee met to revisit key questions from the leadership summit that followed the 2016 election. The organizational imperatives that arose in the 2016 Steering Committee meeting in Berea were noted once again, and committee members agreed that KFTC's vision required shifting the political landscape in Kentucky. In particular, both members and KFTC staff expressed worry about the particular strain of conservatism that they were now seeing grow within the state, and several members agreed that significant action needed to be taken in order to build KFTC's power in the years to come.

Leading up to the 2019 gubernatorial primary, KFTC executed once more on the deepened electoral strategy recommendations coming from its collective decision-making body. In the months before the primary, members made more than 12,000 calls to voters and distributed nearly 18,000 voter guides (including 1,000 in Spanish). Two members, Frank Schwartz and Kaleigha Stewart, made 372 and 366 calls, respectively, in the spring of 2019. Across SMS, mail, canvass, and phone bank efforts, KFTC established 3,728 contacts with potential voters, as demonstrated in **Figure 6**.

5/22/19 - 11/4/19	Walk		Phone		SMS		Bulk Mail	Total Contacts	Total Attempts
County	# canvassed	# attempts	# Canvassed phone	Total phone attempts	# Canvassed SMS	Total SMS Attempt	# canvassed		
Total	**1,265**	**6,762**	**1,115**	**18,084**	**1,344**	**22,487**	**6,362**	**3,728**	**53,700**

KFTC also recruited Democracy Leaders — members focused specifically on voter outreach in ways that ensured KFTC's engagement efforts translated into ongoing membership and retention. Democracy Leaders were provided with lists of "Hot Prospects" — individuals in contact with KFTC who expressed interest in volunteering with voter engagement work. These prospects were logged in KFTC's database. KFTC also continued to hold community-building efforts for current and prospective members at the same time it ramped up electoral outreach efforts. These events, ranging from cookouts to literature drops, provided additional entry points for members to engage around the election and build community with one another.

III. Results of Pivot

With a turnout rate of 42 percent of eligible voters, the 2019 election saw the highest turnout in Kentucky since 1995. Democratic candidate Andy Beshear won the election by just over 5,000 votes. KFTC saw its strategic pivot as contributing to this result but also acknowledged that it came with cost and tension inside of the organization. "It's not hyperbole to say, if we had not made that decision [to go all-in on integrated voter engagement] 12 months ago, we would have a second term of [Governor Bevin]," says Lauderdale. "Some folks [were] really charged up and leaning into it, and some folks are like, 'This is really stressful. Can we just not endorse? I remember when KFTC was nonpartisan, and can we just work with everybody?' When we were fighting the 'good fight' with the coal companies, and we move from that very principled, clear-cut resistance to a just transition strategy where we're trying to build a new economy, that's a lot more complicated."

In several counties with close vote margins (less than 5 percent difference between Democrat and Republican turnout) in the 2019 election, KFTC made a significant number of contacts, as demonstrated in **Figure 7** on the following page:

County Name	Change 2019-2015	Total Contacts	Total Attempts	Turnout Margin
JEFFERSON	13.40%	879	14,148	3.50%
FAYETTE	17.60%	849	8,425	4.60%
UNION	10.30%	388	4,403	2.20%
KENTON	14.60%	154	1,932	3.80%
LYON	13.30%	127	1,450	0.10%

FIGURE 7.

KFTC Contacts in Select Counties with Turnout Margins <5%

IV. Post-Pivot: Building Potential Power for 2020 and Beyond

Longtime progressive advocate and social movement thought-leader Richard Healey writes that one way of thinking about community power is as the capacity to achieve outcomes[7] . Not all power must be exercised, and in fact one of an organization's key competencies is determining the difference between possessing power and actually exercising it. By leveraging its internal accountability structure and negotiations to move forward organizational strategy related to electoral work, KFTC amassed significant potential power that it was then determined to continue leveraging. During the 2019 Steering Committee and chapter leadership meetings, members focused on ensuring that beyond the welcome news of the electoral results, KFTC continued to be in a power relationship with the Governor's office, particularly around voting rights. KFTC members met with Governor Beshear in February 2019 and began a mass mobilization to address felons' rescinded voting rights that continued into November. Nearly 100 KFTC members and ally group representatives were present in December 2019 to see the loop closed; Governor Beshear signed an executive order to restore voting rights for roughly 140,000 people with felonies, some of whom were there to share their relief and stories with media.

Outreach efforts for the state election also created a mobilized base that could be leveraged for the 2020 Senate and Presidential elections. This base pushed for KFTC to endorse progressive Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Charles Booker, mobilizing still thousands more voters and driving turnout to higher levels than Kentucky had seen in recent primaries. This included the first time that several Kentuckians with felony records were able to vote. Although Booker did not win the primary, KFTC leaders shared that, "As we continue our work to register and mobilize new voters and have even more conversations, we'll be holding Amy McGrath [the Democratic candidate for Senate] to her commitment to learning from the Booker movement ... She must hear from us." They also recognized that the "work to build a healthy democracy doesn't depend on a single election or candidate, yet we know how important elections are. Our work this summer and fall will continue to build the movement for racial and economic justice while working for candidates who choose a bright future for all Kentuckians."

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7   Healey, R. (2017). The four faces of power. Grassroots Policy Project. Retrieved from http://grassrootspolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/GPP_4FacesOfPower.pdf