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Labor Market Institutions and Political Engagement in the U.S.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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How do lower-income individuals become involved in politics? The answer to this question—one that is at the heart of the current study and invokes core questions of political participation and inequality—is that labor unions are an important part of the answer. This study expands on the role of labor unions as foundational institutions upon which lower-income individuals are drawn into politics, have opportunities to engage with their political system, and level the participatory playing field in American politics.

In this study, I locate labor unions as central institutions that are distinct from other groups and argue that they serve as a vital institutional source of political engagement for individuals across the income distribution, but are most significant for lower-income individuals. Drawing on quantitative analysis of multiple surveys, I find unions are associated with higher levels of non-procedural forms of political engagement—such as political knowledge, interest, and political discussion—for lower-income individuals, but in terms of procedural acts such as voting, unions are associated with higher levels of political activity for individuals across the income distribution. The findings in this study indicate that if the decline of labor unions in the U.S. persists, the negative political consequences may be widespread, but are likely to be most acute for lower-income individuals.

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Hickman Hall—as most in the political science department can attest—offers no shortage of structural challenges. I am grateful to the many people who sought to keep it in working order—from those who cleaned the offices and bathrooms each day to those tasked with repeatedly repairing the building’s notoriously unpredictable HVAC systems—while I spent four years studying.

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Much of the work I have done is due, in large part, to the fact that I have had the good fortune of spending nearly half of my life with my partner, Zayna—a person whose sharp and incisive intellect is matched only by her boundless compassion and curiosity. It is simply unimaginable to think I would be where I am today without her support.

Four months before writing these words, Zayna and I had the great pleasure of welcoming our beautiful son Benjamin into this world. As I worked to finish this project over the past few months, Benjamin began to roll around on his play mat, trying to grab a colorful giraffe that hung above it. Whether morning, afternoon, or evening, Benjamin would raise his arms, scrutinize the giraffe, and contemplate how he could wrap his fingers around the plastic rings hanging from the giraffe that were within reach. I can only hope to emulate such precision and determination in my own work.

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Chapter 1

Unions and the Levers of Power in American Politics

Introduction

On November 9, 2017, over 900 workers at Green Valley Casino in Las Vegas voted overwhelmingly to unionize with the Culinary Workers Union and affiliate with the national union, UNITE HERE. The Green Valley workers—which included bellhops, dishwashers, bartenders, food servers, housekeepers, cooks, and others—after much strategizing, mobilizing, and organizing asserted their right to band together, improve their working conditions, bargain for better benefits, and earn more for the work they do. Empirical evidence is on their side. It is well-established that low-wage workers who are part of a labor market institution such as a union are significantly more likely to earn better benefits, higher wages, and experience less exploitation (Card 1996; Gautie and Schmitt 2010; Western and Rosenfeld 2011; Schmitt et al. 2008).¹

Of course, unions are not just economic institutions. While the economic benefits the Green Valley employees will accrue is known, the political implications of their vote raise questions that are at the heart of the current study: the role of unions as institutional channels for lower-income workers to access the levers of power in American politics. Unions have been found to mobilize voters and greater union density is associated with higher voter turnout at the aggregate level (Leighley and Nagler 2007), but less is known about the internal relationship between members, households, and unions. Moreover,

¹ This study focuses on unions—a particular labor market institution—however other labor market institutions such as worker centers operate in many similar capacities (Fine 2006).

given that roughly a quarter of all working Americans work in low-wage jobs², what role do (or could) unions play in the political lives of these individuals? Do unions merely mobilize voters every two or four years in a mechanical fashion or do they facilitate deeper levels of political engagement? Is a union more politically consequential for some individuals than others? If so, will the continued decline of unions disproportionately affect some Americans more than others?³

In their decision to unionize, the largely low-wage workers of Green Valley also voted to become members of an institution with deeply-rooted political infrastructure and organizational capacity. With this, the members and their families obtain a salient political channel that stretches from the halls of Congress in Washington through the statehouse of Nevada and the towers of Las Vegas, and, importantly, is capable of reaching directly into their workplaces, households, and daily lives.

The Green Valley Workers' unionization drive illustrates a phenomenon that is at the core of this study and strikes at core questions of inquiry in political science, including debates about political inequality, modes of political engagement, and the role of workplace institutions in a democratic society. What role do unions play in facilitating political engagement? Are unions simply one of an array of other citizen-based groups in society or are they distinct? Are unions as politically consequential for professors and engineers as they are for supermarket or food service workers? Are unions best characterized as a monolithic institution with similar consequences for all individuals

² Low-wage work is defined as earning below two-thirds of the national median gross hourly earnings (Appelbaum and Schmitt 2009, 1908).

³ The unionization rate in 2017 was roughly 11% of all workers. In absolute terms, there are approximately 14 million union members in the United States. These numbers have been declining for years.

affiliated with it, regardless of their underlying circumstances, or are they more politically consequential for some individuals than others? How are unions perceived by low-wage workers who stand to reap substantial economic and perhaps political benefits from a union?

Labor unions have long been crucial institutions located in the workplace—historically known to be the center of distributional conflict—that augment workers’ power and improve working conditions. Indeed, this is part and parcel what a union is and what it does: an institution that takes its strength from the collective power of individual workers who then wield and direct that power to shape their experiences, their treatment at work, and their well-being on their own terms rather than have those terms dictated to them by their employer. Empirical research has repeatedly found that unions improve working conditions and the well-being of workers in numerous ways. Unions increase workers’ control over their schedules (Lyness et al. 2012), inform workers of their rights (Kramer 2008), allow workers to feel more secure in their jobs (Brochu and Morin 2012), increase workers’ wages and benefits (Budd and McCall 2004; Card 1996; Schmitt et al. 2008), and create safer and healthier working conditions (Hagedorn et al. 2016; Reynolds and Brady 2012). However, the role of unions in the political sphere remains overlooked and understudied.

This study probes the institutional foundations of political engagement and offers a theory that locates institutions—particularly labor unions—as a locus of political engagement that enables lower-income workers to overcome the hurdles of collective action posed by a fragmented and veto-prone federal structure. Institutions are thus central to the story given the complex impediments that federalism poses for the

mobilization of lower-income workers across local, state, and national levels (Miller 2007, 2008). Although others have emphasized the importance—and rise and decline of—federated voluntary institutions (Skocpol 2003), this study draws an important distinction between unions and other voluntary groups or organizations in the American politics.

The central argument in this study is that labor unions represent a crucial institution that links individuals with their political system and constitute what I term a *non-substitutable democratizing institution*. The non-substitutable nature of labor unions challenges research in political science that tends to cast citizen-groups or other voluntary groups—important political counterpoints to well-resourced, highly organized groups such as businesses—as a catch-all category in which unions are qualitatively interchangeable with others groups such as environmental, charities, or religious organizations. *Non-substitutable* refers to the unique and singular role unions play in organizing individuals *horizontally*—transcending ascriptive divisions such as race and gender—as well as *vertically*—permeating the layers of the American federal system from local to state to national politics—and mobilizing, informing, and representing workers a democratic society, while *democratizing* refers to the broad-based nature of unions that erodes, rather than reinforces, power asymmetries in both the workplace and the political sphere.

Political scientists have long been concerned about the extent to which citizens are informed, active, and participatory. Richer and more organized individuals are far more likely to be politically engaged, and absent some mechanism to equalize, unequal levels of political engagement yield a more unequal political system (Solt 2008). As

Hahrie Han puts it in a recent book on the personal roots of political engagement, “Addressing problems of inequality in representation depends first on addressing problems of inequality in participation. Participation is the mechanism through which certain individuals become better represented than others” (2009, 4-5).

Despite the emphasis on political engagement in political science, comparatively little work focuses on institutions and even less examines the role of labor unions as a vital institution that facilitates political engagement among lower-income individuals and their families across the local, state, and national levels of American politics. This study addresses this gap and expands our understanding of the relationship between workers, institutions, and political engagement in American politics. Unions routinely hold meetings to discuss political events and potential policies, orchestrate political and voter mobilization drives, communicate with members through mailings and direct correspondence, and provide a space for members to become involved in campaigns around policies and issues. A central contention in this study is that unions are crucial institutions that connect individuals with their political system and are distinct from other citizen-based groups in society as they are less subject to self-selection. Moreover, they possess non-substitutable characteristics including the capacity to inform, organize, and represent lower-income individuals that are obscured or overlooked if we simply include them in a list of other “citizen-groups.”

I argue that the political effects unions have on individuals are conditional on two key components: the type of political engagement and individuals’ underlying circumstances. Put simply, unions are much more politically consequential for supermarket workers or food service workers—workers who lack other avenues of

political engagement—than they are for writers or engineers who have an array of institutions that pull them into politics. These differences are a core contribution of this study, which teases out the nuances of how and why unions are more politically impactful for some workers.

Another contribution of this study is the important theoretical and empirical distinction between procedural and non-procedural political engagement. I argue that the ways in which we understand and theorize political engagement has consequences for what role institutions play in fomenting different types of political activities among different subgroups in American society. I draw an important and consequential distinction between *procedural* and *non-procedural* engagement. *Procedural engagement* is perhaps best understood as engagement that is “written in” to a political system. Procedural engagement is codified in a political system. Democracy as a system of government is based on voting and it is through this essential process that a democracy derives its legitimacy. In the U.S. voting is an inherent procedure that is embedded in the constitution. While there are various forms voting can take—including different types of elections—the premise and content of the procedure is unchanged.

On the other hand, *non-procedural political engagement* can take many forms outside the sphere of voting including one’s knowledge of politics, tendency to discuss politics, or one’s level of interest in politics—many of which are a precursor to other forms of political participation. Although non-procedural engagement is *related* to procedural engagement, I argue that they are analytically distinct. Non-procedural engagement can take many forms, but the crucial distinction from procedural engagement

is that it captures forms of political behavior that are not codified in a democratic system of government, but that nonetheless may affect political outcomes.

A crucial implication of the distinction is that the extent to which one is non-procedurally engaged in politics depends more heavily on *other mediating institutions* in one's life such as family, work, education, friends, and, I argue, unions. Given that non-procedural engagement is not codified in a political system, these institutions help clarify the extent to which forms of non-procedural engagement are relevant to political outcomes and facilitate these forms of engagement.

The distinction between procedural and non-procedural political engagement is consequential for the second prong of my theory: *conditional institutional salience*. Although individuals across the income distribution are affiliated with unions, I challenge the notion of unions as monolithic and argue that affiliation with a union has heterogeneous effects on individuals that vary in their socioeconomic position. Consistent with research that examines the aggregate positive association between union density and voter turnout (Leighley and Nagler 2007), in terms of *procedural engagement*, unions are broadly beneficial for *individuals across the income distribution*. However, I argue that the focus on procedural forms of engagement obscures the *conditional* effects that unions have on non-procedural engagement wherein unions are most politically consequential for *lower-income individuals and those who work in low-wage occupations*.

The implications of these distinctions for political participation and inequality add to our understanding of the institutional foundations of political engagement and its multidimensional nature. If we limit the scope of political engagement to procedural acts such as voting, we miss the important role that labor unions play for different subgroups

of individuals across society and in particular areas of the labor market. Relatedly, the notion of conditional institutional salience I develop locates low-wage workers and lower-income individuals as the key beneficiaries of union affiliation. Unions—by holding meetings, communicating with members, organizing demonstrations, and providing information to members and their families—represent a crucial source of political engagement for lower-income individuals than higher income individuals who have a number of channels that augment their political engagement including higher levels of education, more politicized social networks, and higher media consumption. In doing so, unions broaden the scope of politics and democratize access to the political system and magnify the important ways that workers, institutions, and political outcomes are intimately related.

Political Engagement and Inequality in American Politics

Political scientists have long been concerned about the extent to which citizens are informed, active, and participatory. Richer and more organized individuals are far more likely to be politically engaged and participate in political activities (Verba et al. 1995). Absent some mechanism to equalize, unequal levels of political engagement yield a more unequal political system since political participation is a crucial link that transmits citizens' political preferences to policymakers.

Research examining the causes and consequences of unequal levels of political engagement has grown in recent years as political scientists have increasingly documented the substantial biases that characterize policy outcomes in American politics in which policymakers are far more responsive to richer individuals than to middle- or

lower-income individuals (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012). Additional research has found that the biases against the preferences of lower-income individuals precede formal political institutions and emerge early in the policy process in state-level party platforms, as Rigby and Wright conclude, “the representation of low-income citizens only occurs when their preferences happen to concur with the preferences of their economic betters. When their preferences diverge, those preferences seem to be left off of the active agenda—even this early in the policymaking process” (2013, 563).

While this research has examined the relationship between preferences and the policy outcomes across the income distribution and documented substantial levels of representational bias against lower-income individuals when their views diverge from their richer counterparts, political participation and engagement still constitute the crucial mechanisms through which preferences are communicated to policymakers and result in policy outcomes. For instance, a policymaker may represent two individuals with distinct preferences. The one who is highly participatory, informed, and engaged is a stronger constraint on the policymaker’s behavior and is more likely to hold the policymaker accountable for policy decisions. Thus, participation is a crucial determinant of policy outcomes.

Are lower-income individuals better represented when they participate at greater rates? Although nothing guarantees that greater participation will yield greater representation, the research that has examined this question finds that participation is an important indicator of policy outcomes. When lower-income individuals are politically engaged and participatory, their interests are better represented by their elected officials and their interests are more likely to be represented in policy outcomes (Avery and

Peffley 2005; Hicks and Swank 1992; Hill and Leighley 1992; Pontusson and Rueda 2010). The extent to which individuals across the income distribution are politically engaged and participatory, therefore, plays an important role in shaping policy outcomes.

However, a long line of research in political science finds that lower-income individuals are far less likely to participate in politics than their higher-income counterparts. Those individuals with greater resources and higher levels of education are far more likely to be politically knowledgeable, engaged, and participatory (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba et al. 1995). These individuals are also much more likely to be mobilized by party and organizational elites (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). What, then, explains the variance in political engagement among lower-income individuals? When or why are lower-income individuals more politically engaged?

Scholars have pointed to a number of explanations to these questions. One prominent argument is that religious institutions fill the resource and skill gap for lower-income individuals and represent a crucial countervailing institution that militates against participatory inequality (Verba et al. 1995). In chapter 2, I take up this argument and specifically outline the important distinctions that set religious institutions and unions apart. Others argue that the typically linear relationship between one's resources and one's political participation is complicated, and at times reversed, when individuals participate in a program or institution that clarifies their stakes in policy outcomes. Research has found that lower- and lower-middle income seniors are more politically engaged and participatory than upper-income seniors as Social Security makes up a greater proportion of their income (Campbell 2002). In this sense, lower-income

individuals are drawn into a particular policy domain and become politically active due to their vested interests in its outcomes. However, the question remains whether such mobilization is bound to particular subgroups that have a stake in policy outcomes or whether other institutions are capable of clarifying the stakes of other policy domains that may exist at various levels of federalism including state and local government.

Relatedly, Han (2009) argues that an important and overlooked factor that spurs lower-income individuals into political engagement is motivation. Drawing on a case that runs contrary to the typical resources-participation linear relationship—Katrina refugees’ participation in the New Orleans mayoral election—Han focuses on the “personal roots” of political participation and argues that “personal goals, particularly personal policy commitments, can be especially important for motivating participations among the disadvantaged,” (2009, 10). The emphasis on motivation is an important contribution, but it is less clear how issues might become broadened to yield larger, and more substantively consequential, collective policy commitments rather than isolated personal goals. Importantly, Han acknowledges the important role of organizations, or institutions, as “pathways” of political engagement that foster motivation, but offers an undifferentiated list of organizations that might have this effect including neighborhood organizations, human rights organizations, international development organizations, community groups, educational organizations, unions, environmental organizations, pro- or anti-abortion organizations, minority rights organizations, local governments, and more (2009, 99-100).

Han’s argument that “groups” likely play an important role in the activation of motivation among lower-income individuals is compelling, yet treating citizen-groups as

qualitatively similar and theoretically interchangeable diminishes the analytical utility of the argument and obscures important distinctions *between* groups that undoubtedly vary in the priorities, interests, and capacities. Indeed, pluralists have long argued that American politics contains a range of groups that cohere in order to offer opportunities for engagement and representation to individuals from all parts of the income distribution. However, empirical analyses have cast serious doubt on this view and find that, with the exception of unions, most purportedly citizen or “liberal” groups reflect the same economic biases found in the broader American society (Baumgartner et al. 2009, 255-6; Miller 2007; Schlozman et al. 2012, 441; Strolovitch 2006, 2007).

In sum, the research on political engagement and inequality in American politics offers a number of building blocks that I advance in this study. Participation is a crucial mechanism that conveys political preferences to policymakers and structures outcomes in the political process. When lower-income individuals participate at greater rates, their interests are more likely to be represented in policy outcomes. Scholars have underscored the role of institutions in facilitating political engagement and augmented lower-income individuals’ political engagement, yet institutions vary in many ways that yield divergent expectations and lead to different conclusions. The study locates unions—democratizing, non-substitutable institutions—as central and often overlooked mechanisms that derive their power and legitimacy from bottom-up, broad-based membership, permeate the federal structure of the American government, and facilitate political engagement among lower-income workers and their families in ways that few other institutions in American society do.

Institutions and Political Power


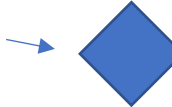

Institutions can serve as mechanisms that both stymie as well as facilitate and enable political action. For instance, Miller (2016) elaborates on the ways that national institutions affect crime policy across countries. In this vein, highly organized groups can exploit veto points in the American federal system to stymie comprehensive social policy while allowing for punitive crime policy whereas in less fragmented institutional arrangements such as the Netherlands, policymakers respond with more comprehensive policies that serve the public good (Miller 2016). From this, we see how institutions—and their structure—can strengthen the power of some groups and affect subsequent policy processes.

However, there is far less theoretical development of the role of institutions as democratizing agents that not only organize and mobilize individuals, but do so from the ground up, while also permeating the federal structure of political institutions in the U.S. This is a crucial gap that overlooks how important institutions are for elevating individuals—such as lower-income workers—with access to few other entities that draw them into politics.

While national institutions are important, there are various tiers of institutions that vary according to their source of power and how they interact with individuals. Formal political institutions—while important—are largely occupied by high-income professionals, lawyers, or business executives (Carnes 2013). Of interest in this study are the institutions that engage, or can engage, with supermarket workers, bartenders, janitors, or delivery drivers and draw them into the political process.

Depending on the structure of an institution and the source from which it derives its power, institutions can vary from “top-down” to “bottom-up” power structures. Table 1 displays a set of ideal types that distinguish institutions from one another and how each institutional type—formal, hybrid, and democratizing—varies in its source of power. The last column contains examples of each institutional type. These three tiers of institutions help illustrate both dimensions that distinguish institutions and how these relate to the power structure that undergirds the institution.

Table 1.1

Institutional Structure and Political Power			
Institution	Power type	Source of power	Examples
Formal political institutions	Top-down (officials)		Legislative, Executive, Judicial
Hybrid Institutions	Mix of top-down (officials), bottom-up (mass partisans)		Political parties, Highly-organized interest groups
Democratizing Institutions	Bottom-up (workers)		Labor Unions, Religious Institutions, Worker centers, Community groups

The formal political institutions of the American government are quintessential “top-down” institutions in which power is concentrated at the top. For instance, the U.S. Senate is premised on the authority of legislative policymaking, while the Supreme Court is the premier “countermajoritarian” unelected institution that is both the ultimate constitutional arbiter as well as the least accountable institution of the American government.

One level “down” from formal political institutions are “hybrid” institutions that derive power from a combination of public participation and elite decision-makers and leaders. A prominent example of this type of institution is the political party. Unlike the formal political institutions, political parties are relatively accessible and somewhat democratically inclined toward mass public participation. For instance, individuals can easily register with a political party and attend events or meetings. However, while the power of political parties is *augmented* by greater and more widespread participation among the mass public, this participation is not necessary.

As institutions, parties are certainly more democratic and less top-down than formal political institutions. However, the incentive structure that undergirds political parties in the U.S. is sensitive to two sources of reciprocity that cast doubt on the political parties as democratic institutions that equalize political power: votes and donations. Parties, by their nature, must attract votes in order to survive and achieve electoral success. Similarly, parties and candidates are increasingly dependent on donations, much of which comes from highly ideological groups and donors (McCarty et al. 2016). In this sense, those individuals who can most reliably reciprocate with votes and donations are most likely to be targeted by political parties and, in turn, it is these individuals whose policy priorities will likely be realized in the party’s political program and the policy process. As long as parties attract enough votes, parties can consist of a small number of devoted followers and decision-makers that guide its orientation. In this sense, parties offer more access and derive more power from mass participation, yet are still hierarchical and ultimately the decisions and exertion of power is often shaped by party leaders and elites (Rigby and Wright 2013).

In contrast to formal political institutions and hybrid institutions, the next tier of institutions captures what I call “democratizing institutions.” These institutions are “bottom-up” in the sense that they derive their power almost entirely from mass participation. These institutions, by virtue of the mass participation on which they depend, possess an incentive structure that is much more likely to be partial to the preferences and interests of the members, the core source of power. Religious institutions have long been seen as countervailing democratic institutions that help level the political playing field (Verba et al. 1995). While religious institutions have been and are crucial entities that can connect individuals with their political system through mobilization, the formation of social capital, and organizing political events where individuals can build skills, I argue that labor unions—institutions that are dependent on members for their existence—constitute a singular, non-substitutable democratizing institution that facilitates political engagement among lower-income individuals.

I argue that there are three key reasons why unions represent such an institution in American politics. First, unions transcend the boundaries of American federalism that disproportionately impede the mobilization of groups of individuals that lack organizational representation and resources to sustain political action. Many policy areas that relate to lower-income workers and their well-being are addressed and debated at *multiple levels* of the American government simultaneously, a process Lisa L. Miller (2008) coins the “federalization” of policy issues. This is consequential for lower-income workers as they may be active at the local level, but face considerable hurdles to advance their interests and mobilize up to the state and federal levels of government. The implication is that the interests and preferences of lower-income workers, lacking an

institution that transcends the layers and contours of American federalism, are “mobilized out” of state and federal political processes while highly organized interest groups, such as business and trade associations, are “mobilized in” and exert considerable power over how issues are defined and debated (Miller 2008).

Unions, as institutions that permeate the federal structure of the American government, are crucial to ensure that workers have access to an institution that permeates the levels and veto points through federalism and can *monitor* local, state, and federal political processes, *inform* members of issues that may affect them at all levels, and *mobilize* their members on particular policies and issues.

Second, unions—in line with their “democratizing” nature—substantively and routinely represents the interests of lower- and lower-middle income individuals in American politics. While a pluralist perspective may theoretically suppose that there are a range of groups that cohere in order to offer representation to individuals from across the income distribution, empirical analyses have cast serious doubt on this bucolic image of American politics (Baumgartner et al. 2009, 255-6; Miller 2007; Schlozman et al. 2012, 441; Strolovitch 2006, 2007).

Interest group scholars have documented this quite clearly at the federal level. Baumgartner et al. found that, “Labor [unions have] traditionally served as an impassioned voice on behalf of low-income Americans and not just for those who formally belong to unions,” whereas other “liberal” groups, “display little interest in the problems of low-income Americans,” (Baumgartner et al. 2009, 255-6). In another extensive analysis of groups in American politics, Schlozman et al. note, “Unless non-professional, nonmanagerial workers are union members, their economic interests receive

very little representation in any arena of organized interest activity,” (2012, 442).

Similarly, in states where unions are stronger, lower-income individuals’ preferences are more likely to be represented in policy outcomes (Flavin 2018).

Third, unions not only permeate the federal system of the American government and represent the interests of lower- and lower-middle income individuals in policy debates, but they regularly communicate information and facilitate political engagement with their members. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996), in their seminal work on political information, discussed, but did not develop or test, the possibility that labor unions may affect levels of political knowledge (111-3). Indeed, unions have long been seen as a “voice” for workers (Freeman and Medoff 1984). Research has found that union members are significantly more likely to be aware of important labor policies to which they are legally entitled (Kramer 2008).

Although both labor unions and religious institutions are examples of democratizing institutions that potentially connect lower-income individuals to the political system, unions are distinct from religious institutions in three key ways: (1) the nature of religious practice emphasizes individualism and grievance displacement whereas the nature of work is organizing around power and builds commonalities of shared experience; (2) in terms of organizational structure, unions, with a broad-based decision-making structure, are more likely than religious institutions to engage in political activity on behalf of lower-income individuals; and (3) political experiences are more common in labor unions than institutions. This project posits that labor unions constitute an overlooked and potentially important avenue through which individuals engage with their political system.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 2 outlines the argument in greater detail and contrasts religious institutions and labor unions. This chapter uses data from a random sample of congregations as well as original coding of union websites to examine the institutional environments that religious institutions and unions represent. In this chapter, I expand on the non-substitutability of labor unions and—drawing on the original coding and content analysis of union websites—I outline the mechanisms through which we should expect unions to facilitate political engagement.

Chapter 3 tests the theory of conditional institutional salience—such that unions are most important for lower-income rather than middle- and upper-income individuals—and examine the relationship between unions and political knowledge, an important non-procedural form of engagement. In this chapter, I find union affiliation is associated with higher levels of political knowledge but the effects are often felt only for lower-income individuals. Examining both general political knowledge as well as individual policy knowledge, unions appear to play an important democratizing role for lower-income individuals to such an extent that a lower-income union-affiliated individual is just as likely as an upper-income non-union affiliated individual to correctly identify candidate stances.

Chapter 4 broadens the concept of political engagement to include three additional notions of political engagement: frequency of political discussion, concern about election outcomes, and, in terms of procedural engagement, voting in primary elections. In this chapter, I find that unions are conditionally consequential for lower-

income individuals in fostering deeper, non-procedural forms of political engagement—such as political discussion—but in terms of procedural acts such as primary voting, unions are associated with higher levels of political activity for individuals *across* the income distribution.

Chapter 5 builds on the previous two chapters and empirically tests the theory of multidimensional political engagement put forth in this study. This chapter employs confirmatory factor analysis models to empirically confirm that political engagement is most accurately characterized as a two-dimensional concept. I then use this model—a model with two latent variables, procedural and non-procedural engagement—to estimate a structural equation model that includes covariates. I find consistent support for the notion of conditional institutional salience. Unions are associated with higher levels of non-procedural engagement for lower-income individuals—such as service workers and laborers—while unions are associated with higher levels of procedural engagement across the income and occupational distribution.

Chapter 6 shifts the focus from the effects of unions on political engagement to the public's *perceptions* of unions, and labor policy more generally. If unions have positive effects for a range of democratic outcomes—and these effects are strongest for lower-income Americans—one might wonder why, as unionization rates have fallen precipitously for decades, labor policy sees little substantive debate and is rarely central to candidates' political programs in American politics. I find that labor unions are seen favorably by lower-income individuals *across party lines*. Although much research in public opinion documents the powerful role that partisanship plays in shaping political attitudes, I find that labor market *experience* complicates a clear picture of a partisan

divide. Indeed, on some measures, lower-income Republican workers are *more supportive* of unions than upper-income Democrats who work in management. In light of research on the responsiveness and bias in policy outcomes that favor upper-income individuals, this chapter suggests that strong labor policy is an issue that lower-income individuals across party lines may favor, but one that upper-income individuals may prefer stay off the political agenda.

Chapter 7 pans out and summarizes the key findings. This chapter discusses the limitations of the study as well as potentially fruitful avenues of future research that can extend and build upon the findings.

Data Sources

This study draws on a range of data as well as original coding and content analysis of union websites. Chapter 2—which expands the argument and examines two democratizing institutions: religious institutions and labor unions—draws on original content analysis of over three dozen union websites to examine the mechanisms through which unions facilitate political engagement as well as three waves of data on the activities of U.S. congregations to examine the political activity of religious institutions. These data come from the National Congregations Study (NCS). Congregations in the NCS are selected through a random sampling strategy tied to respondents' answers in the General Social Survey (GSS). Importantly, the unit of analysis is the congregation and its characteristics. This allows for systematic analysis of political activities in U.S. religious institutions.

Chapters 3 and 4 constitute key empirical chapters that examine the relationship between union affiliation, resources, and political engagement. These chapters principally draw on two data sources: National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) and the American National Election Study (ANES). The NAES (Romer et al. 2004) is a large-scale mass survey conducted in 2000, 2004, and 2008 and contains a number of important indicators as well as a large enough sample for subgroup analysis. The ANES is a mass political survey that has been conducted regularly since 1952. I use the cumulative data file and pool the ANES data from 1972 through 2016 to obtain a large enough sample to examine the subgroups of interest—namely lower-income union households.

Chapter 5 extends the findings in chapters 3 and 4 by formalizing and refining the concepts of non-procedural and procedural political engagement and testing my theory that political engagement is best characterized as a multidimensional concept. This chapter draws on NAES data and latent variable analysis, constructing a confirmatory factor analysis model and structural equation models.

Chapter 6 draws on mass opinion surveys to examine *attitudes* toward unions and toward labor policy. This chapter uses data from ANES, NAES, and NORC to examine how and perhaps why individuals hold different views about unions and labor policy.

Chapter 2

Unequal Political Engagement and Countervailing Institutions

Political engagement has long been tied to the health and stability of democracy. In part, this is due to the importance of an engaged and attentive electorate for the viability of a substantive democratic system that holds decision-makers responsible. However, political engagement is also seen as a proxy for the distribution of power and resources in a given society. Political engagement is the foundation of a democracy. When individuals are politically engaged, they are more likely to shape the policy outcomes of their political system and hold policymakers accountable for their actions.

Robert Dahl described a healthy political system as one in which there are high levels of both contestation and inclusion (1971, 7). Underlying his schema is the distribution of political resources and skills, or what we may call, political engagement. As Dahl notes, “Extreme inequalities in the distribution of such key values as income, wealth, status, knowledge, and military prowess are equivalent to inequalities in political resources. Obviously a country with extreme inequalities in political resources stands a very high chance of having extreme inequalities in the exercise of power,” (1971, 82).

Political engagement—whether in terms of political participation or political knowledge about national politics—is an important consideration in the broader trajectory of political outcomes. This chapter asks: how do lower-income individuals get involved in politics? What role do institutions such as unions play in the process?

Political Engagement and The Institutional Counterpoint

Political outcomes are inherently shaped by institutions. Institutions—ranging from the legislature to political parties and from the local court house to labor unions—are important determinants that structure political outcomes. The role of institutions is prominent in areas such as crime policy in which the layered, veto-prone nature of the American federal system allows highly organized and active groups to stymie policy responses whereas less fragmented systems allow policymakers to craft more comprehensive policy (Miller 2016). In this sense, national political institutions play a crucial role in shaping the outcome of the policy process by enhancing or diminishing the political power of different groups in society.

Labor unions represent another institution that can shape policy outcomes by expanding or diminishing the political power of individuals. Labor unions differ from other institutions as they are largely member-driven and interact with individuals on a routine basis and are involved in daily processes such as working conditions, schedules, and pay that are often immediate considerations for individuals. I posit that labor unions represent a singular, nonsubstitutable democratizing institution. By nonsubstitutable, I mean that democratic workplace institutions—that is, labor unions—represent necessary and functional components in a democratic system. However, others point to religious institutions, not labor unions, as the most significant counterweight to a persistent trend toward unequal political engagement (Verba et al. 1995).

Verba et al. (1995) point to access to resources and engagement are crucial for participation, yet they argue that the “catalyst” for political activity is recruitment. Given America’s uniquely religious environment, lack of social democratic parties, “weak” unions, and general absence of “class-based” political parties, the authors look to

religious institutions as important sites of recruitment that can level the participatory playing field. Verba et al. (1995) acknowledge unions are relevant, but find little reassurance in them and instead assign great weight to religious institutions as they note, "In many respects, the effects of institutions in stimulating political involvement serve to reinforce initial advantage...Only religious institutions provide a counterbalance to this cumulative resource process," (1995, 18).

Verba et al. (1995) derive this conclusion largely on the basis of the proportion of Americans who are members of each respective institution. In assessing the results of their survey, the authors find that unions are, in fact, much more likely to facilitate political engagement among members (Verba et al. 1995, 385-6). The authors then note that, "if an institution is to have an effect on an individual, the individual has to be affiliated," (Verba et al. 1995, 387).

Religious institutions are indeed important social entities that can facilitate political engagement and connect individuals to politics. They are, in many ways, comparable to labor unions. Both constitute institutions that can serve as important institutions that can draw lower-income individuals into politics. In addition, membership in both labor unions and religious institutions extends across the income distribution offering substantial variability in the impact of the two sources of political information and engagement for different individuals from different economic backgrounds.

There are five important distinctions between religious institutions and labor unions that cast doubt on religious institutions as a democratizing institution capable of equalizing political engagement: (1) the impediments of federalism; (2) the nature of religious practice emphasizes grievance displacement and is not principally organized

around power while the distribution of resources and control is central to the workplace and the environment builds commonalities of shared experience; (3) in terms of organizational structure, unions, with a broad-based decision making structure, are more likely than religious institutions to engage in political activity on behalf of lower-income individuals; and (4) political opportunities for engagement are more common in unions; and, most importantly, (5) political malleability: the composition of religious institutions is largely understood to be a function of demographic change—and as such are beyond the reach of policy—whereas union membership is shaped by labor policy that can be augmented by legislative changes that strengthen and protect worker rights as well as ease the process of unionization to level the highly unequal playing field between workers and employers. I take each of these points up in turn. These distinctions are summarized in table 2.1.

Federalism's Impediments

A key difference between labor unions and religious institutions is that, while some religious institutions have regional structures, unions are more likely to permeate the federal structure of the American government and are more likely to be attuned to local, state, as well as national politics. The federal structure of the American government contains a number of veto points that severely disadvantage lower-income individuals and mobilizing across layers of the federal system is a crucial challenge for lower-income individuals who lack the resources to sustain political activity (Miller 2007, 2008). The scope of religious institutions varies much more substantially. Some larger and well-organized churches have regional or national associations and are highly attuned to

politics at all levels, but many are limited in their connection to the political process. These religious institutions can still play an important role in advocating for lower-income individuals, but they may be inevitably constrained by available resources to establish deeper political connections.

On the other hand, most unions are affiliated with national unions and many within the federation of AFL-CIO. Many unions have offices in Washington D.C., state capitals, and have offices that have their locals in small towns and cities across the country. Interest group scholars have documented that unions are one of few other institutions representing lower-income individuals in Washington. At the state-level, Flavin (2018) finds that the preferences of lower-income individuals are more likely represented in state policy outcomes where labor unions are stronger. At the level of Congressional district, recent research has found legislative staffers—an important source of information for members of Congress—are more attuned to citizens' preferences in districts where labor unions are stronger and more widespread (Hertel-Fernandez et al. 2019, 13). Federalism prevents a number of impediments and veto points, but labor unions are uniquely capable of overcoming these hurdles—and in doing so representing lower-income individuals in policy processes taking place at all levels of government.

Organizing Principles

A meeting at a workplace institution—such as a union—offers both an *outlet* for individual grievances and an *inlet* for recognition that those problems are shared by others—many of whom are seeking to change aspects of their working conditions or the policies under which it is governed that build commonalities among otherwise disparate

individuals. The workplace represents a domain of shared experience where grievances have a tangible connection to the distribution of power among workers, between workers and employer, and within a political system and the policies that affect those experiences. The workplace provides a set of concerns among individuals that transcends their individual differences and provides a foundation to build social ties among otherwise disparate individuals.

Scholars have pointed to the collective experience of work and the fundamentally social nature of opposition and contestation. Fantasia (1988), for instance, refers to the collective and social process and practices of resistance to poor treatment and employer power among workers as “cultures of solidarity,” whereby “more or less bounded groupings that may or may not develop a clear organizational identity and structure, but represent the active expression of worker solidarity within an industrial system and a society hostile to it. They are neither ideas of solidarity in the abstract nor bureaucratic trade union activity, but cultural formations that arise in conflict, creating and sustaining solidarity in opposition to the dominant structure.” (Fantasia 1988, 19).

Structure: Incentives and Funding

Religious institutions and labor unions have different institutional constraints and incentives. While labor unions are relatively unconstrained to engage in political activity, religious institutions have additional constraints. Additionally, unions and religious institutions have different incentives.

Whereas unions may facilitate engagement and provide political information for various reasons including solidarity and moral compunction, ultimately, they also need to

survive. This requires more members and more politically active members. Unions are funded by members and therefore are more likely to adhere to members' needs and circumstances.

Political Exposure and Experience

The practices of religious institutions also vary substantially. Some are highly political while others—perhaps most—are less so (Chaves 2004). Although many religious texts dictate help to the poor as a core theological component of faith, there is far more variation in practice (Chaves 2004; Smith 2001). In the survey carried out by Verba et al. (1995), they found that opportunities for political engagement were much more common in unions than they were for religious institutions.

Among union members, 56% said the union provided an opportunity to develop civic skills, 66% experienced a request for political activity at the union, and 39% stated they had been exposed to political discussion through the union. In contrast, among members of religious institutions in the survey, the corresponding percentages were 30%, 34%, and 24%, respectively (Verba et al. 1995, 386). Moreover, although churches played a very important role for African-Americans in advancing the cause of civil rights in the U.S. in the 1960s, the authors found that churches with an all-black congregation offered no more political opportunities than other, racially-mixed churches (Verba et al. 1995, 385, FN 8).

More recent data reveal similar patterns. In a systematic analysis of a random sample of congregations in America, Chaves (2004) found that few provide social services and if they do it is typically in the form of emergency housing, food or clothing

(63-6). Politically, roughly a quarter of congregations inform their members about opportunities for political involvement and less than one in ten congregations report organizing a demonstration, registering people to vote, lobbying political officials, or inviting political candidates to speak at their congregation (Chaves 2004, 94-6). In terms of religious attendance, a somewhat counterintuitive trend has been ongoing for the past several decades. Despite *participation* in religious services gradually falling, religious *giving* has *increased* across all congregations and denominations (Chaves 2004, 36-37). This suggests that the incentive structure that guides congregations' activities is perhaps increasingly weighted toward the preferences of those with more resources.

Chaves (2004) draws on data from the first wave of the National Congregations Survey (NCS). The NCS draws a random sample of congregations in the U.S. and collects data on the congregations' social, political, and religious practices. The first wave was conducted in 1998. The second and third waves were conducted in 2006 and 2012. For a more reliable and updated assessment of the political practices taking place in U.S. religious institutions, we can analyze all three waves of data. To do so, I identified the questions in the survey that were asked across all three waves and pooled the data to analyze it. This allows us to analyze a random sample of over 4,000 congregations in the U.S. and the extent to which their members are presented opportunities for political engagement.

To assess political activity, I identified nine questions that asked respondents (who were congregation leaders) whether, over the last 12 months in their congregation, (1) members had been told about opportunities for political activity; (2) there had been any meetings, classes, or groups to discuss politics; (3) there had been any meetings,

classes, or groups to get people registered to vote; (4) there had been any meetings, classes, or groups to get out the vote during an election (waves 2 and 3); (5) there had been any meetings, classes, or groups to participate in efforts to lobby elected officials; (6) there had been any meetings, classes, or groups organize or participate in a march or demonstration for or against a public issue or policy; (7) there had been voter guides distributed to members; (8) there had been any elected officials invited to speak to members; (9) there had been any political candidates invited to speak to members. Respondents answered “yes” or “no” to each of these questions.

The results are shown in Figure 2.1 below. The bars depict the number of congregations according to the total number of affirmative responses offered to the political questions above. It is immediately clear that the modal category is zero. That is, the most common congregation in the U.S. is one that does not engage in any of the political activities listed above. Only about 26% of the congregations engage in more than two political activities.

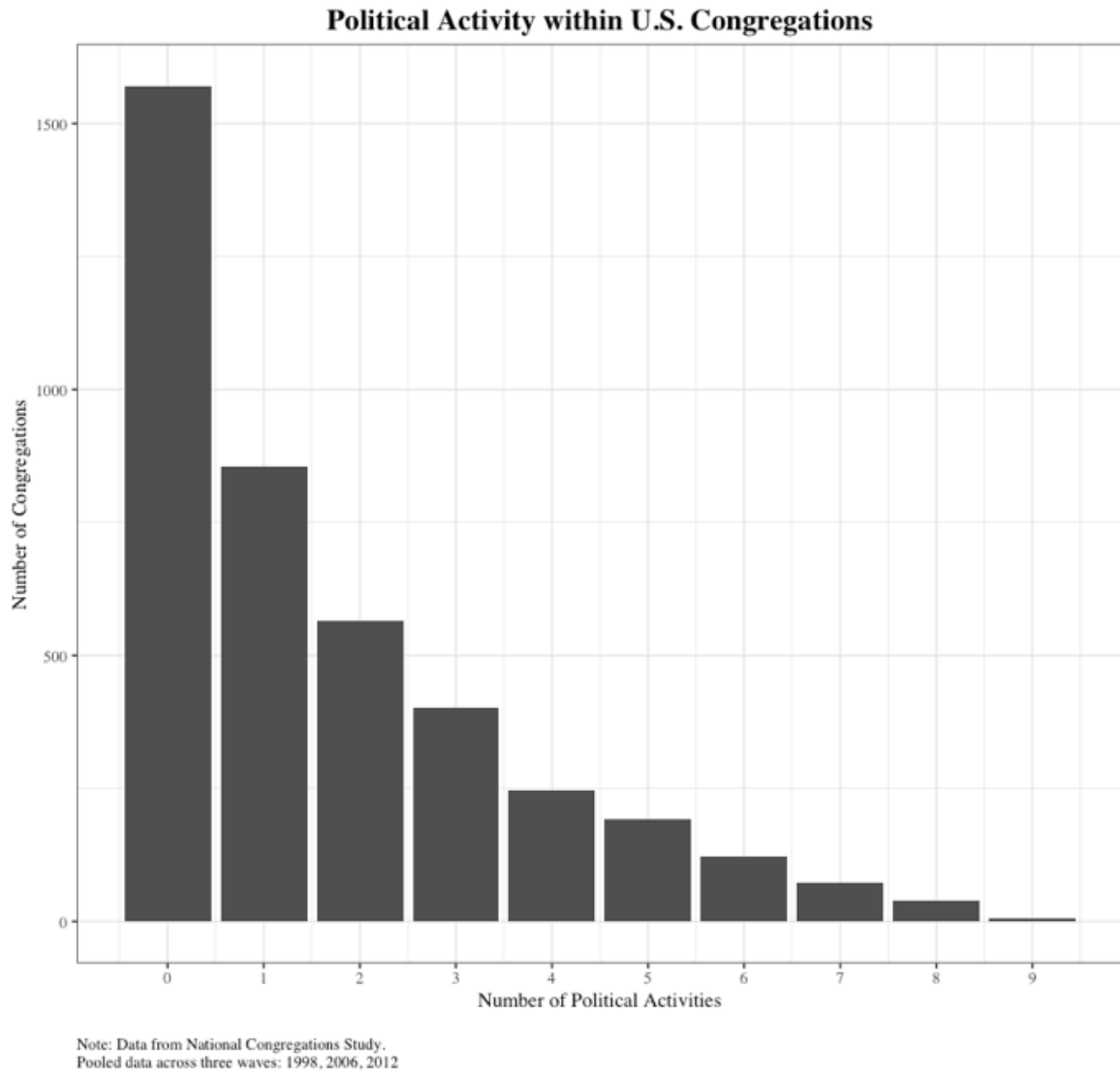


Figure 2.1: Political Activity within U.S. Congregations

The data in Figure 2.2 are consistent with Verba et al. (1995) and Chaves (2004). Only about one in five congregations provide opportunities for political activities, organize a voting drive, and provide opportunities to lobby officials. Less than one in ten congregations had groups for people to discuss politics. Overall, opportunities for political engagement through religious institutions are present, but they are relatively rare.

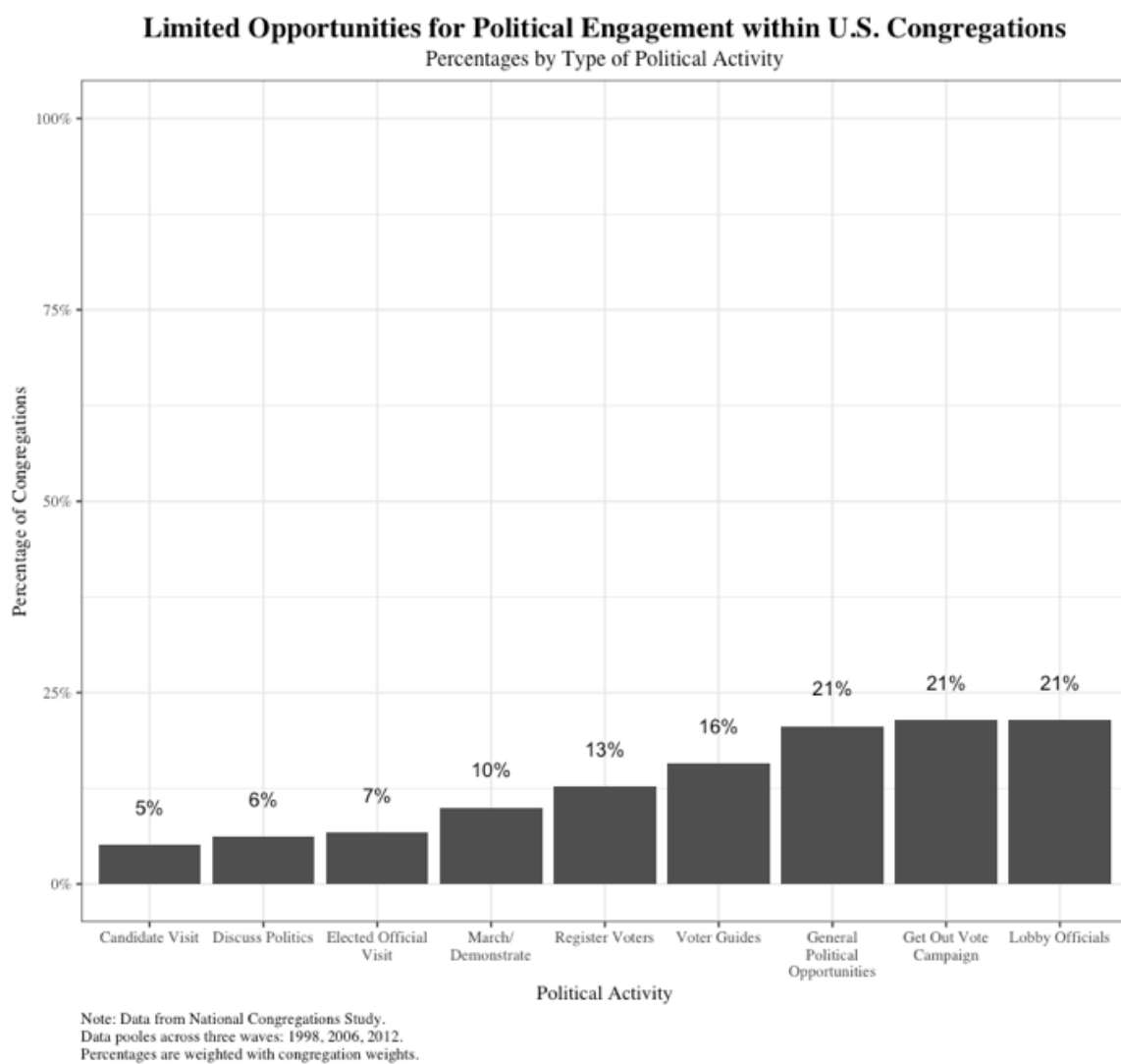


Figure 2.2: Limited Opportunities for Political Engagement within U.S. Congregations

Verba et al. (1995) acknowledged that opportunities for political engagement are more common in unions than in religious institutions, yet conclude that that religious institutions—not unions—are our best hope for providing a “counterbalance” to the deep-seated political inequality because more Americans are affiliated with the religious institutions than labor unions.

To put their argument in more explicit terms, we can consider a few hypothetical breakdowns. In line with the data above, let's say roughly 20% of those affiliated with religious institutions have opportunities for political engagement. For those affiliated with unions, about 60% are exposed to political experiences. On the face of it, one may readily conclude that unions are more politically consequential for individuals given the greater number of opportunities they provide for political engagement.

However, these percentages are only meaningful in relation to the *total* number of people affiliated with each institution. For instance, if 100 individuals are affiliated with a religious institution, then roughly 20 people are exposed to some sort of political engagement by virtue of that religious affiliation. On the other hand, if there are only 10 individuals affiliated with a union, then only six individuals are likely to be exposed to political engagement efforts by the union. For those considering institutions as a means by which to level the political playing field, 20 sounds much better than six. It is from this logic that Verba et al. (1995) derive their conclusion: "In many respects, the effects of institutions in stimulating political involvement serve to reinforce initial advantage...Only religious institutions provide a counterbalance to this cumulative resource process," (1995, 18).

In the U.S., as of 2018, roughly 73% of Americans claim to be affiliated with a religious institution while about 11% of workers are members of labor unions. The percentage who actually interact (as opposed to just identify) with their religious institution is likely much lower whereas the percentage of individuals affected by unions is likely higher as individuals may come in contact with unions through family members ("union households") and friends as well as non-member mobilization efforts by unions.

In any event, an important caveat about these percentages is that while they do, in fact, support the notion that religious institutions are more widespread in America, it is crucial that we account for two important components: (1) these percentages are not fixed; and (2) union affiliation, unlike religious affiliation, is affected by policy design and the political outcomes. Through these points, we arrive at the fifth and final important point in the distinction between religious and labor institutions: political malleability.

Membership Composition: Political Malleability

While I have largely emphasized the nature of religious and labor institutions and their distinct relationships to political engagement, we are ultimately interested in the makeup of these institutions. As the authors note, “if an institution is to have an effect on an individual, the individual has to be affiliated,” (Verba et al. 1995, 387). How or why does membership affiliation with these institutions vary?

Religious participation and attendance in the U.S. has gradually declined over the past several decades, while religiosity (belief in supernatural, god, spirituality, etc.) has remained unchanged (Chaves 2004, 34-6). Yet although participation has declined, religious participation is correlated with age and as the “baby boomer” cohort ages, researchers expect religious participation may begin to rise (Chaves 2004, 35).

Christian religious institutions make up the vast majority of religious institutions in the U.S. If we look more closely at Christian religious institutions, membership in liberal Protestant institutions has declined while affiliation with evangelical, and often conservative, Protestant churches has grown. However, the growth in membership at

evangelical Protestant churches is not attributed to “switching” or new converts, but rather the comparatively *high birth rate* among women in conservative denominations compared to women in moderate or liberal institutions (Chaves 2004; Hout et al. 2001).

In fact, the empirical research in sociology of religion indicates that the structure of religious membership in the U.S. is largely shaped by *demographic* changes within the American populace (Hout et al. 2001; Skitbekk et al. 2010). This implies that aggregate religious affiliation is affected and shaped by non-political forces and therefore beyond the reach of policy.

Union membership—which we have seen offers far more opportunities for political engagement than religious affiliation—has been declining for decades. But if the religious composition in the U.S. is largely a function of demographics, what shapes the aggregate levels of union affiliation?

Specifically, union membership is understood to be shaped by two main factors: (1) trade policy (Brofenbrenner 2000; Slaughter 2007; Vachon and Wallace 2013); and (2) labor policy, including right-to-work laws as well as the extent of opposition toward, and legal protections for, worker unionization campaigns (Brofenbrenner 2009). Liberalized trade policy negatively affects unionization rates by reducing the bargaining power of workers relative to owners of firms who are able to move easily shift operations abroad to jurisdictions with diminished labor protections. This shift lowers the cost of labor for owners and effectively places workers from the U.S. in competition with workers in developing countries. Workers have less leverage to protect against job losses in unionized industries if owners can readily move to a country with very low labor standards, and therefore low labor costs.

Relatedly, owners can stymie unionization drives in mobile industries by leveraging the *threat* of job loss and capital mobility. Brofenbrenner (2000) analyzed a random sample of over 400 private sector unionization campaigns and owners used this threat often when workers sought to form a labor union at their workplace. Among unionization drives in mobile industries, 68% of employers threatened to move all or part of their plant during the organizing drive. Importantly, when such threats were made, workers were significantly less likely to successfully vote for and form a union.

Second, in addition to liberalized trade, labor policy has contributed to union decline by as workers receive relatively meager protection during unionization drives. Meanwhile, economic elites—cognizant that unions mobilize workers and serve as an institutional check on concentrated economic power—have sought to undermine the strength and capacity of unions (Hertel-Fernandez 2018).

In addition to the legal and political mechanisms through which economic elites have sought to diminish the power of unions, employer opposition to unionization drives has become intense and sophisticated over the past several decades (Windham 2017). Employers use a range of tactics to instill fear in workers, inject a sense of futility, and retaliate against pro-union workers as they consider voting for a union.

In a survey of NLRB unionization campaigns held between 1999 and 2003, Brofenbrenner (2009) found that employers waged an antiunion campaign against workers seeking to unionize in 95% of union elections. On average, employers deployed just over 10 different anti-union tactics—many of which may be considered illegal—to influence the outcome of worker unionization elections.

Nearly nine out of ten employers experiencing a unionization drive held “captive audience” meetings with workers leading up to the unionization vote while three out of four employers hired an anti-union consulting firm. In Brofenbrenner’s (2009) analysis, 75% of employers distributed anti-union leaflets to workers with an average of 16 leaflets being distributed throughout the antiunion drive. Perhaps attempting to play on the uncertainties of family members at home to influence a workers’ vote, roughly 70% of employers experiencing a unionization campaign mailed anti-union letters to workers’ homes (Brofenbrenner 2009, 10). In just over a third of unionization drives, the employers fired workers who were actively involved in the unionization efforts. In nearly half of the unionization drives, the employer threatened to cut wages and benefits (Brofenbrenner 2009, 10).

When employers use these tactics, unsurprisingly, the likelihood of workers electing to form a union decreases. The extent to which the government protects workers’ rights and maintains a fair and level unionization process in these campaigns is a function of labor policy.

The widespread and intense employer opposition in the U.S. combined with the relatively weak protections workers are afforded has earned the U.S. an unenviable designation in the International Trade Union Confederation’s (ITUC) Global Rights Index (ITUC 2018). In an analysis of legal text and 97 indicators pertaining to violation of workers’ rights in law and practice derived from the International Labor Organization’s Conventions, the ITUC scores countries from 1 to 5. The U.S.—joined by other similarly ranked countries such as Iraq, Uganda, Vietnam, and Haiti—falls into

Rating 4. This rating indicates that American workers routinely experience, “Systematic violations of rights.”

Workers face extreme hurdles when seeking to form a union. They are often fired, threatened, treated poorly, or intimidated (Brofenbrenner 2000, 2009)—all of which likely instill a deep sense of fear in workers who have to balance their job with other considerations such as a family, rent, and other expenses. Employers are well aware of this and research has found that management used antiunion tactics in 96% of unionization drives analyzed by Brofenbrenner (2009). However, most important in the current context is that while religious affiliation is largely a function of demographic change, unionization is a process that is governed by federal and state law. Labor policy—and laws—can change.

Unions and Political Engagement

To get a sense of what unions do in the political realm, I conducted a content analysis of the websites of the 35 largest unions in the U.S. These data were collected and coded between January 8, 2019 and February 22, 2019. In addition to coding, I also draw a number of quotes about how unions describe their institution and how it relates to the political engagement of their members. Unions were selected by their membership totals: I analyzed the top 35 unions by membership.

For the content analysis, I analyzed the websites across five dimensions related to political engagement: (1) voting information (references to voting, elections, registration); (2) political officials (references to policymakers, lawmakers, and political institutions such as state legislatures of the US Congress); (3) policy (descriptions of

policies or issues); (4) legislation (information about actual pieces of legislation, summaries of legislation, legislative campaigns); and (5) action (information about demonstrations, “taking action,” mobilization campaigns, protests).

For each of these categories, I coded the website on a three-point scale: 0 (none; no mentions); 1 (some information, mentions); or 2 (extensive, detailed information; specific sections devoted to the topic). To be sure, there are limitations to these data. Much of the activity many members and their families take part in is facilitated by their “local” rather than the national union. Additionally, unions vary in the extent to which their websites are up-to-date and even whether the website is considered an important medium of information to communicate with members. However, the content analysis is likely a conservative analysis as much member interaction takes place at meetings, calls, face-to-face interactions, and through mailings. In addition, many unions have their own publications or newsletters that are available only to members. Nonetheless, the information available on the websites helps to get a sense of how and in what ways unions seek to engage their members and their families in the political process.

The results are displayed below in figure 2.3. The data indicate that unions regularly provide opportunities to engage in politics and learn about issues and policymakers. Nearly all union websites contained some information about policies or issues (94%). Additionally, over 80% of the coded websites contained information on elected officials as well as summaries of legislation. Just under 80% of the sites contained opportunities for political action such as joining a demonstration, a campaign, or attending a rally. Perhaps most surprisingly, only 44% of the websites contained information about voting such as a registering to vote, polling location, or information

about upcoming elections. There are two potential explanations for the relatively few sites that feature electoral information. First, union members may be already quite likely to vote and therefore the union focuses on more substantive, policy-specific information about the political process. Second, the time of year may affect if and when voting information is displayed. The data collection for these figures took place in January and February of 2019. It may be that these pages are updated to display voting information when there is an upcoming election or that there are separate pages that are unique to each state as registration can vary across state lines and unions often cover workers in multiple states.

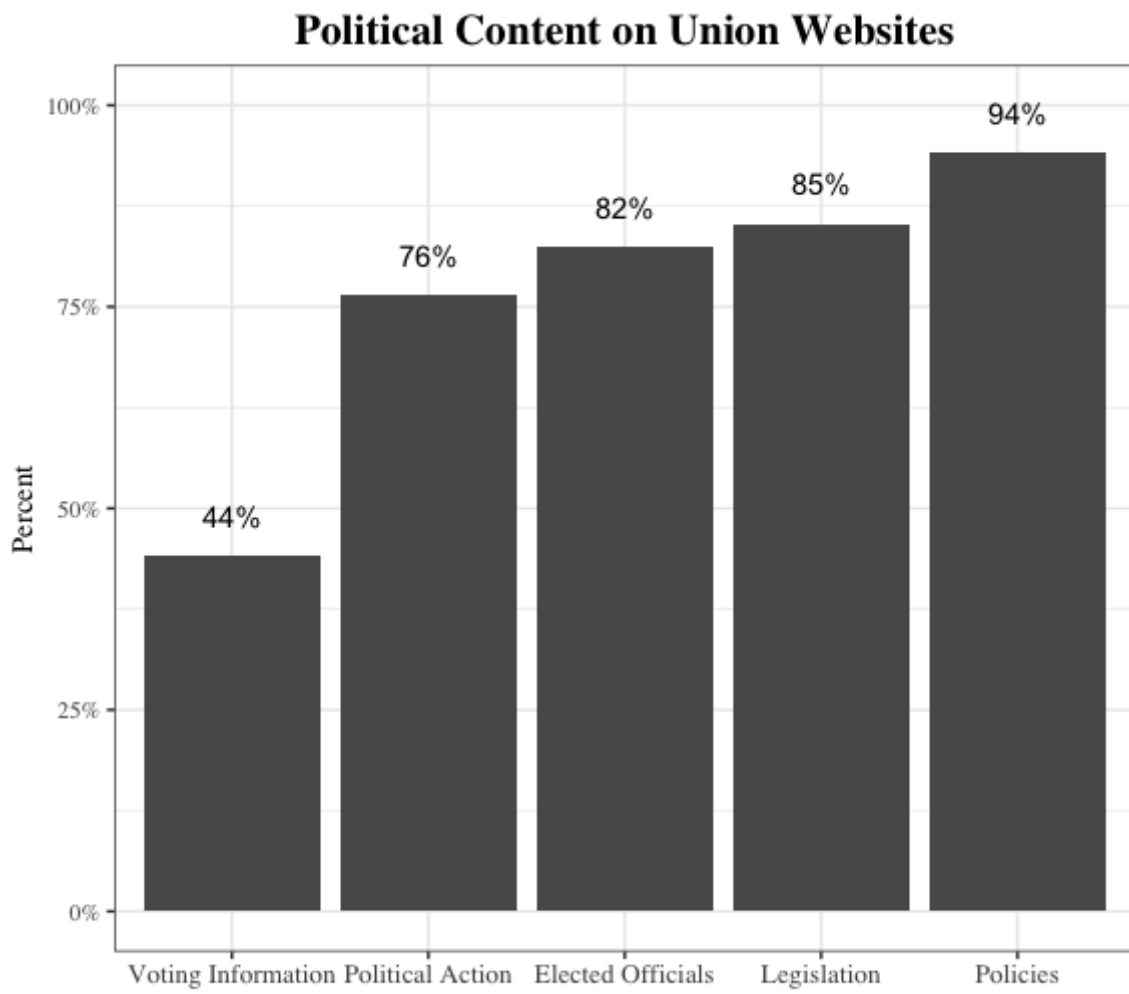


Figure 2.3: Political Content on Union Websites

Aside from the coding and percentages, I also conducted a content analysis to examine the language on the websites and how and why unions can serve as mechanisms through which unions seek to facilitate political engagement. This is particularly important as the content of the website likely reflects the communications that members and their families receive through direct communication from the union, whether through emails, mailings, newsletters, or at meetings.

One prominent theme that emerged through the analysis is a clear emphasis on the effects that policy, policymakers, and the political process more broadly have on workers. This language sought to draw workers into the political sphere by emphasizing the ways that policies affect their work and their well-being while also signaling to workers that the union can and will serve as a mechanism that will push, encourage, and enable them to engage with their political system to ensure that workers have a say in how political outcomes are decided.

One union that represents transit workers drew on explicitly on the jobs their members do and clarified who and which policies affect that work:

As a transit worker, school bus employee or over-the-road bus worker, your job, wages and working conditions are directly linked to politics. Representatives in federal, state and local government make crucial decisions every day that determine the amount of funding available to your transit system or school district, the safety and security requirements at your workplace, your bargaining rights, and more.⁴

The union's choice of words is important here. Language such as "directly linked to politics" establishes a clear connection between decision-making processes and workers'

⁴ <https://www.atu.org/action/atu-cope>. Last accessed February 21, 2019.

daily lives. Notably, this quote also speaks to the “federalization” of policy that Miller (2008) describes and how important it is for individuals, especially lower-income workers, to have representation at *all levels* of government. The union underscores the federalized system of policymaking by emphasizing that decisions at “federal, state, and local” levels affect workers’ lives. This union also describes the role of the union in assisting to distill policy information for their members noting that the union, “monitors legislation impacting transit, school bus and intercity bus transportation at the federal and state levels.”⁵

This emphasis on the layers of federalism and the union as a conduit of information about politics comes out again in a quote from a letter carriers’ union. The union describes their smaller “branches” (similar to locals) as key central institutions for members to connect with their political system noting, “branches are where NALC members get information about both local and national issues, voice their opinions at meetings and coordinate union activities, from advocacy efforts to charitable and social events.”⁶

This language evokes the point discussed above: unions provide both an *inlet* where workers “voice their opinions” as well as an outlet through which members can connect to the various levels of policy activity and get, “information about both local and national issues.”⁷

⁵ <https://www.atu.org/action/atu-cope>. Last accessed February 21, 2019.

⁶ <https://www.nalc.org/union-administration/nalc-branches>. Last accessed February 22, 2019

⁷ <https://www.nalc.org/union-administration/nalc-branches>. Last accessed February 22, 2019.

Other unions emphasize the vital role that rank-and-file members play in making the union what it is. A union that represents entertainment industry workers casts this involvement as part of a larger process of member engagement and organizing, both in the union and in politics stating that the union, “has maintained and enhanced its position in the vanguard of the entertainment industry through effective rank and file empowerment, political engagement, and our dedication to grass roots organizing.”⁸ (<https://www.iatse.net/about-iatse>).

Many unions organize get-out-the-vote campaigns before elections, but unions also seek to maintain political engagement *beyond* elections. One union seeks to build sustained political engagement with a checklist for members that asks members questions such as “How might you utilize the opportunities for education (stewards’ training, member meetings, etc.) to impress upon others the importance of ‘keeping it going’ [after the election]?” and “How will you recognize and appreciate political volunteers/leaders?”

In addition, this same union emphasizes the way that political campaigns can serve as a springboard for members to become involved with other groups and issue campaigns as well as the role the union can play to sustain that issue campaign with a question on the checklist that asks, “How can members of our union who, through the course of the political campaign, became interested in a particular community group and/or issue stay involved with their work? How might ‘their’ work become (more clearly) ‘our’ work?”⁹

⁸ <https://www.iatse.net/about-iatse>. Last Accessed February 18, 2019.

⁹ <http://www.uncw.org/>. Last accessed January 8, 2019.

Conclusion

Scholars have long pointed to religious and workplace institutions as keys to a more democratic and equitable political system. These institutions provide information and facilitate political engagement among those lower-income individuals that counterbalance the well-known bias in American politics toward richer individuals. When lower-income individuals are more engaged, informed, and participatory, their interests are better represented in policy outcomes.

In this chapter, I argue that labor unions—a particular form of workplace institution—are singular institutions that facilitate political engagement among lower-income individuals. Whereas aggregate religious affiliation in the U.S. is largely structured by demographic changes, and therefore beyond the reach of policy, union membership is structured by two main factors that are subject to policy. This renders union affiliation a consequence of the political outcomes and implicated by decision-making processes at each level of government.

Additionally, this chapter presented data collected from a content analysis of nearly three dozen unions. The results indicate that unions' websites routinely included information about policies, legislation, elected officials, and to a slightly lesser extent, opportunities for political action. Unions also seek to connect individuals with the political system, convey the importance of policy outcomes for their members and their well-being, transmit information about policies and elected officials, and cast the union as a mechanism of political engagement that can help ensure workers' views are represented in the policy process.

Chapter 3

Unions and Political Knowledge

Introduction

An informed electorate is a cornerstone of a robust democratic system. Knowledge about how the political process works, which policies are under consideration and which are not, and where policymakers stand on a given issue all indicate engagement with the political system, enable individuals to seek political change, and ensure that political elites are held accountable for their actions.

This chapter examines whether and to what extent unions are associated with higher levels of political knowledge—both general knowledge about political institutions and policymakers as well as particular knowledge about which policies candidates support—for lower-, middle-, and upper-income individuals. The focus on political knowledge—a non-procedural form of political engagement is important as those who are more informed are more likely to be politically engaged and participatory (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), hold more coherent opinions on issues (Goren 1997), exhibit greater alignment between voting behavior and their self-expressed interests (Lau et al. 2008; Lau and Redlawsk 2006), decipher the party that most closely represents their interests (Fowler and Margolis 2014), and prefer economic policies more closely attuned to their socioeconomic location (Fernández-Albertos and Kuo 2015).

Although a well-informed electorate is desirable, the empirical evidence indicates that there are substantial inequalities in the distribution of political information (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). As Phillip Converse remarked, “With information as with wealth, ‘them what has gets,’ and there is no comforting system of progressive taxation to help redress the drift toward glaring inequalities,” (Converse 1990, 373).

This is consequential. If some individuals are able to more effectively follow, monitor, and assess political outcomes, political elites are likely to weigh the preferences of these individuals more heavily as they decide which policies to act on and which to ignore (Jaeger et al. 2017). For instance, lower-income individuals may be more concerned with which candidate supports stronger labor standards while upper-income individuals may be more concerned with which candidate is more likely to vote to eliminate or reduce the estate tax. Even this yields the same vote choice, if informational disparities persist between the lower-income and upper-income individuals, the candidate faces greater constraints to adhere to the preferences of the upper-income individual and, when in office, may prioritize tax cuts and dismiss the importance of labor standards. Indeed, some scholars have pointed to informational inequality as a key factor in the rise of economic inequality in the U.S., “One key factor in the spectacular rise in economic inequality is the informational advantage of the rich”, (Campbell 2010, 230).

While scholars offer a range of individual-level explanations for how and why individuals are politically informed, I build on recent work arguing that institutions can affect the conditions under which individuals exhibit high or low levels of information (Boudreau 2009). The question remains, however, outside of experimental settings: *which* institutions are viable purveyors of information and why? Additionally, given that

access to resources is an important determinant of access to, and therefore possession of, political information, there is reason to suspect that the impact of institutions may be conditional on individuals underlying circumstances.

Drawing on data from three waves of the National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES), this chapter examines how affiliation with workplace institutions known for collecting and disseminating information about politics—in this study, labor unions—affect levels of political knowledge. The findings indicate the labor unions constitute an institution that is capable of increasing individuals' reserve of information about the political world. However, the relationship is conditional on one's underlying circumstances. Unions are associated with higher levels of political knowledge among lower- and middle-income individuals, but have no distinguishable effect among upper-income individuals. The results suggest that unions are important institutions for those at the lower-end of the income distribution, while for upper-income individuals, unions are merely another political node in their lives, indistinguishable from the array of resources available to them.

These findings are an important contribution to our understanding of political knowledge, representation and the disproportionate informational consequences associated with declining rates of unionization. The results indicate that political knowledge is not fixed according to individual characteristics and that labor policy may be a viable path to a more informed and equitable democratic society in the U.S.

Individual-level Explanations of Political Knowledge

How and why individuals are engaged with their political system is at the heart of political science. Normatively, a representative democracy depends on an informed, engaged, and reasonable electorate (Dahl 1971). Empirically, those who are more informed are more likely to be politically engaged and participatory (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), hold more coherent opinions on issues (Goren 1997), exhibit greater alignment between voting behavior and their self-expressed interests (Lau et al. 2008), decipher the party that most closely represents their interests (Fowler and Margolis 2014), and prefer economic policies more closely attuned to their socioeconomic location (Fernández-Albertos and Kuo 2015).

Yet vast disparities persist in levels of political information. The individual-level explanations offered by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) stimulated much subsequent research on when and why informational disparities increase or decrease between individuals from various ascriptive categories.

Gender, for instance, has been central to important work on informational disparities (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Barabas et al. 2014; Dolan 2011; Sanbonmatsu 2003; Verba et al. 1997). Kathleen Dolan finds that the “knowledge gap” between men and women diminishes when a survey includes “gender-relevant” questions such as identifying a female member of Congress or the percentage of women of Congress. Others have called into question the disparities between races and ethnicities, noting that they are a function of socialization and survey design rather than any true disparity (Abrajano 2015).

While this research has offered important insights, research into the disparities between individuals with more or less resources has gone largely unexplored, despite the

fact that these disparities—those between income groups—persist regardless of one’s age, gender, race, or ethnicity.

Given the political causes and consequences of rising income inequality in the U.S., the extent to which lower-income and upper-income individuals are aware of the actions of policymakers and the policies they support or oppose is consequential. Indeed, the close association between income and information renders this question increasingly urgent as Robert Erikson summarizes succinctly, “Information is correlated with income, reinforcing the class bias in representation...An improvement in political information among the poorer voters could change election outcomes and change policy,” (2015, 23).

Upper-income individuals have a range of options to obtain political information including high levels of education, immersion in politically-inclined social networks, and the resources and skills to consume large amounts of political news. As Delli Carpini and Keeter explain, “less affluent citizens are less knowledgeable largely because income is related to holding a politically impinged job and being more formally educated, and because these structural conditions increase the likelihood that one will have the opportunity, ability, and motivation to learn about politics.” Yet, given the importance of political information, the question remains: where might the opportunity to obtain political information come from for those at the lower end of the income distribution?

Institutions and Political Knowledge

Institutions have long been seen as important conduits linking individuals to the political system (Verba et al. 1995). Institutions can provide information, subsidize efforts to obtain information, or affect the motivations to acquire a given set of information. Aside

from individual-level explanations, in this vein, scholars increasingly point to contextual explanations of political knowledge.

Central to this strand of research is an understanding of individuals' information acquisition as one that is embedded in the reality of social context. In this sense, research has considered the extent to which the media environment—a proxy for the availability of information—affects individuals' levels of political information (Jerit et al. 2006; Hayes and Lawless 2015; Mondak 1995). Hayes and Lawless (2015) explored how opportunity and context affect levels of information and engagement. In their work, they find that in areas where local newspaper coverage has diminished, or newspapers have closed, individuals are less informed and less engaged. Their work offers useful insight into the ways that circumstantial factors can shape levels of knowledge and engagement beyond individual characteristics, yet the emphasis on media institutions is a common theme, consistent with much past work.

Media consumption is, of course, higher among upper-income individuals, offering little leverage as sources of political information for lower-income individuals. However, media is but one institution that may affect one's knowledge of the political system. As Bourdeau puts it, “regardless of citizens' factual knowledge about politics, there are institutions embedded in our political system that may help citizens to assess the veracity of political actors' statements and to learn from them,” (2009, 288). Bourdeau (2009) found that institutions increase individuals' levels of political information when the source of information is penalized for lying, when the speaker is verified by a third party, or perhaps most importantly, “shares common interests with them,” (2009). The

looming question then becomes: which institutions might share common interests with lower-income individuals?

Unions and a Theory of Conditional Institutional Salience

Unions—which strengthen worker leverage and push for workplace democracy—have long been seen as one of the most important institutions that undergirds the strength of a democratic system and its citizenry (Dahl 1985; Pateman 1970). Labor unions push for better working conditions and higher wages for members. However, they also have deep roots in the political infrastructure of national, state, and often local politics that uniquely positions them to provide a connection between lower-income individuals and their political system.

First, unions are known to provide political information and opportunities for political experiences to their members (Verba et al. 1995). Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996), in their seminal work on political information, discussed, but did not develop or test, the possibility that labor unions may affect levels of political information (111-3).

Aside from general political information, research has found that unions inform workers of their rights to utilize policies such as family leave (Kramer 2008). Other, more recent research looks beyond the workplace and considers the social and political role that unions play and how they interact with members in politically consequential ways. Kim and Margalit (2017) draw on unique surveys with union members to document how shifts in union leaders' stances on trade policy leads to changes in the political preferences of members. The authors conclude that, "it appears that unions are not merely a 'voice' of workers' preferences, but also an effective institution that is able to

systematically shape and cohere that voice toward a given policy objective,” (2017, 14).

The political information unions provide is not solely aimed at informing individuals about candidates and issues, but also interpretation of the political process, proposals, and issues and distilling that information.

Second, Bourdeau (2009) notes that a credible institutional source of information is one that shares the concerns and interests of the individual receiving the information. In this sense, individuals see the institution as one which is trustworthy and reliable. Empirical research suggests unions are a credible source of information for lower-income individuals.

As discussed in Chapter 1, unions are one of few other institutions in U.S. politics that substantively represents lower-income individuals in policy outcomes (Baumgartner et al. 2009, 255-6; Schlozman et al. 2012, 442)¹⁰. Baumgartner et al. undertook a large-scale systematic analysis of policy change at the federal level and concluded, “Labor [unions have] traditionally served as an impassioned voice on behalf of low-income Americans and not just for those who formally belong to unions,” while other “liberal” groups in Washington D.C., “display little interest in the problems of low-income Americans,” (Baumgartner et al. 2009, 255-6). Others report in highly detailed analysis of interest groups that, “unless non-professional, nonmanagerial workers are union members, their economic interests receive very little representation in any arena of

¹⁰ Other organizations and institutions such as worker centers (Fine 2006) and similar “alt-labor” organizations organize and advocate for lower-income workers, but differ from unions in that unions have a direct connection to and presence in the workplace and are not voluntary as other groups are.

organized interest activity. [If they're not members of unions], [t]he interests of unskilled workers receive none at all," (Schlozman et al. 2012, 442).

Recent research has also found that labor unions appear to be more attuned to the public's preferences and effectively communicate this information to legislative aides. As Hertel-Fernandez et al. note, "Staffers representing districts and states with stronger unions were more accurate in their predictions of constituent preferences," in the five issue areas they analyzed (2019, 13).

Lastly, unions extend across the income distribution ranging from lower-income workers such as food servers and home health aides, to nurses and teachers in middle income brackets, and up to engineers and writers at the upper end of the income scale. Labor unions, therefore, represent a unique institution capable of reaching those American households with fewest resources. Empirically, this offers substantial variability in assessing the impact of the union on different individuals from different economic backgrounds.

Hypotheses

The expectation in this study is that unions are associated with greater levels of political information among individuals who are affiliated with them. However, a key component of the theory offered is that this impact is conditional on other resources available to individuals. As access to resources increases, the impact of the union should be submerged among an array of other sources of political information—such as high levels of formal education, extensive media consumption, and politicized social networks—that accompany access to greater levels of resources.

Drawing on research focused on the institutional and contextual factors that may affect individual-level political information, given that unions have organizational capacity that extend across the U.S. federal system and regularly provide information to members, unions may increase levels of political information among those affiliated with it:

H1: Union affiliation is associated with higher levels of political knowledge, regardless of income.

The statistical expectation for H1 is such that the coefficient for union affiliation is positive while the interaction between union and income is not significant. This indicates that unions have positive effects on information *that do not depend on one's resources*.

However, given the above discussion, the effect of unions may be *conditional* on one's underlying circumstances. As access to resources increases, so too does the number of additional sources in an individuals' life such as higher levels of education, more political social networks, and the skills and resources to obtain political information. Lower-income individuals may have few options aside from the union in this regard. Therefore, the conditional institutional salience hypothesis is as follows:

H2: The association between unions and political information is *conditional* on underlying access to resources. The positive effect of unions should be largest for lower-income individuals and diminish as access to resources increases.

The empirical expectation for H2 is a positive coefficient for union affiliation and a *negative* coefficient for the union and income interaction term, indicating that the effect of the union is conditional on one's income and that the positive union effects are *larger at lower levels of income*.

Finally, a competing hypothesis to the conditional institutional salience for lower-income individuals may be that given that upper-income individuals have access to a range of institutions and resources that are known to yield higher levels of political information and engagement, the union may merely augment such advantages. Upper-income individuals who are affiliated with a union may be in a better position to utilize its benefits and gain more from such an affiliation than others. This yields a final hypothesis such that the effects of union affiliation are positive and most substantial at higher ends of the income distribution.

H3: Union affiliation is associated with higher levels political knowledge is *conditional* on underlying access to resources and the positive effect of unions should be largest for upper-income individuals.

If H3 is supported, the coefficient for union affiliation should be *positive* and the interaction term between union affiliation and income also *positive*. This would indicate larger positive effects for those at the higher end of income.

Data

To assess whether affiliation with a union affects individuals' levels of political information, this study draws on three waves of data from the National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) conducted in 2000, 2004, and 2008. The individual-level data from the three waves are standardized and merged with contextual level data in order to estimate fixed effects controls where appropriate. Each wave contains more than 50,000 respondents which allows for reliable estimates of subgroups such as lower-income union households.

In addition to the NAES data, data from the American National Election Study (ANES) is used to examine political knowledge. The data run from 1976 to 2016 and are pooled to obtain large enough samples to examine subgroups such as lower-income union members.

Measuring Political Knowledge

This study operationalizes political knowledge in two ways. In line with the literature on political information, the measures employed here assess (1) general political knowledge; and (2) knowledge of candidate positions on policy-specific information. These are largely seen as distinct types of political knowledge (Gilens 2001).

General political knowledge refers to information about national political institutions and processes. It is, therefore, widely interpreted as a reliable proxy for political engagement (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1993, 1996). For instance, identifying the party in control of Congress or the sitting vice president signals engagement that likely extends to other areas of politics.

On the other hand, general political knowledge is distinct from specific policy-related knowledge for two reasons. First, this information may be of little practical use or normative importance to individuals. For instance, one may be able to identify the sitting vice president, but may not be able to identify the candidate that supports a policy that would affect one's well-being. The latter is arguably a more consequential piece of information to possess about politics.

Second, scholars have raised questions about the relevance of certain types of political information to different subgroups of individuals. Most notably, scholars working in the area of gender and politics have called into question the supposed knowledge gap between men and women by questioning the relevance of the items used to measure political knowledge (Dolan 2011; Sanbonmatsu 2003).

This study, therefore, examines both general political knowledge as well as policy-specific political knowledge.

General Political Knowledge Measures

The primary measures of general political knowledge follow the scale outlined in Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993). This scale is a combination of five survey items related to political processes and institutions as well as ideological placement of major parties or elites.

In the NAES data, the two latter waves—2004 and 2008—provide a range of items that were asked to all or nearly all of the sample and conform closely to the scale recommended by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993). I constructed the 2004 scale using four institutional items and two ideological placement questions. The four institutional items

asked respondents to identify the vice president, the role of the Supreme Court, the majority required to override a veto, and which party controls the House of Representatives. If the respondent offered the correct answer, the variable is coded 1, otherwise it is coded 0.

Ideological placement items are constructed from two questions that ask respondents to place George W. Bush and John Kerry on a five-point ideological scale from very conservative to very liberal. Two dichotomous variables are constructed from these questions that are coded 1 for a “correct” answer—if Bush is described as either conservative, very conservative, or moderate whereas a “correct” answer for Kerry is one in which he is described as liberal, very liberal, or moderate. Otherwise, the variable is coded 0.

If respondents answered that they did not know the answer, they are coded as offering an incorrect answer (Luskin and Bullock 2011). There are two different institutional questions in the 2008 version and the ideological placement questions ask about Barack Obama and John McCain. Otherwise, the 2008 scale mirrors the 2004 scale. I construct the by taking the sum of correct answers and dividing it by six, resulting in a scale that ranges from 0 to 1.

The scales are reliable and consistent. The Cronbach’s alpha for each scale is slightly above .6. Additionally, the scales are assessed by employing item response theory to assess the extent to which each question effectively discriminates between informed and uninformed individuals on the latent scale of political knowledge.

Income is positively associated with political knowledge. With 1 a being the highest score and 0 the lowest, the overall mean for the 2004 is .729 (SD = .241) and for

2008 is .720 (SD = .247). The mean scores on the 2004 scale for lower-, middle-, and upper-income individuals are .626 (SD = .256), .745 (SD = .226), and .822 (SD = .194), respectively. The mean levels of political knowledge in the 2008 data are .595 (SD = .263), .719 (SD = .237), .810 (SD = .200).

The ANES data is used to examine the likelihood that the respondent correctly identified the party that controls the House of Representatives. This question was asked routinely from 1976 through 2016 and therefore offers a consistent indicator that can be examined across election years. The measure takes the value of 1 if the respondent correctly identified the party that controls the house, and 0 otherwise. The analysis is estimated with logistic regression.

Measuring Policy-Specific Information

Given the criticisms of the general knowledge scales, this study employs two additional measures to assess political information that is both policy-specific and germane to the groups in the study.

The two measures come from the 2004 wave of the NAES and asked respondents to identify (1) the candidate who supports increasing the minimum wage; and (2) the candidate who favors making union organizing easier. Respondents were offered four answers: Bush, Kerry, Both, or Neither. They could also say they did not know or refuse the question. If the respondent answered Kerry—the correct answer to both questions—the variables are coded 1. Otherwise, the variable is coded as 0. Those who refused the question are coded as missing and excluded from the analysis.

Among all respondents in 2004, 66% correctly identified Kerry as the candidate who supported raising the minimum wage and 61% correctly identified Kerry as the candidate who supported making union organizing easier. Within income groups on the minimum wage, 60%, 66%, and 72% of lower-, middle-, and upper-income respondents, respectively, correctly identified Kerry. On the union organizing question, 51%, 63%, and 71% of lower-, middle-, and upper-income respondents answered the question correctly.

Independent Variables

The theory of conditional institutional salience above is predicated on two individual attributes: access to resources and affiliation with a union. To test how these factors affect individual levels of political information, two factors are important: household income and household union affiliation.

Household income is measured as pre-tax household income and collapses the NAES' original nine-point scale into a three-point variable that is centered so that the median is 0, while lower-income households are coded -1 and upper-income households are coded 1.¹¹ Lower-income households include those with household incomes that fall below \$35,000. Middle-income households are those that fall between \$35,000 and \$75,000, while upper-income households are those that earn greater than \$75,000 a year. Union affiliation is measured as a dichotomous variable coded 1 if the respondent stated that they come from a union household—either they are a union member or they live with

¹¹ Coding income differently (e.g. five-point scale or leaving income in the original nine-point scale) yields substantively similar results.

a spouse who is a union member—and 0 if they have no union affiliation. These respondents indicated that they or their spouse is a member of a union.

Within the 2004 sample, 15% of the respondents are affiliated with a union (are members or live with a member). After recoding the income variable on a three-point scale, 33% of the respondents are lower-income, while 37% and 27% are middle- and upper-income, respectively. In the 2008 sample, 14% of the respondents are affiliated with a union while 26%, 34%, and 39% come from lower-, middle-, and upper-income households, respectively.

Controls

There are a range of other factors that may also be expected to affect levels of political knowledge. First, one of the most important factors affecting one's level of political knowledge is educational attainment (Delli and Carpini and Keeter 1996; Galston 2001). Those with higher levels of education are not only more likely to learn objective facts about the political system but also acquire skills to pursue additional information. Therefore, education, measured on a nine-point scale from low to high, is included as a control variable. It should be noted that including a control for education puts the theory offered above to a stringent test as education is routinely seen as the most important determinant of political knowledge. Education is measured on a nine-point scale from 1 to 9 with a mean of 5.39 in 2004 and 5.56 in 2008.

Additionally, a number of other demographic characteristics have been identified as important factors that affect measured levels of political information (Barabas et al.

2014). These include age, gender, race, and ethnicity. Accordingly, control variables are included for each of these. In the 2004 sample, the mean age is 48 years old. The sample consists of 55% females and 45% males. Among respondents, 8% identify as black and 8% as Latino. In the 2008 sample, the mean age is 53, the gender breakdown is 57% female and 43% male, and of the respondents 8% identify as black and 7% as Latino.

One may encounter political information in other domains as well, such as affiliation with a religious institution (Verba et al. 1995; Smith 2017), or from a spouse or partner, while those who are unemployed may be less political engaged (Schlozman and Verba 1979). Controls are therefore included for religious attendance, marital status, and unemployed status.

Graduate students in the U.S. typically receive a relatively low stipend while studying and may be considered to have low household income. To ensure that the results for lower-income individuals are not driven by these highly educated lower-income individuals, a dichotomous control is included to that takes the values of 1 if the respondent is a student, and 0 otherwise.

Political inclinations may affect which information one seeks out and retains (Jerit and Barabas 2012). To account for this, controls are included for political ideology—a five-point scale from very conservative to very liberal—as well as binary variables for self-identified strong partisanship. The correct answer to both policy-specific questions is John Kerry, the Democratic candidate in 2004. Therefore, to account for the likelihood that Democratic partisans are more informed about their party's candidate, the models exclude controls for strong partisanship (of either party) and include a binary control variable that simply indicates whether the respondent identifies as a Democrat.

Lastly, the ANES analysis is pooled across election years from 1976 to 2016. To ensure the results are not affected by any given election year, a set of dummy variables are included to account for the election years included in the pooled data.

Method

Models with the general political knowledge scale are estimated with linear regression. The models are estimated both as multilevel models with fixed effects as well as simple linear regression models. The analyses of the policy-specific information are estimated with logistic regression models—both with fixed effects and without—given the dichotomous nature of the outcome variables.

Before proceeding to the results, a brief summary of the expectations is offered. If unions have no measurable effect on individuals' levels of political information, the coefficient for union household should not be significant. If unions are associated with higher levels of political information for all individuals affiliated with them—regardless of one's access to resources—the coefficient for union household should be positive and significant while the interaction term for union household and household income should not be significant. The conditional institutional salience theory, however, predicts that the effects of union affiliation should be conditional on one's resources. If this theory is supported—that lower-income individuals benefit the most from union affiliation—the interaction term between union affiliation and household income should be significant and negative.

Table 3.1 Unions and General Political Knowledge

	Model 1: NAES 2004	Model 2: NAES 2008	Model 3: ANES 1976-2016
Union Affiliation X Income	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.17* (0.07)
Union Affiliation	0.01** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	-0.03 (0.03)
Income	0.04*** (0.00)	0.05*** (0.00)	0.40*** (0.03)
Education	0.04*** (0.00)	0.04*** (0.00)	0.63*** (0.02)
Age	0.00*** (0.00)	0.00*** (0.00)	0.42*** (0.02)
Female	-0.08*** (0.00)	-0.08*** (0.00)	-0.67*** (0.03)
Married	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)	0.11*** (0.03)
Black	-0.09*** (0.01)	-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.36*** (0.04)
Latino	-0.10*** (0.01)	-0.08*** (0.01)	-0.31*** (0.05)
Religious Attendance	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00*** (0.00)	-0.01 (0.01)
Student	0.05*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.27*** (0.07)
Unemployed	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.03** (0.01)	0.10 (0.06)
Ideology	0.01*** (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)	-0.01 (0.01)
Strong Republican	0.06*** (0.00)	0.05*** (0.00)	0.52*** (0.04)
Strong Democrat	0.01 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.45*** (0.04)
Intercept	0.44*** (0.01)	0.45*** (0.01)	-1.27*** (0.11)
R ²	0.29	0.29	
Adj. R ²	0.29	0.29	
Num. obs.	16754	23099	31677
RMSE	0.20	0.20	
AIC			36776.08
BIC			37052.07
Log Likelihood			-18355.04
Deviance			36486.67

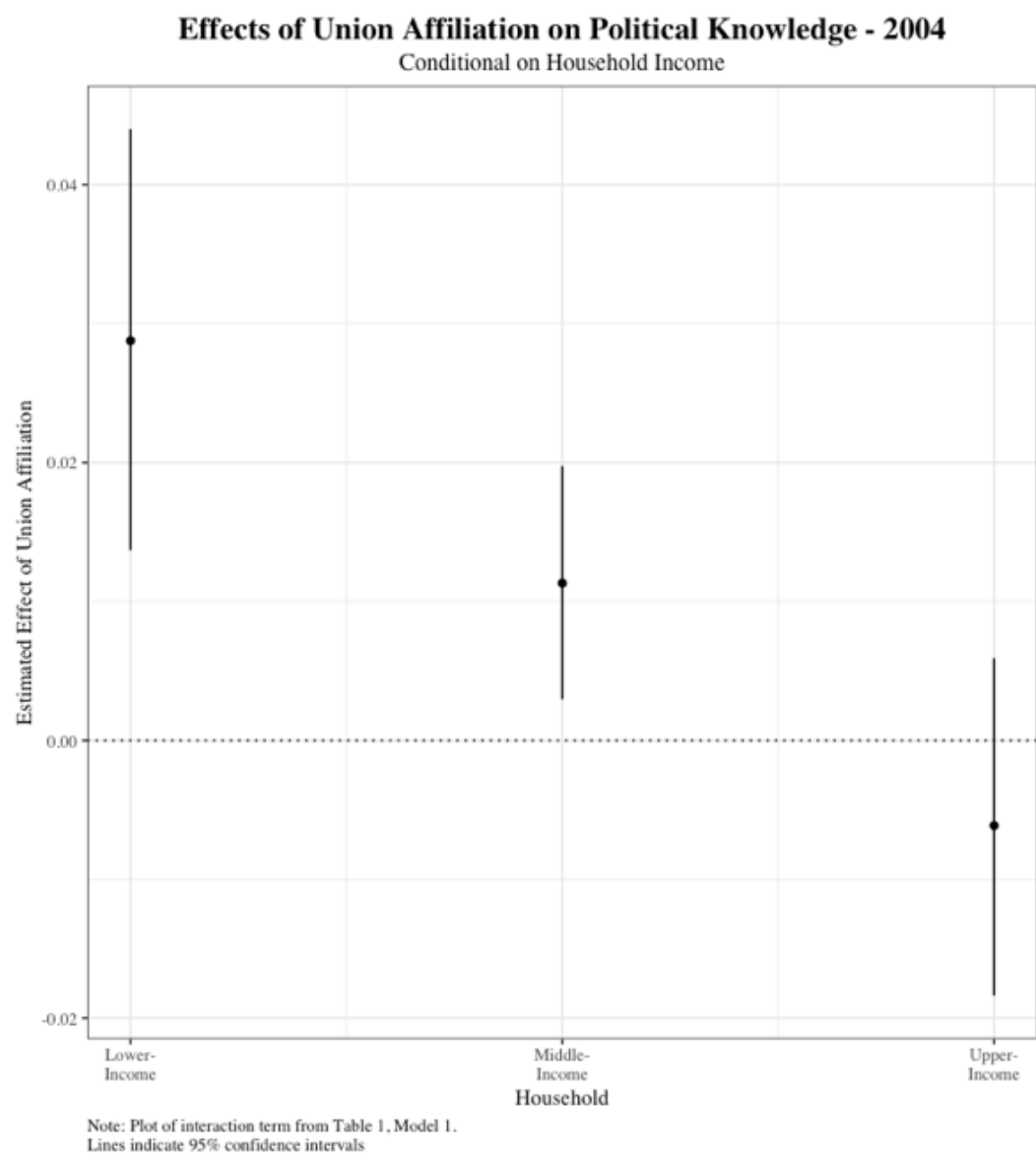
$p < 0.001$, $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$. Models 1 and 2 are OLS regression coefficients. Model 3 are logistic regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 1 displays the results of the analyses. The two columns contain the results for models using the general political knowledge scales from the 2004 and 2008 waves of NAES and the pooled ANES data. The first two columns present the analysis using linear regression while model 3 displays the results from the logistic regression model.¹²

Across both waves of NAES data, the coefficient for union affiliation is positive and significant ($p < .01$ in 2004; $p < .001$ in 2008). Consistent with H2—the conditional institutional salience hypothesis—the interaction terms in all three models are negative and significant ($p < .01$ in NAES 2004; $p < .001$ in NAES 2008; $p < .05$ in ANES). This indicates that the positive effect of union affiliation is conditional on income and that the positive effects of union affiliation are largest for those who come from lower-income households.

The interaction term offers insight into the conditional relationship, but for a more complete interpretation, it is necessary to assess the conditional effect of union affiliation at each level of income. To this end, the estimated effect of union affiliation at different levels of household income is plotted along with 95% confidence intervals for 2004 and 2008. Given that the results are largely similar for the linear regression and ordered logistic regression, the linear models are used to plot the interaction terms.

¹² Given that the normality of the scales may be a concern, additional models employ ordered logistic regression models. The results are substantively unchanged. Additionally, in the interest of space, the year dummy variables in the ANES model are not shown.

**Figure 3.1**

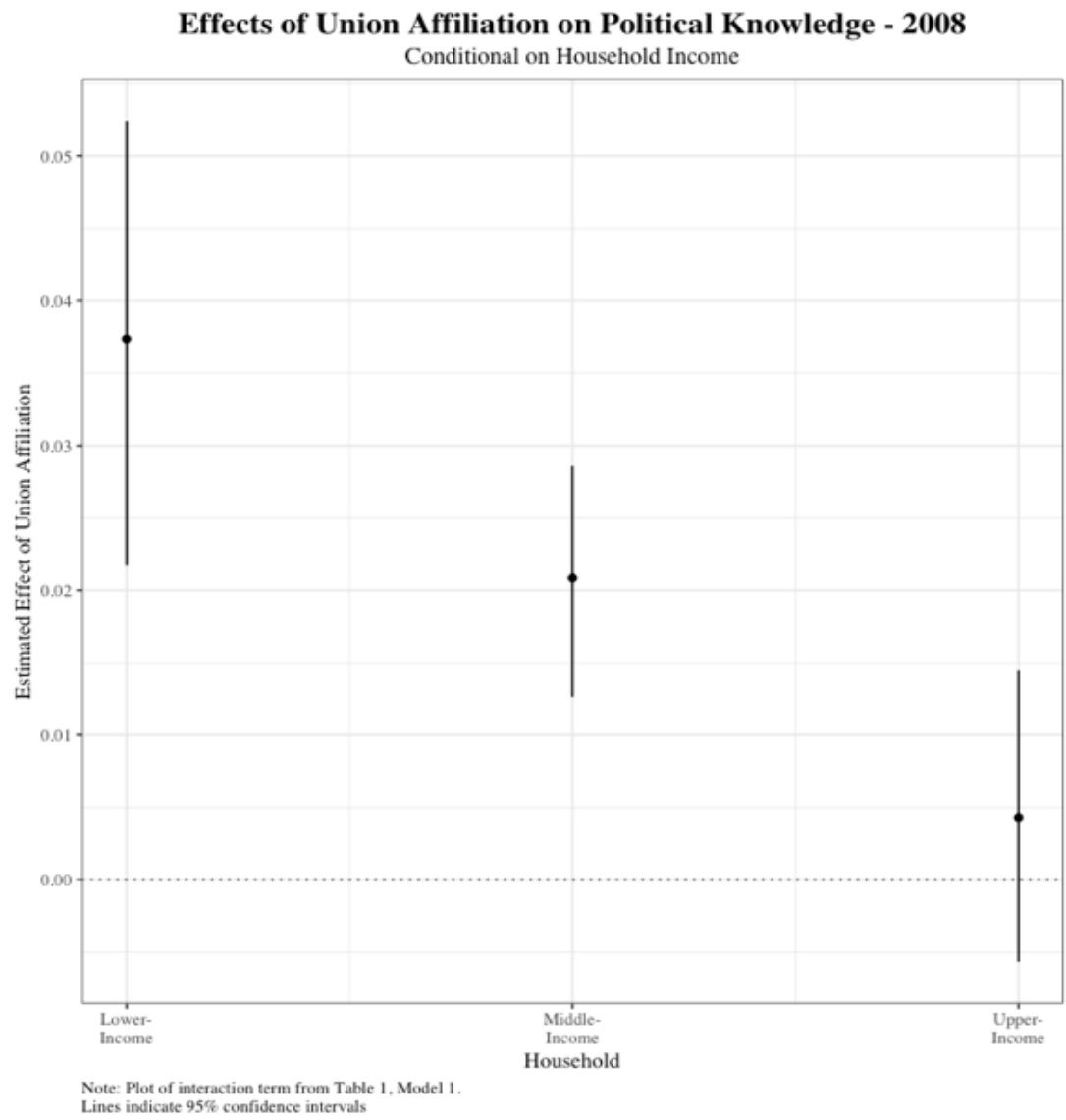


Figure 3.2

As seen in the plots in Figures 3.1 and 3.2, the results provide empirical support for the conditional hypothesis outlined above. Those who come from lower-income and middle-income households and associated with unions exhibit significant increases in political information. For those who come from upper-income households, the effect of being affiliated with a union is indistinguishable from zero as seen by the confidence intervals

that cross zero—represented by the dotted horizontal line—for upper-income individuals. The results indicate that unions are associated with higher levels of political information for lower- and middle-income individuals, but the impact for upper-income individuals—those who have a range of other resources available to them—is indistinguishable from zero.

Results: Policy-specific information

The second set of analyses assesses the relationship between union affiliation, income, and correct political information about candidate stances on specific policies.

Specifically, the results displayed in table 3.2 depict logistic regression models estimating the likelihood of correctly identifying the candidate that supports increasing the minimum wage and changing labor policy to make union organizing easier.

Table 3.2: Unions and Policy-Specific Knowledge

	Model 1: Know Candidate in Favor of Raising Min. Wage	Model 2: Know Candidate in Favor of Easing Unionization
Union Affiliation X Income	-0.32* (0.13)	-0.09 (0.07)
Union Affiliation	0.11 (0.10)	0.42*** (0.05)
Income	0.14* (0.06)	0.20*** (0.03)
Education	0.15*** (0.02)	0.16*** (0.01)
Age	0.01*** (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)
Female	-0.54*** (0.07)	-0.46*** (0.04)
Black	0.15 (0.08)	0.01 (0.04)
Latino	0.66*** (0.15)	0.05 (0.07)
Married	0.03 (0.16)	-0.27*** (0.08)
Religious Attendance	-0.08** (0.03)	0.00 (0.01)
Unemployed	-0.18 (0.28)	-0.05 (0.15)
Student	0.03 (0.25)	0.20 (0.11)
Democrat ID	0.68*** (0.09)	0.25*** (0.04)
Ideology	0.06 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.02)
Intercept	-0.68** (0.21)	-0.30** (0.11)
AIC	4763.33	17382.90
BIC	4857.76	17496.02
Log Likelihood	-2366.67	-8676.45
Deviance	4733.33	17352.90
Num. obs.	4003	13932

$p < 0.001$, $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$

For the minimum wage model in table 3.2, the coefficient for union affiliation is not significant, while the interaction between union and income is significant ($p < .05$). Although this may seem counterintuitive, the results demonstrate the importance of assessing interaction terms at each level of the conditioning variable. The coefficient for union indicates the effect of union affiliation when the other variable—income—takes the value of 0 (Brambor et al. 2006, 72). Given that income is coded as a three-point variable ranging from -1 to 1, the value of 0 is meaningful as it represents median, or middle-income, households and represents the effect of union affiliation for individuals who come from middle-income households. Therefore, for middle-income individuals, affiliation with a union has no effect on the likelihood of correctly identifying which candidate supports raising the minimum wage. However, the significant and negative interaction term indicates there is an effect at the lower-income of the income distribution. Interestingly, Latinos are significantly more likely to correctly identify the candidate who favors raising the minimum wage while for blacks, there is no significant difference.

To more clearly assess the interaction term—the effect of union affiliation at different levels of income—contained in the minimum wage model, the figure below depicts estimated effect of union affiliation at each level of income along with 95% confidence intervals. As Figure 3.3 illustrates, the conditional institutional salience hypothesis receives support. The confidence intervals for middle- and upper-income individuals cross zero, indicating the effect of union affiliation is negligible. However, lower-income individuals who are affiliated with a union are significantly more likely to

correctly identify the candidate who supports increasing the minimum wage—a policy that would disproportionately affect lower-income workers.

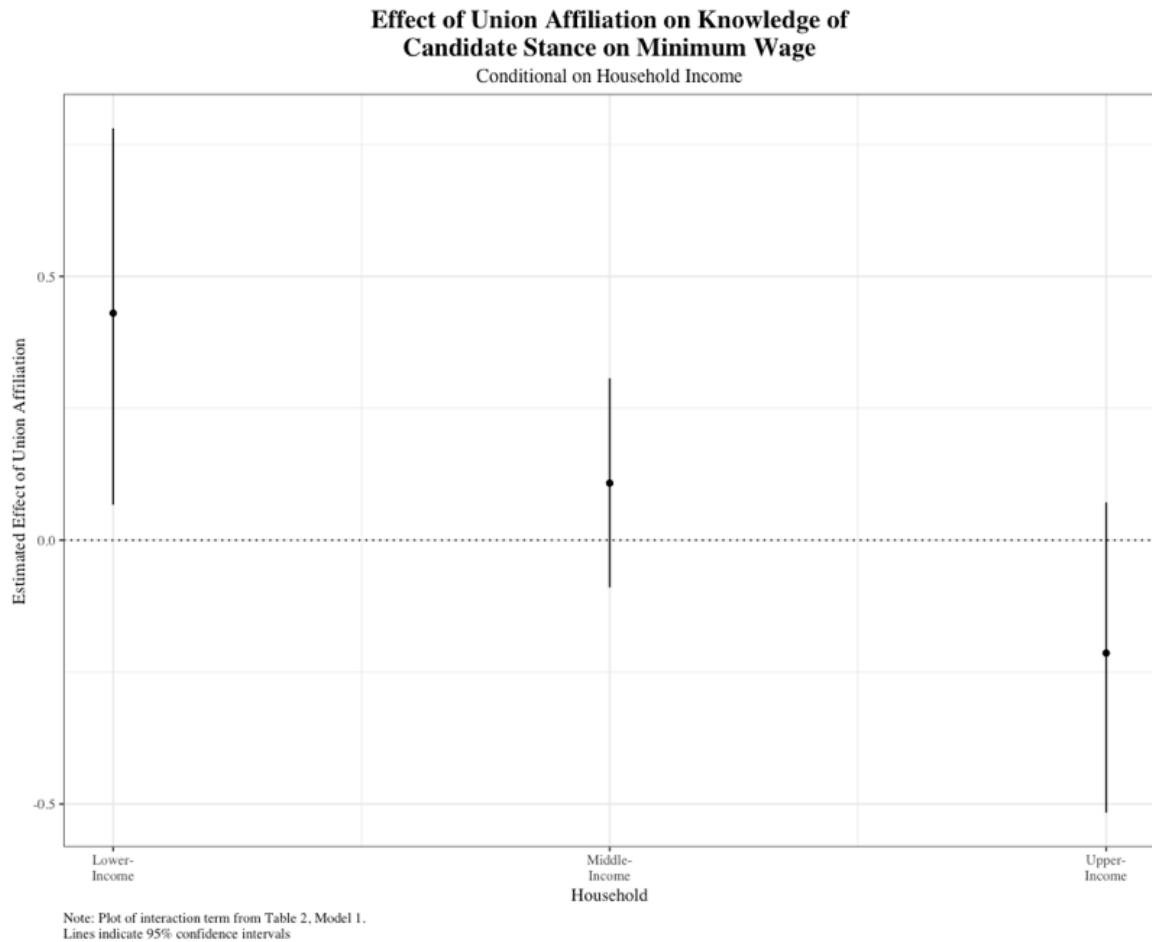


Figure 3.3

Turning to the second model—which predicts the likelihood of correctly identifying the candidate who supports labor policy that would make union organizing easier—the results are different. The coefficient for union affiliation is large, positive, and significant ($p < .001$), but the interaction term is not significant. This suggests that the effect of union affiliation is positive—unions are associated with higher levels of information and

this effect is not dependent on one's access to resources. However, further exploration reveals some caveats.

Given that the interaction term is not significant, there is no reason to plot the conditional estimates of union affiliation at different levels of income. However, it is possible—and possibly enlightening—to compare the probability of correctly answering the question for those affiliated with a union and those without such an affiliation, at different levels of income. In this sense, we can discern if the union “effect” is uniform across all income levels or differs at different levels. Figure 3.4 plots the predicted probabilities for union and non-union individuals at each level of income, along with 95% confidence intervals, while holding constant other variables at their median values.

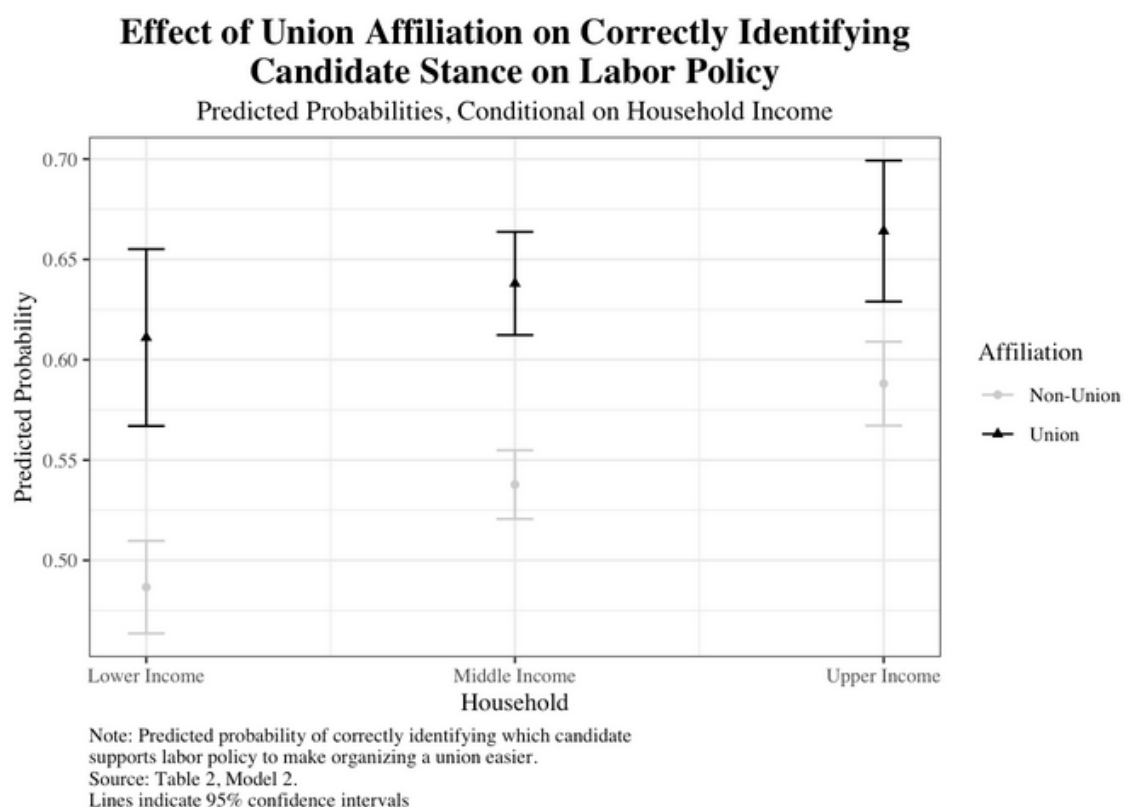


Figure 3.4

As expected, there is no interaction. Instead, those affiliated with a union are significantly more likely to offer the correct answer at each level of income. However, an important caveat that is evident in the plot is that the difference between union and non-union individuals is largest at lower levels of income and narrows as income increases. The probability that a lower-income individual who is affiliated with union correctly identifies the candidate who supports making unionization easier is 61% (CI 57%, 66%). For a non-union lower-income individual, the probability is 47% (CI 46%, 51%), a difference of 14 percentage points. The difference for union and non-union middle-income individuals is 10 percentage points while the difference for upper-income individuals is seven percentage points. In part, this partially comports with the findings above. In this case, although unions are associated with higher levels of information for individuals across the income distribution, the effect is largest for those with lowest level of resources.

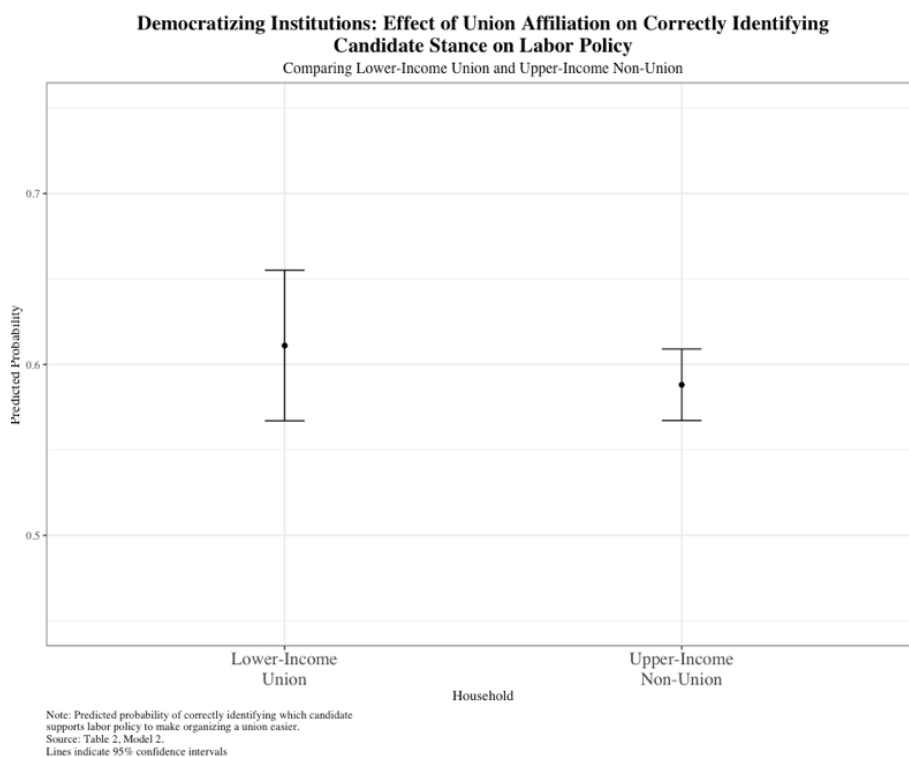


Figure 3.5

In terms of the informational disparities, the results also offer compelling insight that speaks to other work on the importance of issue-specific information for different individuals. In order to emphasize the findings, Figure 3.5 subsets the results from Figure 3.4 by plotting only the results for a lower-income union-affiliated individual and an upper-income non-union individual.

As seen in Figure 3.5, the predicted probability that a union-affiliated lower-income individual correctly identifies the candidate in favor of labor policy reform is *indistinguishable* from the probability that an upper-income non-union individual correctly answers the question. The estimate is higher for lower-income individuals, but the confidence intervals between the two estimates overlap, indicating the true difference between the estimates cannot be identified. While we cannot rule out the importance of

the policy domain (lower-income union individuals may be more concerned with the candidate who will expand labor policy), given these results, those interested in addressing the informational disparities across the income distribution may want to give labor unions a closer look.

Discussion

A politically engaged and informed electorate is an electorate that can more effectively monitor the actions of political elites and demand accountability for policy decisions. Empirical research has documented that democracy is strengthened when the electorate is engaged and informed (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Goren 1997; Lau et al. 2008; Fowler and Margolis 2014; Fernández-Albertos and Kuo 2015).

While the benefits of a more informed electorate are clear, the path to achieve this has largely focused on individual-level explanations. This chapter has offered an alternative to individual-level explanations: workplace institutions. The results in this chapter indicate that labor unions—institutions with substantial connections to politics and organizational capacity to transmit this information to members and their families—are associated with higher levels of political knowledge among those individuals affiliated with unions.

The augmented levels of political knowledge that labor unions appear to provide are not equally distributed. Lower-income individuals benefit the most from union affiliation. In three of the four measures analyzed in this chapter—two general political knowledge scales and two measures of correctly identifying candidate policy stances—the impact of union affiliation was conditional on one's underlying access to resources.

Lower-income individuals—lacking the resources, connections, skills, and networks of their richer counterparts—gain the most from union affiliation. Middle-income individuals also benefit but to a lesser degree. For upper-income individuals, labor unions have no discernible effect on three of the four measures in this chapter.

The fourth measure analyzed in this chapter—knowledge of a candidate’s stance on labor policy—is not conditional on household income. In this case, those affiliated with unions are significantly more informed than their non-union counterparts at all levels of income. However, the difference is largest between lower-income union and non-union households, echoing the finding that unions are more impactful for lower-income individuals. Remarkably, by some measures labor unions democratize the distribution of political information to such an extent that a lower-income individual affiliated with a union is just as likely to correctly identify the candidate’s stance as an upper-income individual who lacks a union affiliation.

Relatedly, the measures in this chapter drew on long standing research in political science—employing multi-item political knowledge scales as well as policy-specific knowledge that is likely to be relevant to individuals’ socioeconomic position—to assess the role of unions. However, additional research should build on the latter by exploring other domains of information including objective information about laws and policies that are more likely to implicate lower-income individuals than their richer counterparts.

Particularly important in this regard is the set of labor laws and standards lower-income individuals are likely to encounter at the workplace. For instance, in a novel survey of low-wage workers, Bernhardt et al. found that workers who could correctly identify the minimum wage were significantly less likely to experience labor law

violations and wage theft (2013, 822-3). The extent to which institutions provide other labor policy information—such as laws related to employer retaliation, workplace health and safety, and paid leave policies—is an important path to pursue and one that has substantial social and political consequences.

Chapter 4

Expanding the Scope: Union and Political Engagement

Introduction

Political knowledge is a proxy for a general sense of engagement with the political system. Unions appear to distill and convey information to lower-income, and to some extent middle-income, individuals, but have no measurable impact on upper-income individuals. However, broadening the scope of political engagement beyond information is important to assess the extent to which political knowledge is a reliable proxy of a more robust sense of engagement and whether unions help interpret politics and clarify the implications of political processes for individuals such that it yields greater political engagement.

This chapter applies the conditional institutional salience hypothesis developed in the previous chapter to assess the extent to which the theory holds for measures of political engagement that examine both procedural and non-procedural engagement. Specifically, this chapter draws on the three waves of NAES data to examine what effect, if any, unions have on individuals' tendency to discuss politics with friends and family, whether they are concerned about the outcome of an election, and whether they vote in otherwise low-turnout, primary elections. These outcomes are selected as they represent unconventional and somewhat disparate types of political engagement.

Those with greater access to resources are far more likely to be politically engaged (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba et al. 1995). This is well-known. Yet, despite this bias, scholars have identified a handful of institutions that seek to

democratize levels of political engagement by facilitating political action among lower-income individuals. Organizations such as religious institutions (Verba et al. 1995) and member-based organization such as the AARP (Campbell 2003) are seen as institutions that provide an institutional counterweight to the political advantages held by the wealthy.

Labor unions, for reasons outlined in earlier chapters, represent a singular and nonsubstitutable democratizing institution. Scholars have long seen workplace democracy as a fundamental component of a substantively democratic society (Dahl 1985; Dewey 1939; Pateman 1970). Modern social scientists have documented that at the aggregate level, labor unions increase voter turnout (Leighley and Nagler 2007), equalize policy representation (Flavin 2018), and increase political participation (Zullo 2013; Kerrisey and Schoefer 2013). This scholarship has yielded important insights. But it is not clear the extent to which the impact of unions is conditional on one's underlying resources. Kerrisey and Schoefer (2013) drew on data from the 1960s through the 1990s and find an interactive effect for education such that unions have a greatest effect on those with low levels of education. This chapter expands on this work by drawing on more recent data, testing the conditional institutional hypothesis as it relates to income, and includes additional outcome measures.

Hypotheses

The expectations in this chapter are similar to those in the previous chapter. First, unions may be associated with higher levels of political engagement across the income distribution. In this sense, there is no conditional effect on lower-income individuals.

H1: Unions are associated with greater levels of political engagement, regardless of income.

The conditional institutional salience hypothesis specifies that the impact of a union is conditional on access to resources. Unions should have the largest effects at the lowest end of the income distribution and the effect should diminish as access to resources increase as the union will be submerged by a range of other sources of political engagement such as high levels of education, high media consumption, and politically-inclined social networks.

H2: Unions are associated with greater levels of political engagement but the effects are conditional on access to resources such that the effect of unions should be most pronounced at the lower end of the income distribution and the effects should be smaller and eventually diminish as income increases.

Unions may turn out voters—lower-income or otherwise—but have no impact on other forms of political engagement. In this sense, unions can be seen as an electoral mobilization force rather than an institution that distills information and fosters deeper forms of political engagement. In this sense, unions should be associated with higher

levels of turnout but have no effect on other non-procedural forms of political engagement such as political discussion.

H3: Unions are associated with higher levels of voting, but have no effect on non-procedural forms of political engagement.

Data and Method

In order to assess the relationship between unions, resources, and political engagement, this chapter draws on the three waves—2000, 2004, and 2008—of survey data from NAES. The primary outcomes of interest are three measures that seek to capture different forms of political engagement.

Political Discussion

The first outcome of interest is the frequency of political discussion. In part, this measure provides a potential mechanism through which the results of the previous chapter may be understood. However, it also measures the deeper levels of political engagement that go beyond voting. The measures come from a question that was asked to nearly the entire sample in each wave of the NAES and asked respondents, “How many days in the past week did you discuss politics with your family and friends?” The answers range from zero to seven. The models are estimated with ordered logistic regression.

The mean levels of political discussion appear to have increased across the three waves. In 2000, respondents discussed politics, on average, 2.14 days a week ($SD = 2.31$), while in 2004 and 2008, the respondents discussed politics an average of 2.95 days a week ($SD = 2.49$) and 3.72 days a week ($SD = 2.64$), respectively.

Political Concern

The outcome of an election may be irrelevant to individuals who do not see how it may affect their daily lives. However, institutions can foster a sense of engagement such that individuals come to see political outcomes as the culmination of processes are either directly or indirectly relevant to them in some way by clarifying the stakes, implications, and consequences of one outcome over another.

In order to measure this form of political engagement—what we may term political concern—this study draws on a question that was only asked during the 2000 wave of the NAES in which respondents were asked, “Do you care a great deal which party wins the 2000 presidential election?” Respondents were offered two response options. The variable is coded 1 if the respondent indicated that they cared “a great deal,” and 0 if they indicated, “not very much.” Given the binary nature of the outcome, the models are estimated with logistic regression.

Political Procedures: Voting in Primary Elections

Most studies assessing voter turnout consider whether voters turnout for national elections, typically presidential elections. Voter turnout in these elections hovers around

60% of eligible voters. In addition, social desirability generally inflates figures of self-reported voting on surveys. To assess procedural participation that is nonetheless somewhat unorthodox—and generally the subject of less research on unions and participation—this study examines the likelihood of voting in primary elections.

Primary elections are consequential for candidate selection, yet they are also notoriously low-turnout events. In addition, voters report feeling less social pressure about voting in primary elections (Gerber et al 2017). This may reduce the pressures of social desirability, yielding more accurate measurements of voting behavior. I analyze items in each wave that asked respondents whether they voted in their state's primary election.¹³ The variables are dichotomous and coded 1 if the respondent claims to have voted and 0 otherwise. Among respondents in 2000, 2004, and 2008, 40%, 43%, and 54% reported voting in their primary. The likelihood of voting is estimated with logistic regression.

Independent Variables

As in the last chapter, the theory of conditional institutional salience above is predicated on two individual attributes: access to resources and affiliation with a union. To test how these factors affect individual levels of political information, this study operationalizes these using household income and household union affiliation. Household income is

¹³ Additional analyses that examine general election voting yield substantively similar results. The magnitude of the union effect is somewhat smaller in general elections. This is perhaps due to low-information context of primaries and the particularly important role unions play in turning members out and clarifying the stakes of such elections.

measured as pre-tax household income and collapses the NAES' original nine-point scale into a three-point variable that is centered so that the median is 0, while lower-income households are coded -1 and upper-income households are coded 1. Lower-income households include those with household incomes that fall below \$35,000. Middle-income households are those that fall between \$35,000 and \$75,000, while upper-income households are those that earn greater than \$75,000 a year. Union affiliation is measured as a dichotomous variable coded 1 if the respondent stated that they come from a union household and 0 otherwise.

Controls

There are a range of other factors that may also be expected to affect one's level of political engagement. First, those with more extensive formal education are more likely to be politically engaged. Therefore, education, measured on a nine-point scale from low to high, is included as a control variable.

Additionally, a number of other demographic characteristics have been identified as important factors that affect political engagement. These include age, gender, race, and ethnicity. Accordingly, control variables are included for each of these.

One may encounter political information in other domains as well such as affiliation with a religious institution (Verba et al. 1995; Smith 2017), or from a spouse or partner, while those who are unemployed may be less politically engaged (Schlozman and Verba 1979). Controls are therefore included for religious attendance, marital status, whether the respondent is a student, and whether the respondent is unemployed.

The who are highly ideological or who self-identify as “strong partisans” of one party or the other may be thought to be more politically engaged. Therefore, as in the previous chapter, controls are included for political ideology that ranges on a five-point scale from very liberal to very conservative and two dichotomous indicators that take the value of 1 if the respondent identified as either a strong Republican or a strong Democrat.

Results: Political Discussion

The first set of results are shown in Table 4.1. The columns display the results from the ordered logistic regression models for each wave—2000, 2004, and 2008. Linear regression and multilevel linear regression models yield similar estimates.

Turning to the results, the tables offer empirical support for H2, the conditional institutional salience hypothesis. The coefficient for union affiliation is positive and significant for each wave. However, most importantly, the interaction term in each model is also statistically significant ($p < .001$ in 2000 and 2008; $p < .01$ in 2004) and negative, as expected. This indicates that the affiliation with a union is significantly associated with more frequent discussions about politics, but that this effect is largest for those who come from lower-income households.

Table 4.1: Unions and Political Discussion

	Model 1: NAES 2000	Model 2: NAES 2004	Model 3: NAES 2008
Union Affiliation X Income	-0.09** (0.03)	-0.10*** (0.03)	-0.16*** (0.03)
Income	0.24*** (0.01)	0.23*** (0.01)	0.33*** (0.01)
Union Affiliation	0.05* (0.02)	0.11*** (0.02)	0.07** (0.03)
Education	0.15*** (0.00)	0.13*** (0.00)	0.11*** (0.00)
Age	0.00*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Married	0.21*** (0.02)	0.32*** (0.02)	0.37*** (0.02)
Black	-0.23*** (0.03)	-0.15*** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.03)
Latino	-0.19*** (0.04)	-0.20*** (0.03)	-0.12*** (0.04)
Religious Attendance	0.03*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Ideology	-0.03** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Strong Republican	0.76*** (0.03)	0.58*** (0.02)	0.42*** (0.02)
Strong Democrat	0.55*** (0.03)	0.60*** (0.02)	0.55*** (0.02)
Unemployed	-0.20** (0.07)	0.10* (0.04)	0.08 (0.06)
Student	0.34*** (0.06)	0.28*** (0.05)	0.27*** (0.08)
AIC	144364.96	247329.52	170209.62
BIC	144545.92	247520.17	170392.92
Log Likelihood	-72161.48	-123643.76	-85083.81
Num. obs.	40839	64763	45628

p < **0.001**, *p* < 0.01, *p* < 0.05. Results of ordered logistic regression models. Standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients are in logits and indicate effects on the frequency of political discussion.

The coefficients in table 4.1 are estimated in logits which are not easily interpretable.

Therefore, below I examine the magnitude of the effects by generating predicted

probabilities. To this end, the 2008 model is used to generate the predicted probability that individuals never discuss politics, discuss politics one day a week, two days a week, and so on, all the way up to seven days a week for both union-affiliated and non-union affiliated individuals across the range of income levels. The model for 2008 is used because it is the most recent. Results are substantively similar for the 2000 and 2004 models.

Rather than presenting the results for each potential outcome, the results are plotted for the two poles of the question: the likelihood of never discussing politics (zero days a week) and the likelihood of discussing politics every single day of the week (seven days a week).

Figure 4.1 depicts the predicted probabilities with 95% confidence intervals that individuals never discuss politics with friends and family in a given week. Along the horizontal axis is household income and the vertical axis measures the estimates. The results for those affiliated with unions are depicted in black and the estimates are in the shape of a triangle. Non-union affiliated estimates are gray and marked with a circle.

As can be seen in the plot, those with greater resources are generally less likely to have weeks that are free of political discussion. However, the results indicate that the likelihood that one never discusses politics is no different for middle- and upper-income individuals whether they are affiliated with a union or not, whereas lower-income individuals who are affiliation with a union are significantly less likely to refrain from discussing politics in a given week. In contrast, union-affiliation has no statistically distinguishable effect for those from middle- and upper-income households as the confidence intervals for the estimates for both union and non-union households overlap.

Those lower-income individuals who are affiliated with a union are significantly less likely to have a week free of political discussion. The predicted probability that someone from a non-union, lower-income household takes part in zero political discussion all week is 19% (CI 18.2%, 19.7%) while for lower-income union-affiliated households, the likelihood is 15.7% (CI 14.4%, 17%), a difference of just over three percentage points.

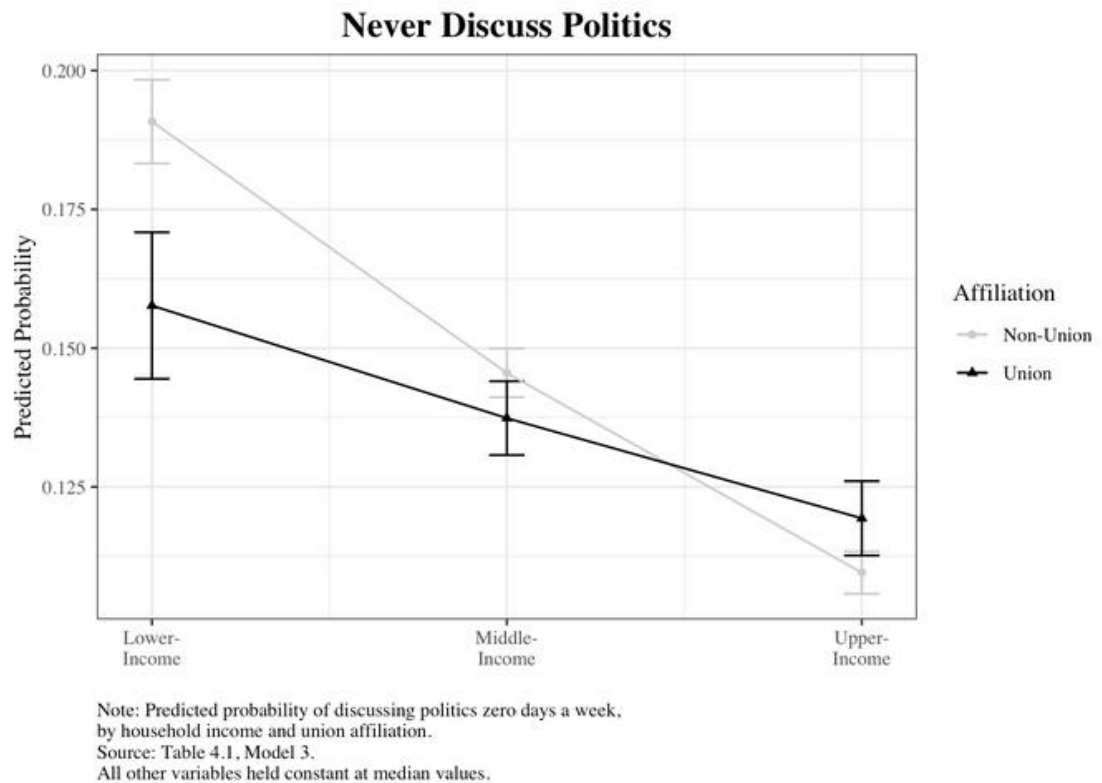


Figure 4.1: Unions and Political Discussion

What about the other end of the spectrum? How likely is it that individuals from different economic backgrounds are discussing politics every single day of the week and does it depend on union affiliation? Figure 2 depicts this information. Specifically, the plot shows the probability of discussing politics seven days a week across different levels of household income and by union and non-union affiliation, holding all other variables constant at their median values.

The general relationship seen in Figure 4.2—that richer individuals are more likely to discuss politics everyday—still holds. However, another relationship also holds: unions again play an important role for lower-income individuals and significantly increase the likelihood that lower-income individuals discuss politics every day of the week. Again, the effects of union affiliation for middle- and upper-income individuals are indistinguishable from zero.

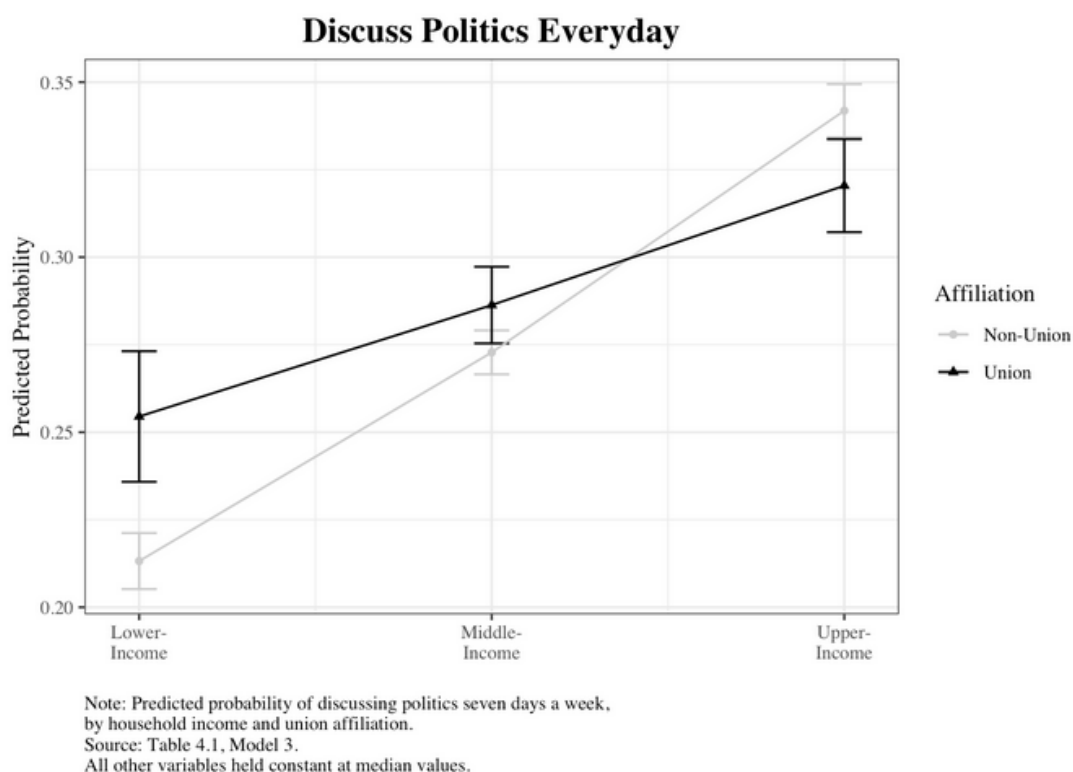


Figure 4.2: Unions and Political Discussion

To put this finding into context, if we look closely at the estimates for lower-income union individuals and middle-income non-union individuals, we can see that the estimates are indistinguishable from one another. The predicted probability that a union-affiliated lower-income individual discusses politics every day is 25.4% (CI 23.6%,

27.3%) and the estimate for a middle-income non-union affiliated individual is roughly 27.3% (CI 26.6% 27.9%). Given the overlapping confidence intervals, the estimates are indistinguishable from each other.

The findings here suggest that the channels of political engagement that unions provide to discuss politics are most important for those at the lower end of the income distribution, whereas middle- and upper-income individuals are likely to be politically engaged at similar levels, regardless of whether they are affiliated with a labor union or not. Again, this translates into millions of lower-income individuals taking part in the political sphere and talking about politics, largely as a result of their affiliation with an institution that provides the space, capacity, and information to do so.

Results: Political Concern

A deeper sense of political engagement might be evident if individuals express interest in or concern about an election outcome. This section presents the results from the second set of analyses. The table below depicts the estimates from a logistic regression model predicting the likelihood that a respondent cares a “great deal” about the outcome of the 2000 presidential election.

Table 4.2: Unions and Election Concern

	Model 1: Concern about Election Outcome
Union Affiliation X Income	-0.11** (0.04)
Union Affiliation	0.03 (0.03)
Income	0.11*** (0.02)
Education	0.04*** (0.01)
Age	0.01*** (0.00)
Married	0.02 (0.02)
Black	0.34*** (0.04)
Latino	0.04 (0.04)
Religious Attendance	0.06*** (0.01)
Ideology	-0.07*** (0.01)
Strong Republican	2.02*** (0.05)
Strong Democrat	1.69*** (0.04)
Unemployed	-0.03 (0.08)
Student	0.14 (0.07)
Intercept	-0.36*** (0.07)
AIC	52249.93
BIC	52381.34
Log Likelihood	-26109.97
Deviance	52219.93
Num. obs.	47130

p < **0.001**, *p* < 0.01, *p* < 0.05. Results of ordered logistic regression models. Standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients are in logits and indicate effects on the likelihood of being concerned about election outcome.

The results offer additional empirical support for H2, the conditional institutional hypothesis. Notably, the coefficient for union affiliation is not significant, while the interaction term between union and income is significant ($p < .01$) and negative. Taken together, this indicates that the union effect when income is at 0—or a middle-income individual—is not significant but there is a significant effect at the lower end of the income scale. In order to assess this, the marginal effects or the predicted probabilities could be plotted. Given that we are interested in not only whether or not there is an effect but also *how large* that effect is, plotting the predicted probabilities offer the most effective approach.

In Figure 4.3, the model is used to plot the predicted probability that a respondent cares a “great deal” about the 2000 election outcome and how it varies based on union affiliation and household income. All other variables are held constant at their median values. Evident yet again is the conditional effect of union affiliation. Union-affiliated lower-income individuals are significantly likely to care a “great deal” about the outcome of the election, whereas there is no measureable difference between middle-income union and non-union individuals, nor is there a difference among upper-income individuals. Union affiliation appears to yield a sense of concern that the outcome of an election is something that can have implications for some part of people’s lives. Those lower-income individuals without a union affiliation are significantly less likely to hold this view.

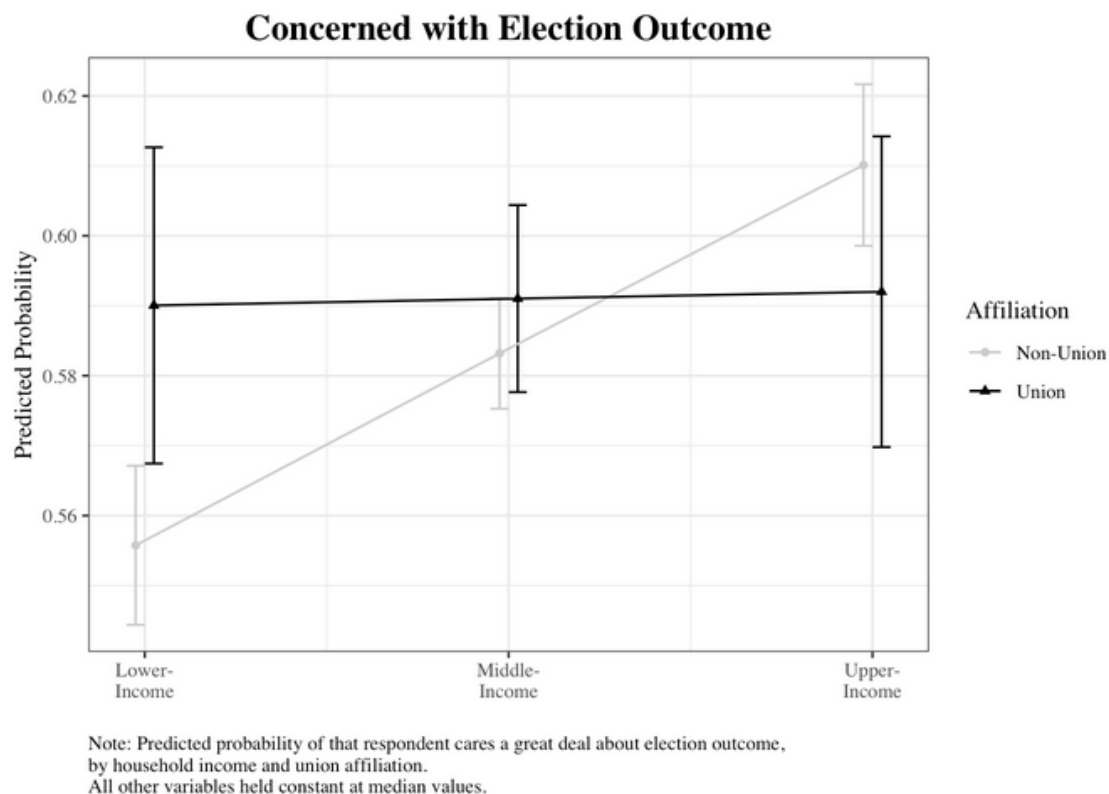


Figure 4.3

Results: Primary Election Voting

The final set of analyses assesses the relationship between union-affiliation, resources, and voting in a presidential primary election. The results from the three logistic regression models for the three election years are depicted below in table 4.3. Analyses using multilevel logistic regression are available in the appendix. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the state-level differences capture much more variance than in other models, particularly in 2008 when state-level differences capture roughly 24% of the variance in primary turnout. However, in 2004, state differences capture only 4% of the variance while in

2000 they explain 10%. In any event, of interest here is whether the individual-level explanatory factors are different in logistic regression and multilevel logistic regression models. They are not. Therefore, the non-multilevel models are presented here.

Turning to table 4.3, the results indicate that union affiliation is positive and statistically significant ($p < .001$ all three election years). However, the interaction term between union and income is significant ($p < .01$) and negative only in 2008. This is only partially in line with expectations and yet reveals an important finding that appears to run through this study: unions are conditionally important for lower-income individuals in fostering deeper, non-procedural forms of political engagement—such as political knowledge and political discussions—but in terms of procedural acts such as voting, unions are associated with higher levels of political activity for individuals across the income distribution.

Table 4.3: Unions and Primary Election Participation

	Model 1: 2000 Primary Elections	Model 2: 2004 Primary Elections	Model 3: 2008 Primary Elections
Union Affiliation X Income	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.15** (0.05)
Union Affiliation	0.28*** (0.03)	0.25*** (0.03)	0.29*** (0.04)
Income	0.17*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.01)	0.22*** (0.02)
Education	0.11*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.00)	0.12*** (0.01)
Age	0.03*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)
Married	0.19*** (0.02)	0.14*** (0.02)	0.13*** (0.03)
Black	0.20*** (0.04)	0.30*** (0.03)	0.28*** (0.05)
Latino	-0.07 (0.04)	-0.15*** (0.04)	-0.24*** (0.05)
Religious Attendance	0.13*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)
Ideology	-0.04** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
Strong Republican	0.77*** (0.03)	0.52*** (0.02)	0.53*** (0.03)
Strong Democrat	0.61*** (0.03)	0.69*** (0.02)	0.98*** (0.03)
Unemployed	-0.16 (0.09)	-0.13* (0.06)	-0.13 (0.08)
Student	-0.15 (0.09)	-0.22** (0.08)	0.17 (0.12)
Intercept	-3.07*** (0.07)	-2.67*** (0.06)	-2.51*** (0.08)
AIC	52399.19	68212.62	40617.56
BIC	52529.13	68345.84	40743.11
Log Likelihood	-26184.59	-34091.31	-20293.78
Deviance	52369.19	68182.62	40587.56
Num. obs.	42738	53179	31901

$p < 0.001$, $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$. Results of ordered logistic regression models. Standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients are in logits and indicate effects on likelihood of voting in primary.

The coefficients in Table 4.3 are logits and therefore are not easily interpretable. To facilitate interpretation, the plots in Figure 4.4 below use the models from Table 4.3 to generate predicted probabilities of voting along 95% confidence intervals across election years, income levels, and union affiliation, with all other variables held constant at their median values. From left to right, each pane presents the results for a given election year and the likelihood of voting in the primaries for those who come from lower-, middle- and upper-income households. Finally, the plots disaggregate the likelihood of voting within income groups based on whether the individual is affiliated with a labor union or not. Non-union results are depicted in gray with circle points while union estimates are shown in black with triangle points.

Across the income distribution, those affiliated with a union are more likely to vote in primary elections. In 2000, lower-, middle-, and upper-income union members were more likely to vote than their non-union counterparts by 6.5%, 6.7%, 6.8%, respectively. In 2004, the differences are 6.6%, 6.1%, and 5.4%. In 2008, lower-income union-affiliated individuals were 10.8% more likely to vote than non-union lower-income individuals, while the differences at middle- and upper-income levels were 7.2% and 3.6%, respectively.

A few points are worth noting. First, as with other forms of political engagement, access to resources plays an important role. The richer one's household, the more likely an individual is to vote in the presidential primary election. Second, turnout is relatively low in primary elections and the results reflect this. For most estimates, the predicted

probability of voting in the primary is less than 50%. Third, those affiliated with unions are significantly more likely to vote in presidential primaries in all three election years and at every level of income. Unions have long been known for their capacity to turnout voters. The results here indicate that these efforts are effective in general elections as well as primary elections, an important yet understudied domain for voter turnout.¹⁴

¹⁴ Additional analyses examining general election voting yield substantively similar results.

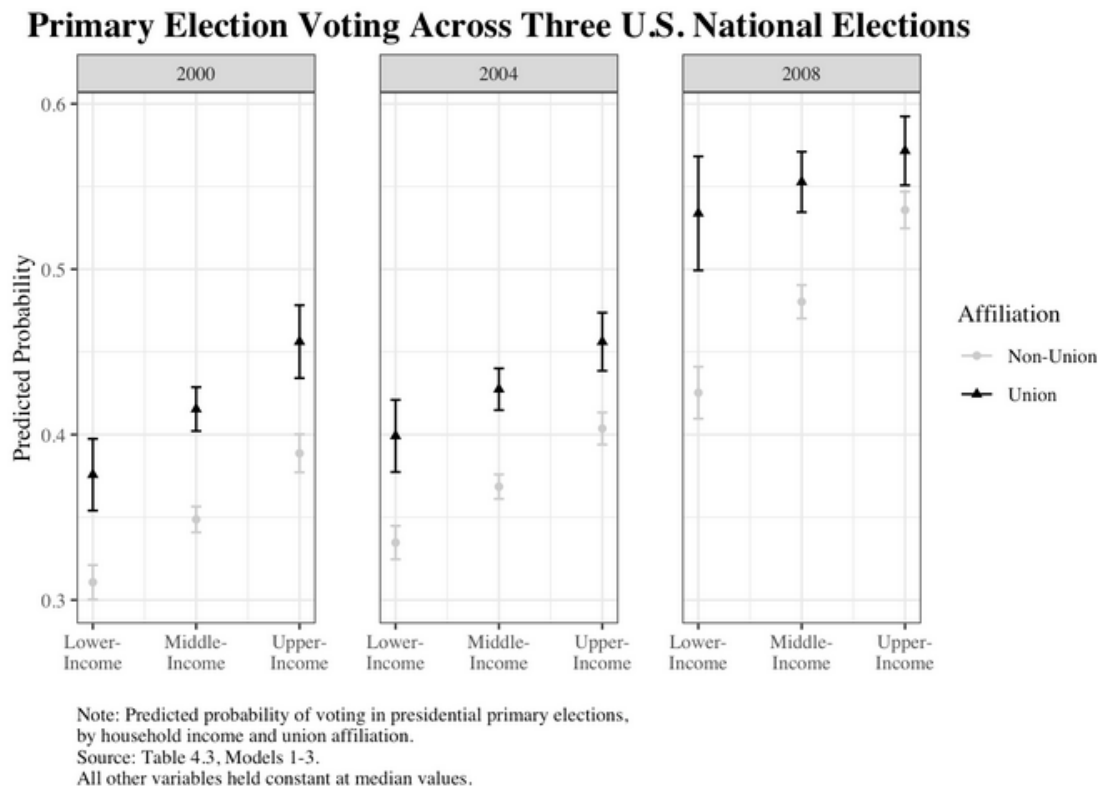
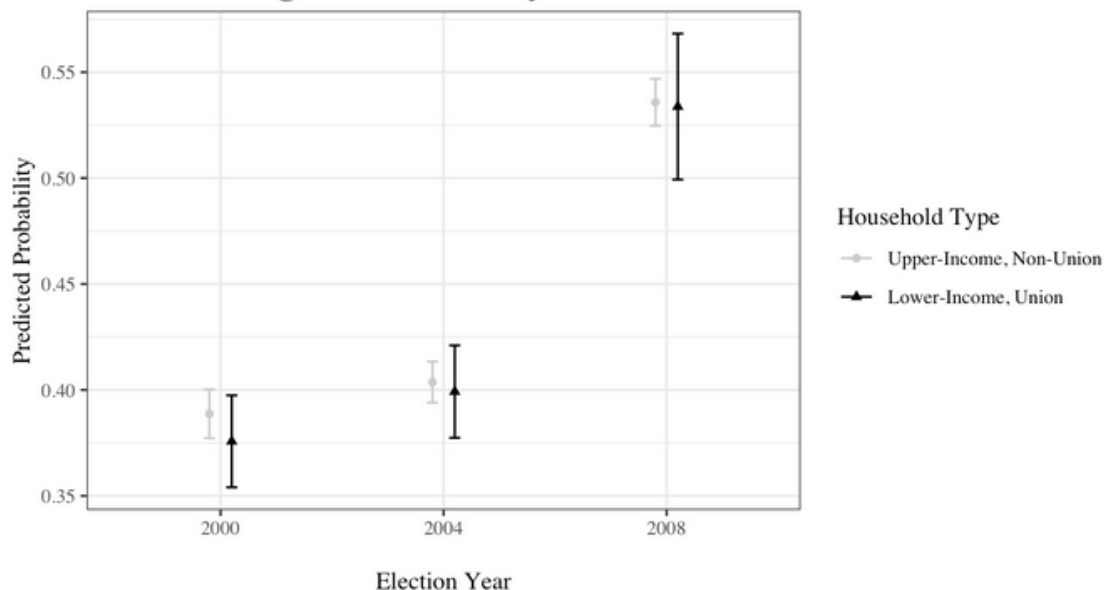


Figure 4.4: Unions and Primary Election Participation

Finally, these results offer an interesting finding related to political equality: in each election year, lower-income individuals who are affiliated with a union are just as likely to cast a vote in primary elections as upper-income individuals who are not affiliated with a union. To emphasize these results, the estimates for a lower-income union-affiliated individual and an upper-income non-union individual are plotted below in Figure 4.5. Considering the overarching interest in the extent to which unions represent a politically “democratizing” institution, this finding is particularly noteworthy and provides important evidence that the expansion of unions for lower-income workers could yield a more robust and equal primary election system. The predicted probability that a lower-income union-affiliated individual voted in the 2000 primary election is 40% (CI 38%, 42%), roughly the same for the 2004 primaries, while in 2008 the probability is 47% (CI

44%, 51%). The same figures for an upper-income non-union individual are 41% (CI 40%, 42%) in 2000, 40% (CI 39%, 41%) in 2004, and 47% (CI 46%, 49%) in 2008.

Primary Democratizing Institution: Unions, Income, and Voting in U.S. Primary Elections



Note: Predicted probability of voting in presidential primary elections, by year, household income and union affiliation.
Table 4.3, Models 1-3
All other variables held constant at median values.

Figure 4.5

What is striking about these results is that the confidence intervals overlap for the estimates in each year. This indicates that union affiliation is associated with such a higher level of participation among lower-income union-affiliated individuals that the difference between their likelihood of voting and that of an upper-income individual with no union affiliation is indistinguishable.

Discussion

This chapter offers important insight that there may be a crucial distinction between procedural and non-procedural political engagement and the role unions play in each of these. The results in this chapter indicate that unions are conditionally important for lower-income individuals in fostering deeper, non-procedural forms of political engagement—such as political knowledge and political discussions—but in terms of procedural acts such as voting, unions are associated with higher levels of political activity for individuals across the income distribution.

Chapter 5

Labor Market Institutions and the Dimensions of Political Engagement

Introduction

The findings of the last two chapters assess the extent to which affiliation with a union has heterogeneous effects on individuals that vary in their access to resources. The results indicate that unions are particularly consequential for *lower-income individuals* and foster deeper, non-procedural forms of political engagement—such as political knowledge and political discussion. In terms of procedural acts such as voting, however, unions are associated with higher levels of political activity for individuals *across* the income distribution, although the effect is largest for lower-income individuals.

Distinguishing between two types of political engagement—procedural and non-procedural—I argue that political engagement is a *multidimensional* concept. That is, a single dimension of political engagement does not fully capture the theoretical construct of political engagement and obscures important caveats about how unions affect political engagement. In order to extend the results and analyses from the last two chapters, I draw on latent variable models to examine whether political engagement is, in fact, a concept with more than one dimension.

Latent variables have often been used to examine whether there are multiple dimensions underlying constructs that may be superficially understood as single concepts (Bartolomew et al. 2008). For example, Feldman and Johnston (2014) argue that a unidimensional scale of political ideology does not sufficiently capture the range of ideological understandings that people possess. Instead, they propose, and find support

for, a two-dimensional theory of ideology with latent variables that capture *two dimensions* of political ideology: a social dimension and an economic dimension. In that example, they conclude, “Parsimony is a desirable goal in science. However, this must be balanced against the need for an accurate description of social phenomena,” (Feldman and Johnston 2014, 353).

On its face, the notion that political engagement may encompass discrete dimensions is intuitive. Voting and discussing politics are not necessarily the same thing. The act of voting in an election is related, but, I argue, analytically distinct, from discussing politics with one’s family, friends, or co-workers or maintaining interest in the political process itself. Non-procedural engagement could encompass actions such as joining a social movement, advocating for policy proposals, following legislative or regulatory changes, or some other aspect of engagement with the political sphere that, while not procedurally defined, nonetheless has the potential to affect political outcomes.

In this chapter, I posit that political engagement is, in fact, best characterized by more than one dimension. Moreover, this distinction is consequential because affiliation with a union affects political engagement *differently* depending on the dimension—procedural or non-procedural—as well as one’s underlying economic circumstances.

In order to examine the overarching theory, in this chapter, I distinguish between procedural and non-procedural political engagement and how they relate to unions. I then develop structural equation models to examine the relationship between union affiliation and different forms of political engagement.

Table 5.1: Dimensions of Political Engagement

Dimension:	Non-Procedural	Procedural
Mediating Institutions:	Integral	Peripheral
Link Between Individual and Political System:	Not codified	Codified
Role of Institutions:	Clarify link between individual and political system; distill information; facilitate engagement	Augment link between individual and political system; strengthen connection between individual and codified outcomes in political system
Observable Indicators:	Political Knowledge Political Interest Political Discussion	Primary Election Vote Midterm Election Vote General Election Vote

Data

To examine whether there is support for this multi-dimensional notion of political engagement, I draw on data from the 2008 wave of NAES. It is the most recent wave, has a wide range of engagement measures—both procedural and non-procedural—and contains a large enough sample to carry out the analyses. I use six items that, I expect, capture different dimensions of political engagement.

Procedural political engagement is captured with a number of items related to the most fundamental procedure of democracy—voting. Specifically, I include three measures of voting: primary, midterm, and general election voting. In terms of non-procedural engagement, I include three measures that are relevant to political processes but are not necessarily fundamental procedures: political knowledge (a six-item scale), political interest, and frequency of political discussion.

Multi-Dimensional Political Engagement

This section draws on a two-factor measurement model to examine these two forms of engagement among lower-, middle-, and upper-income union and non-union affiliated individuals using structural equation models. The expectations for non-procedural and procedural engagement differ in relation to these factors.

First, in earlier chapters, I found that unions are associated with higher levels of voting for individuals across the income distribution. Unions are well-known for the electoral capacity and mobilization of voters. The impact of unions on individuals' likelihood of voting is *largest* for lower-income individuals, but across the income distribution, unions are associated with higher levels of voting. Therefore, I expect union affiliation to be associated with *higher levels of procedural political engagement across the income distribution*.

Although non-procedural engagement is *related* to procedural engagement, but the crucial distinction from procedural engagement is that it captures forms of political behavior that are not *codified within a* democratic system of government. This means it can take many forms. This also means that the extent to which one is non-procedurally engaged in politics may depend on other mediating institutions in one's life such as family, work, education, friends, and, most notably, an institution such as a union. Given that non-procedural engagement is not codified in a political system, these institutions help clarify the extent to which forms of non-procedural engagement are relevant to political outcomes and certain institutions may even facilitate these forms of engagement.

The expectations for non-procedural engagement, therefore, are conditional. While procedural engagement evokes routinized procedures, non-procedural engagement is more dependent on mediating institutions to distill the link between individuals and

their political system. As income increases, the density and number of institutions—such as media consumption, education, and politically-inclined social networks—increases. Therefore, although union affiliation extends across the income distribution, in terms of non-procedural engagement, unions are likely to be most salient for those who lack high levels of immersion in other institutions. The expectation, then, is that *union affiliation should be associated with higher levels of non-procedural political engagement among lower-income individuals* as it is likely to be the main, if not the only, mediating institution to facilitate engagement. *As income increases, the effects of union affiliation on non-procedural engagement should diminish.* The expectations are illustrated in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Expectations: Unions and Engagement		
	Non-Procedural	Procedural
	Conditional on Income	Broad, Not Conditional on Income
Lower-Income	Positive	Positive
Middle-Income	Weakly positive/negligible	Positive
Upper-Income	Negligible	Positive

To test these hypotheses, I draw on the two-factor measurement model developed above and include covariates to construct a structural equation model. I include union affiliation as a covariate and use it to predict levels of both procedural and non-procedural engagement. I also include education as a control variable as it is often seen as an important predictor of engagement. Given the theoretical expectations for those who

come from lower-, middle-, and upper-income households, I subset the data and estimate three separate models for each group.

Results: Structural Equation Models of Political Engagement

The results from the three models are reported below with use of path models. The three path models correspond to the models for lower-, middle-, and upper-income individuals. Squares indicate observed variables whereas circles indicate latent variables. Each model consists of three parts. First, furthest to the left, there are two squares for education and union affiliation that represent the observed covariates. Next, the two latent variables—non-procedural and procedural political engagement—are shown in circles. Finally, the set of squares furthest to the right show the observed items associated with each latent variable. The assumed direction of causality runs from left to right.

For this study, the most important parts of the path model are two unidirectional arrows that run from the union square to the two circles, the latent variables. These arrows represent the effect of union affiliation on each form of engagement and the numbers on the arrows represent the standardized coefficient. Comparing how these numbers differ across the models for different income levels and types of engagement is central to assess support for the theory in this study.

As seen in the lower-income model (Figure 5.1), the effect of union affiliation on non-procedural engagement is strongest and positive for lower-income individuals. This is in line with expectations. For the lower-income model, the standardized coefficient for union affiliation on non-procedural engagement is 0.07 ($p < .001$). As income increases,

the effect diminishes to 0.03 ($p < .05$) for middle-income and even more so for upper-income individuals as it becomes negative with an estimate of -0.05 ($p < .001$).

Although not displayed, the unstandardized coefficients, which represent a one-unit change (non-union to union) in engagement, is perhaps more informative. The unstandardized coefficients for the effect of union affiliation on non-procedural engagement for lower-income, middle-income, and upper-income individuals are 0.33, 0.11, and -0.19, respectively. For lower-income individuals, the effect of union affiliation is *larger than a one-unit change in education*. These results indicate that unions are disproportionately beneficial for lower-income individuals and have strong positive effects on levels of non-procedural political engagement. The effect is smaller for middle-income individuals and even negative for upper-income individuals. Unions are important for non-procedural engagement, but primarily and most substantially for lower-income individuals.

What effect does union affiliation have on procedural political engagement? Recall that the expectation for procedural engagement is that unions are broadly beneficial across the income distribution. If we turn to the arrows in each path model that run from union to procedural engagement, we see that this hypothesis also receives support. Figures 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 display the results for lower-, middle- and upper-income individuals, respectively. Similar to the findings in earlier chapters, unions are associated with higher levels of procedural engagement for individuals *across the income distribution*, but the effect is again largest for lower-income individuals. The standardized coefficients for lower-income, middle-income, and upper-income individuals are 0.08 ($p < .001$), 0.05 ($p < .001$), and 0.04 ($p < .001$), respectively. Individuals in unions are more

likely to vote regardless of their income, but the boost is largest for individuals from lower-income households.

Aside from the union effects, the double-sided arrow between the circles in each path model represents the correlation between the two latent variables.¹⁵ The correlation between the two forms of engagement is highest for lower-income individuals ($R = .55, p < .001$). For middle- and upper-income individuals, the forms of engagement are still moderately correlated (middle: $R = .49, p < .001$; upper: $R = .45, p < .001$), but the differences indicate a somewhat tighter connection between the two types of political engagement for lower-income individuals. For clarity, these results—the differential effect of union affiliation by income and type of engagement—are reported side-by-side in table 5.3.

Table 5.3

Effect of Union Affiliation on Political Engagement					
Household Income	Non-Procedural		Procedural		
	Unstd.	Std.	Unstd.	Std.	
Lower-Income	0.33	0.07	0.08	0.08	
Middle-Income	0.11	0.03	0.03	0.05	
Upper-Income	-0.19	-0.05	0.02	0.04	

¹⁵ For each latent variable, one of the manifest variables (the constrained variable) is set to 1 to scale the other variables. This is represented by the dotted line. I examine the fully standardized results here and in the plot in which case the constrained variable is interpretable.

Figure 5.1

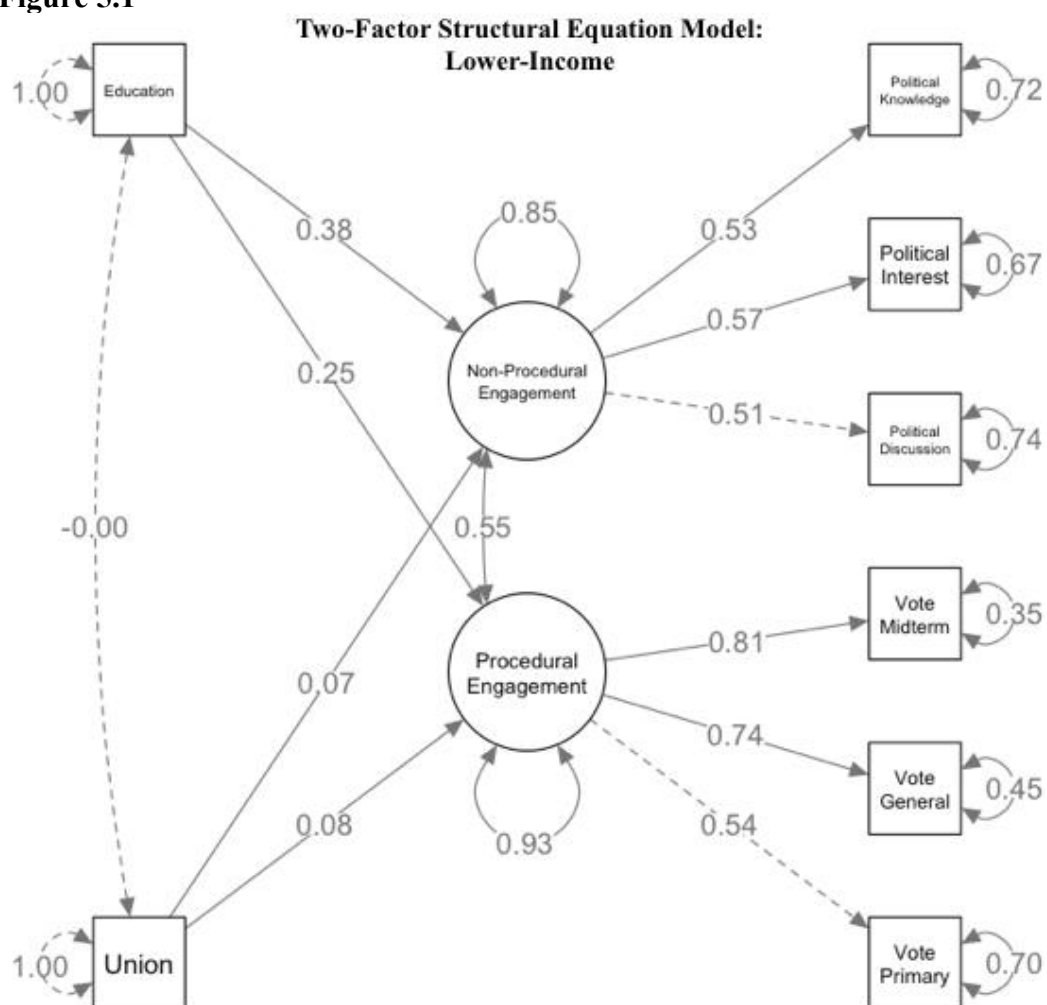


Figure 5.2

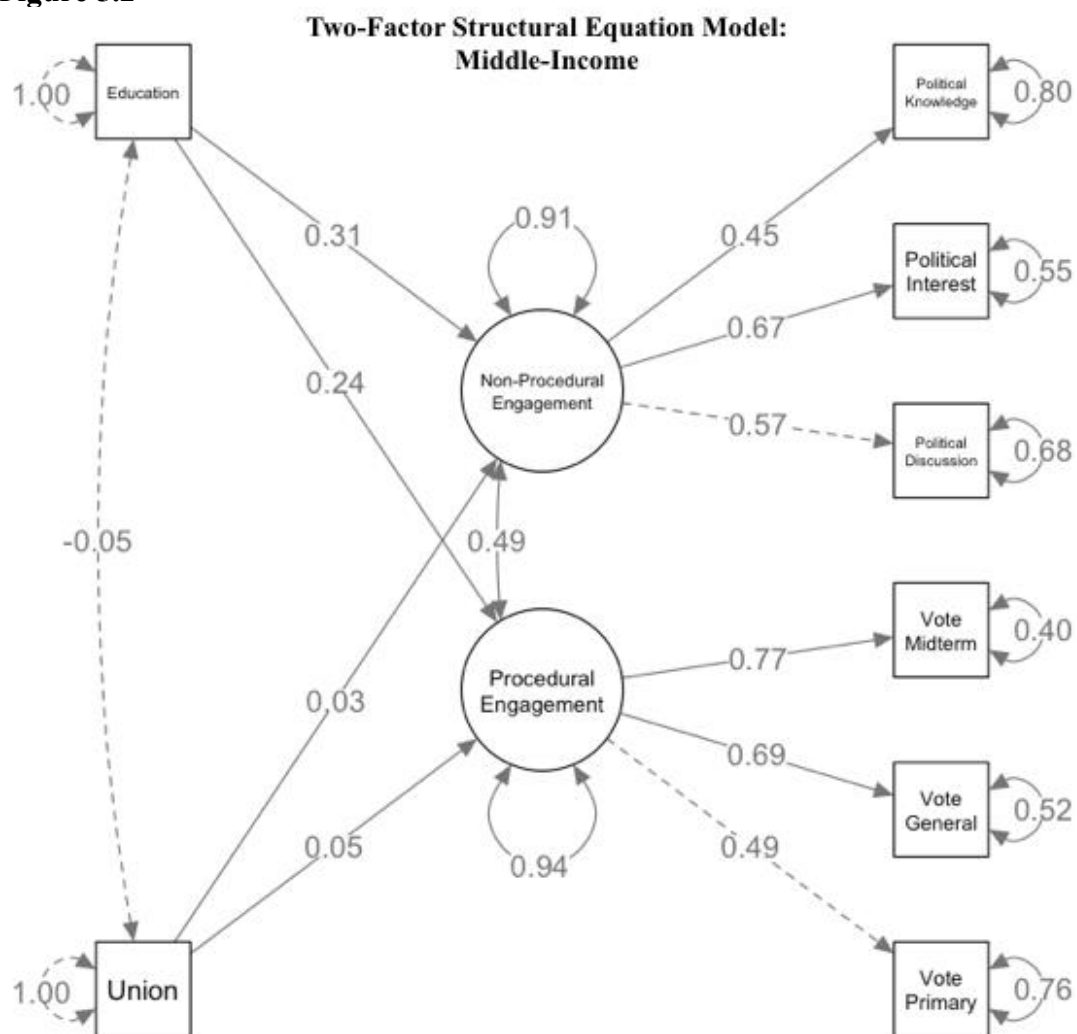
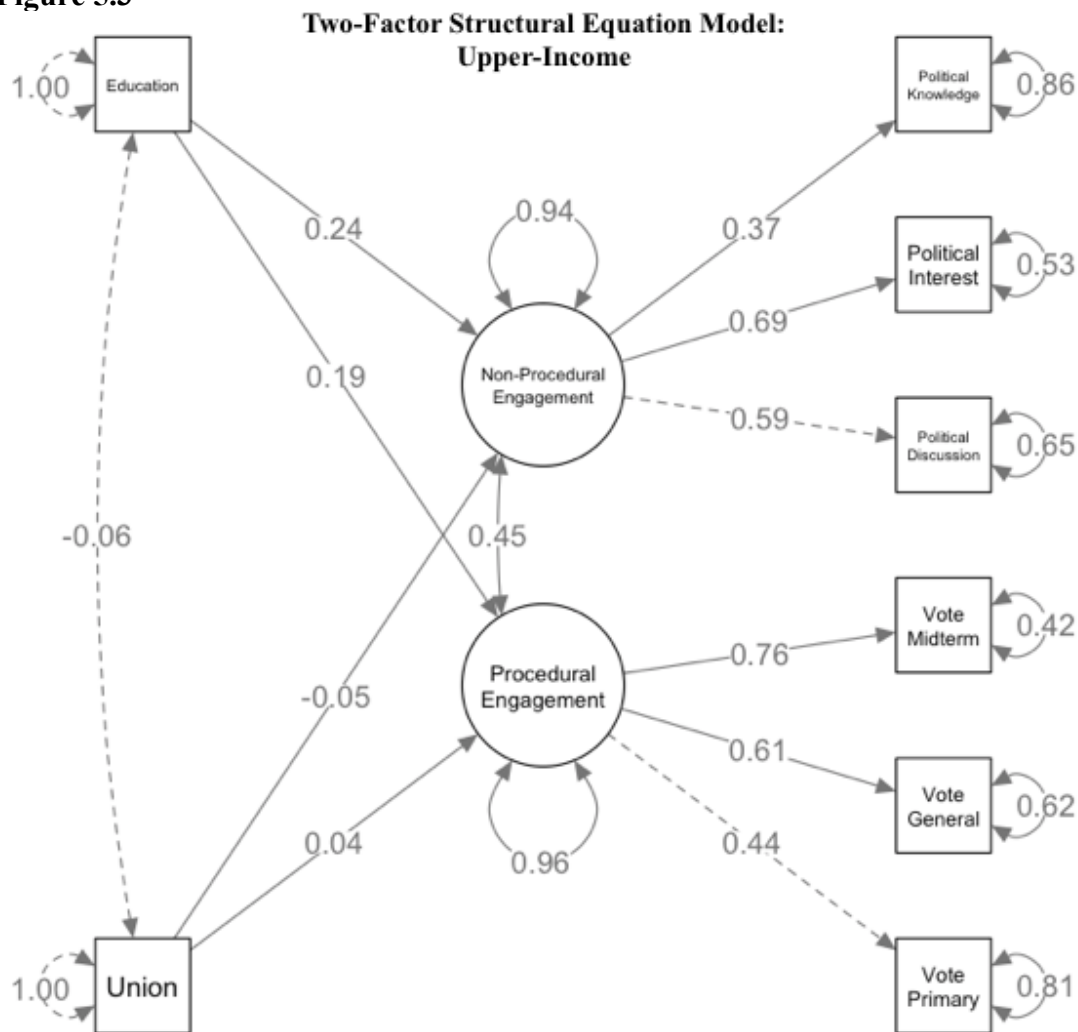


Figure 5.3



Occupation and the Two Dimensions of Political Engagement

Another way to consider one's labor market experience, aside from income, is to consider the work one performs. Although political scientists tend to focus on income or education, sociologists point to the importance of examining occupational differences. In this section, I expand on the model above but disaggregate the analysis by occupation rather than income. The drawback to this approach is that it substantially reduces the sample size for each model as the sample is spread across several categories. However,

the American labor market is composed of occupations and some of the most significant changes in the U.S. in the coming year will take place in the labor market as middle-wage jobs decline and workers are increasingly working in high-wage, or more likely, low-wage jobs doing service work and manual labor.

Similar to the approach above, I run separate models to assess the role of union affiliation within occupations. The expectations in this section are similar to those above, but instead of income, I expect low-wage occupations to see the greatest procedural *and* non-procedural boost from union affiliation, while union affiliation for those in middle- and high-wage occupations should augment *procedural engagement* but make *no difference for non-procedural engagement*. I use the same model as above, but since I disaggregate by occupation, I control for education, I as well as for income which is measured on a three-point scale: -1 (low), 0 (middle), 1 (high). The occupations considered include: service worker, laborer, semi-skilled worker, clerical/office worker, skilled tradesperson, salesperson, and professional. Managers and business owners were excluded since they cannot join unions. I expect unions to be associated with higher levels of procedural and non-procedural engagement for those in low-wage occupations: service workers, laborers, and semi-skilled workers. However, for those in mid-wage or high-wage jobs (office/clerical, skilled tradesperson, salesperson, and professional), I expect union affiliation to be associated with higher levels of *procedural engagement*, but have *no effect* on *non-procedural engagement*. Wage levels are broad, yet are in line with mean levels of household income for respondents in the data. These expectations are formalized in the table 5.4 below.

Table 5.4

	Expectations: Effect of Unions on Engagement by Occupation		
Occupation	Type	Expected effect on Procedural	Expected Effect on Non-Procedural
Service worker	Low-wage	Positive	Positive
Laborer	Low-wage	Positive	Positive
Semi-skilled Worker	Low-wage	Positive	Positive
Office/Clerical Worker	Middle-wage	Positive	No effect
Skilled Tradesperson	Middle-wage	Positive	No effect
Salesperson	Mid/High-wage	Positive	No effect
Professional	High-wage	Positive	No effect

Results: Occupation and the Two Dimensions of Political Engagement

The results from the models are reported below in Table 5.5. The table presents the results for the model for each occupation. The left-hand column lists the occupation. This is followed by a column with the types of positions associated with the occupational category. Columns three and four report the completely standardized estimates from the structural equation model testing for the effect of union affiliation on the two latent political engagement factors. These are the estimates of union affiliation, holding education and income constant. Finally, the last column, furthest to the right, reports the number of observations in each model.

From the table, we can see that service workers and laborers who are affiliated with unions are significantly more likely to be both procedurally and non-procedurally engaged than those who lack a union. The non-procedural estimate for semi-skilled workers is also positive, although slightly short of conventional levels of statistical significance ($p = .07$), which may be partially due to the small number of observations in

that model ($n = 536$). For the other four occupations—largely middle- to high-wage positions—union affiliation has no significant effect on one's level of non-procedural political engagement. These results are in line with theoretical expectations.

The results for procedural engagement are also largely in line with expectations and the other results above. With the exception of salespersons, union affiliation is associated with significantly higher levels of procedural political engagement across the occupational landscape, with semi-skilled workers seeing the largest increase from union affiliation. This again mirrors the results above. Union affiliation effectively *augment* the link between individuals and procedural forms of political engagement and this effect is shared by nearly all workers. However, when it comes to the distillation of political information and facilitating non-procedural forms of engagement, low-wage workers uniquely experience significant benefits from union affiliation rendering them more knowledgeable, engaged and interested in the political system.

Table 5.5

SEM Results: Unions and Two-Factor Engagement by Occupation				
Occupation	Positions encompassed in category	Latent Variable 1: Union effect on Procedural Engagement	Latent Variable 2: Union effect on Non-Procedural Engagement	Observations in model
Service Worker	hairstylist, personal attendant, nurse's aide, police officer, firefighter, waiter/waitress, maid, hairstylist, retail worker, cashier	0.07*	0.08*	1436
Laborer	plumber's assistant, construction worker, agricultural worker, longshoreman, garbage collector, other manual worker	0.14***	0.09*	931
Semi-skilled Worker	machine operator, assembly line worker, taxi driver, truck driver, bus driver	0.19***	0.09+	536
Clerical/Office Worker	typist, secretary, postal clerk, telephone operator, bank clerk	0.06*	0.04	1515
Skilled Tradesmen	printer, baker, tailor, electrician, machinist, mechanic, carpenter	0.12***	-0.03	1413
Salesperson	advertising salesperson, realtor, insurance salesperson	-0.04	-0.04	801
Professional	lawyer, doctor, scientist, teacher, engineer, registered nurse, accountant, programmer	0.08***	-0.03	6238
$p < .001$ ***, $p < .01$ **, $p < .05$ *, $p < .10$ +				

Discussion

Political engagement is the foundation of a system of government that depends on citizen participation. Although it is commonplace to see political engagement as a general and single concept, I posit that political engagement is more accurately understood as a *two-dimensional* concept. In this chapter, I draw on latent variable analysis to examine the extent to which political engagement can be reliably captured by a single dimension. I find a single dimensional notion of engagement is inadequate and that there are two dimensions that more accurately capture political engagement: non-procedural and procedural engagement.

This distinction is important and is consequential for how we understand the interactions between individuals, resources, institutions, and political outcomes. Individuals interaction with institutions differently depending on their underlying circumstances *as well as* the type of political engagement in question. Specifically, I argue that non-procedural engagement is more heavily dependent on mediating institutions that clarify the connection between individuals and their political system whereas procedural engagement is codified in a democratic system.

The implications of this distinction yield different expectations for how union affiliation affect political engagement for different individuals. Those with access to greater resources also have a number of mediating institutions—such as higher levels of education, media consumption, and politically-inclined social networks—that clarify the links between an individual and the political system. Therefore, although unions extend across the income distribution, they are likely to be more salient for whom the union may

be the primary, or only, institution that distills the links between individuals and political outcomes and facilitates forms of political engagement *that are not procedurally specified in a democratic system of government*. As income increases, so too does the number of mediating institutions in an individual's life. Lower-income union-affiliated individuals may have a union but upper-income union-affiliated individuals are likely to have much more: a union, but also extensive education, high media consumption, robust networks of politically-inclined friends and family, and so on.

Aside from the results across the income distribution, in additional models that take a different approach by assessing *occupational* differences, the results are largely similar. Those who work in the service sector or manual laborer experience substantial procedural and non-procedural benefits from union affiliation while those in middle- to high-wage jobs are more procedurally engaged by virtue of union affiliation, but experience little change in *non-procedural* engagement.

The findings suggest that the political consequences of declining unionization rates in the U.S. will be disproportionately felt at the lower-end of the income distribution, but in ways that have not been clearly delineated. Scholars have documented the ways that unions affect political engagement but have not distinguished between procedural and non-procedural engagement. The results here suggest the distinction is both theoretically and empirically consequential.

If unions continue to decline, procedural engagement may fall across the economic and occupational spectrum, although the largest effects will be at the lower ends of these groups. However, the role of unions in facilitating non-procedural engagement is uniquely felt by lower-income and low-wage workers. If unions decline,

middle- and high-wage workers may be less likely to vote, yet will likely still maintain similar levels of knowledge and interest in the political system. The same cannot be said for lower-income and low-wage workers for whom the union appears to be a salient link to the political system. Without a union, these workers and their families will be less likely to maintain interest in politics, discuss political issues, and possess knowledge of the political system, while their more well-off counterparts will be engaged whether they have a union or not.

Chapter 6

Work, Partisanship, and Attitudes Toward Labor Policy

Introduction

Up to this point, we have considered what effect unions have on individuals' political engagement. On the whole, unions are associated with higher levels of political engagement. However, a core part of the theory offered in this project is that, on a number of important democratic outcomes analyzed, this effect is conditional: the political benefits unions provide are most substantial for those who come from lower-income households and diminish, or are negligible, for upper-income individuals.

An engaged and participatory electorate is an important component of a healthy democratic system and unions appear to play a key role. However, a democracy is designed to respond to and reflect the preferences of its citizens. Given that unions appear to be consequential institutions that are associated with a more informed and engaged electorate—particularly for lower-income individuals—this still raises a question: why might unions still be in decline?

Public opinion is a crucial component of the policy outcomes and affects how and why issues move through the political process (Shapiro 2011). Labor policy and unions are politically malleable and therefore subject to the public opinion and the policy process, which raises the question: what do people think about labor policy and unions? This chapter examines public opinion toward labor policy and unions across a range of angles and data sources and disaggregated by income, occupation, and partisanship. The

results indicate that lower-income individuals across party lines are strongly supportive of strong labor policy and unions. Importantly, in terms of attitudes about labor policy and unions, occupation and income—indicators that tap into people’s labor market experience—appear to be important for how people think about unions and often these factors cut across typical partisan lines. For instance, by some measures, lower-income Republican service workers are more supportive of unions than upper-income Democratic managers or business owners. The findings raise important questions about how experience serves as a viable source of information about labor unions that transcends the cues individuals receive from the party on such policies.

Unions and the Policy Process

Two important reasons for union decline are discussed in chapter two—namely liberalized trade, or capital mobility, and extremely sophisticated and intense employer opposition to unionization, which often takes the form of potentially illegal anti-union tactics deployed against workers. As discussed in chapter two, these two processes are important because they are *politically malleable*. That is, trade and labor policy are *politically determined* and are shaped and structured by *decisions made by policymakers* within the policy process.

Policy, for instance, can shape the distribution of power in the workplace by protecting the rights of workers against their employer. If a given group of workers is organizing a union at their workplace, labor policy, for instance, can offer strong protections against employer retaliation by imposing high penalties for illegal tactics. Similarly, policy can alter the process of unionization by allowing workers to privately

sign a card to form the union rather than take part in a highly contentious election procedure during which employers are known to use an array of tactics—many of which are illegal—in order to influence the way workers vote.

On the other hand, labor policy might offer relatively little protection for workers and meager penalties against employers for labor law violations. In such an environment, which most accurately characterizes contemporary U.S. labor policy, workers have thin protection, are susceptible to overt intimidation by their employers, and are likely to have little reassurance that exercising their legal right to form a union will not be met with adverse actions from their employer, such as termination or poor treatment.

These two potential scenarios are the result of political processes and discrete political decision-making. There is nothing inevitable about one outcome or the other. However, political scientists are interested in how or why the political process generates one outcome or the other.

Policy outcomes are notoriously difficult to model and are often described as “overdetermined.” That is, it is difficult to isolate any single factor that shapes policy outcomes since there a number of different factors that are contributing to the outcome. Yet, while there are a number of factors that affect how and why policymakers attend to one or another policy, one of the most fundamental in a democratic system of government, is *what the public wants*. Public attitudes are an important component of the policy process and tend to anticipate, or at least signal, policy change (Shapiro 2011).

If public attitudes are at least partly related to policy outcomes, then they might offer at least some insight into related topics in this project. First, public attitudes might help us understand why, despite the empirically documented benefits unions provide that

strengthen many aspects of a democratic society, the rate of unionization continues to decline. Second, if we know what individuals think about unions—and particularly whether they see unions favorably—this may offer empirical insights about whether the public would—given the option—support a policymaker who stakes a campaign on expansive labor policy and the centrality of labor unions. In this chapter, we explore how individuals view labor unions, and labor policy generally.

In this chapter, I examine the U.S. public's attitudes on labor policy and how they are structured by three key factors: (1) income; (2) occupation/industry; and (3) partisanship.

Measuring Attitudes Toward Unions

How do people see unions and what do they think of them? The first part of this question—how do people see unions—is difficult to answer. Conceptually, individuals may think about labor unions from a range of perspectives. Some may see unions as an institution that binds workers together. Others may see unions as a political entity that helps to organize workers toward some political end. A historical take on unions might see them as the core institutions that effected changes in the workplace while others may perceive them as discriminatory and exclusionary that sought to preserve benefits for particular groups. A contemporary view might see unions as agents of economic change that have spearheaded wage increases for low-wage workers working in fast-food and other service sector jobs. Simply put, it is difficult to grasp exactly *how* individuals see unions given the range of perspectives and dimensions that underlie such a view. This is a

viable avenue for future research and could yield rich insights, but for now we put it aside.

Instead, this chapter seeks to address the second part of the question—what people think of unions and labor policy. In order to operationalize attitudes toward unions and labor policy, this chapter distinguishes between two conceptually related, but analytically distinct, components of labor policy attitudes: (1) general attitudes; and (2) policy-specific opinions.

The first part of labor policy attitudes—general attitudes—refers to a view of labor unions that is unstructured and somewhat abstract. One's general attitude toward unions might stem from a notion of unions that is based on experience, affective feelings, or the degree to which one sees them as desirable or undesirable entities in society.

To assess general attitudes, this chapter draws on “feeling thermometer” ratings of labor unions. These questions are included in surveys and ask individuals to rate their feelings, or favorability, toward unions on some scale, typically zero to 10 or zero to 100, with higher values representing more favorable views, a midpoint score signifying a neutral view, and low scores indicating an unfavorable view.

The second part of views on labor policy and unions—policy-specific opinions—is distinct from general attitudes because it assesses one's views of unions or labor policy in relation to some context, circumstance, or outcome. These measures—although certainly related to general attitudes to some extent—are arguably more valid indicators of policy preferences and therefore more politically realistic indicators of how a given individual views unions in relation to some specific policy that may, at some point,

materialize in a campaign, legislative debate, or resemble a policy proposal that a candidate seeking political office may offer.

In this chapter, policy-specific opinions of labor unions and labor policy are measured with items that assess individuals' views of policy-related issues that implicate labor policy or labor unions. These include the individual views on the right to join a union and on policy that would make union organizing easier.

General Attitudes Toward Unions Over Time

Previous chapters in this project documented the substantial political benefits lower-income individuals appear to accrue if they are affiliated with a labor union. Do lower-income individuals view unions more positively than upper income individuals? It may be that those with higher incomes and often higher levels of education understand the political importance of labor unions and hold higher opinions of them as important institutions in society. However, it may also be true that higher income individuals are generally indifferent toward unions or see them as unnecessary. To assess how individuals across the income distribution see unions, this section first turns to a question that has been asked in the American National Election Survey (ANES) for several years that assesses individuals' general orientation toward labor unions, or their "feeling" toward unions measured on a thermometer-like scale.

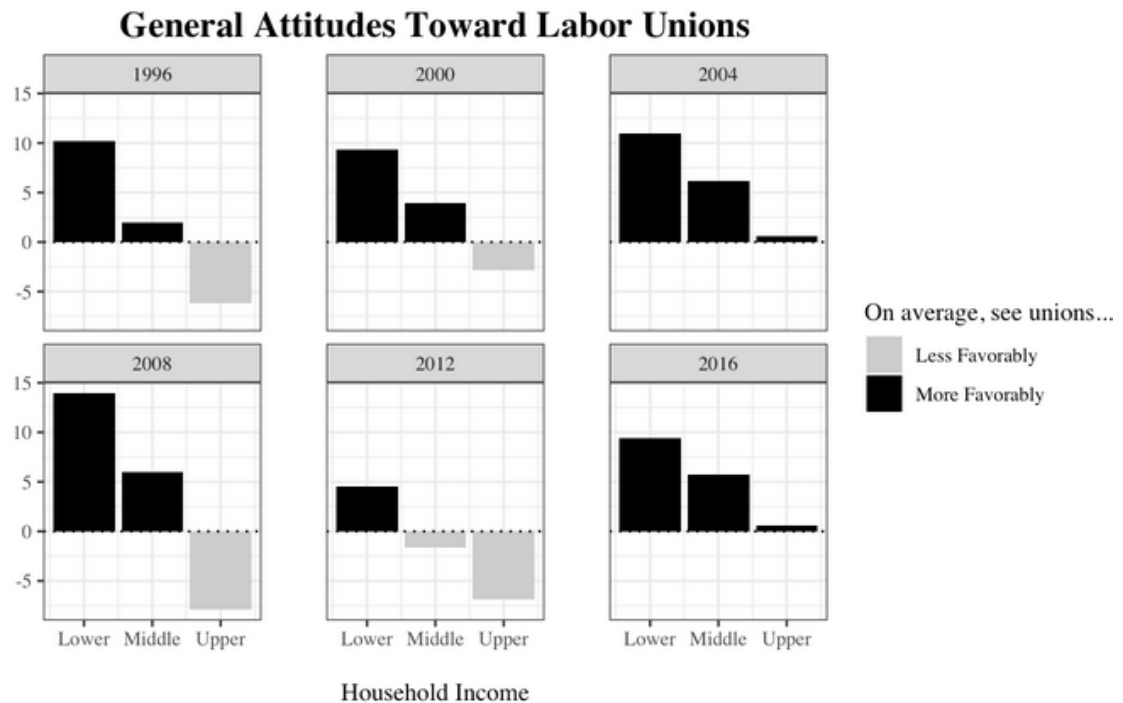
The item asks respondents how "warmly" they feel toward labor unions on a scale of zero to 100. In order to assess general attitudes toward unions, I draw on the ANES cumulative data file and calculate the relative mean thermometer rating toward labor unions for those who come from lower-, middle-, and upper-income households going

back through the last six election years. The relative mean score is calculated by subtracting 50—a “neutral” score on the 0 to 100 thermometer score—from the mean scores for each income group across election years. The resulting values allow for easier interpretation: positive values indicate a more favorable view of unions while negative scores indicate a less favorable view, on average. Zero indicates a neutral view of unions.

The results are plotted in figure 1 below. The six panes in the figure represent the six election years—1996 through 2016—and within each pane, the relative means are plotted for individuals from lower-, middle-, and upper-income households. Mean values above zero indicate positive views of unions and are black while values below zero indicate negative views and are gray.

As seen in Figure 6.1 Lower-income individuals, on average, held positive views of labor unions in every election year included in the plot. In three of the years included—1996, 2004, and 2008—the mean view among lower-income individuals is greater than 10 points above 0 (which would correspond to more than 60 on the original scale), indicating highly favorable attitudes toward labor unions. The previous chapters indicated that unions are disproportionately beneficial for lower-income individuals. Here, we see that lower-income individuals hold the most positive views of labor unions as well.

Middle- and upper-income individuals hold less positive views of labor unions. Middle-income views are positive, on average, with the exception of 2012, but not as positive as lower-income individuals. Upper-income individuals, on average, hold negative attitudes toward unions in all but 2004 and 2016 where the slight black bar indicates a slightly positive view, although this is not distinguishable from zero.



Note: Values centered by subtracting 50 from subgroup aggregate mean score.
 By household income and election year.
 Data from ANES 1996-2016.

Figure 6.1: General Attitudes Toward Unions

Although the general results are consistent across election years, there are some noteworthy differences. In 2008, the difference between the views of lower-income and upper-income individuals is by far the largest of all the election years—a difference of roughly 22 points. What might account for this?

It is difficult to determine exactly why this year stands apart, but one possible explanation is the campaign of former President Barack Obama. Labor unions turned out in force to carry Obama into office and staked considerable political capital in his presidency with hopes of achieving labor law reform. Lower-income individuals may have associated the general sense of excitement about Obama with unions and

synthesized the two into a more positive, perhaps anticipatory, view of unions, maybe holding out hope that Obama would seek to expand worker rights and union membership by spearheading labor law reform. Conversely, upper-income individuals may have perceived the same developments, but turned strongly *against* unions out of fear that their potential expansion might challenge the political and economic power upper-income individuals had accumulated over years of rising inequality.

In any event, it is now clear that the high hopes for labor policy expansion under Obama among unions and lower-income individuals was somewhat misplaced. Likewise, upper-income individuals—particularly economic elites—might have realized that they had little to fear as Obama did little to publicly advance federal labor policy legislation as unions and perhaps lower-income individuals had hoped. Despite a Democratic president and full Democratic control of Congress, labor law reform—in the form of the Employee Free Choice Act—failed to even reach the floor for a vote in Congress.

Obama, however, was praised by many in the business community. In a *Forbes* op-ed published in February 2009, Richard A. Epstein expressed appreciation for Obama's "Welcome Silence" on the bill and praised Obama's judicious decision to abandon the bill in response to the "fierce and unrelenting opposition of the entire business community." Lower-income individuals working long hours for low wages in sectors that deploy intense antiunion tactics such as retail, food services, and other low-wage sectors, it turned out, would have to put their hopes for some semblance of workplace democracy on hold.

Lower-income individuals, on average, see unions quite positively. This is not unique to a given year or election cycle. In this section, we saw that the positive views of

labor unions by lower-income individuals holds across at least the past twenty years of data included in the ANES. However, there are other considerations, aside from income, that may also affect how people view unions and labor policy.

The Competing Effects of Partisanship and Work

Although lower-income individuals see unions more positively than their upper-income counterparts, there are other considerations that may be relevant to how individuals see unions. As noted above, it is difficult to identify exactly *how* individuals see unions—that is, what image comes to mind when people think of unions.

We can, however, use large scale surveys to examine *what* people think of unions—such as whether they see unions positively or negatively, whether they think they are important or not, and so on—and from these assessments, we can draw on other research such as work in public opinion and industrial relations and offer theories that explain *why* people see unions as they do.

Research in public opinion has long sought to explain the factors that affect individuals' attitudes toward policies, groups, and institutions. Much research in public opinion points to the ways that stances taken by one's political party affect the way individuals view the political world. Scholarship often finds that partisanship is the single most important factor to explain people's attitudes toward policies and other aspects of the political world.

The notion that partisanship serves as a “perceptual screen” through which one understands the political world stems from early work by Angus Campbell and colleagues (1960) who saw party identification—one of a number of cues that affect

voters' decisions (Lau and Redlawsk 2001)—as a deep attachment that shaped individuals' vote choice. In terms of policies and attitudes, Zaller (1992) laid the foundation of much public opinion research and argued that most individuals do not hold consistent views, but instead have a number of “considerations” that they draw on when asked for their views. The sources of these considerations include the media and political elites.

Labor unions have been closely associated with the Democratic party for many years (Dark 1999). Labor unions have provided substantial political and electoral resources to Democratic candidates (Francia 2010). Republican elites, on the other hand, have sought to actively undermine unions and worker rights—ranging from former President Ronald Reagan's highly public termination of over 11,000 air traffic controllers in 1981 to Former Governor Scott Walker's curtailment of union rights in Wisconsin.

This research would lead us to expect that individuals who identify as Democrats hold high opinions of unions and those who identify with the Republican party—following their party's elites—should largely reject the importance of labor unions and see them unfavorably. However, this presupposes that individuals have no other viable source of information that could influence their views of labor unions beyond the preferences of their respective party elites.

While individual partisans may adhere to their party's preferences on many issues and policies, not all issues affect individuals equally. Labor unions occupy an important domain in the social world: the domain of work. Work is a central sphere that shapes many parts of one's life. Given the meager social policy regime in the U.S., many of the provisions that shape Americans' well-being—such as wages, the availability and quality

of health insurance, paid time off for illness or family leave, control over one's schedule, and retirement security—are intimately tied to the workplace.

Why might work be important for attitudes toward unions? There are two reasons why work may be important for attitudes toward unions. The first reason relates to work—and the experience of work in the U.S. The second reason stems from how unions might affect that experience.

The U.S. is notable not only for its meager social policies, but also for a very large and growing low-wage workforce (Doussard 2013; Gautie and Schmitt 2010; Kalleberg 2009, 2011; Weil 2014; Thelen 2019). Roughly one in four jobs in the U.S. is considered low-wage. These jobs—including work in areas such as food services, retail, home healthcare, delivery fulfillment, ride-hailing, janitorial services, and private protective services—are routinely characterized by diminished working conditions, decentralized employment relations, low wages, scarce benefits, and lack of schedule control (Appelbaum and Schmitt 2009; Doussard 2013; Gautie and Schmitt 2010; Kalleberg 2011; Weil 2014). Although estimates of the partisan composition of the low-wage workforce is a nascent area of research, there is little doubt that both Republicans and Democrats in the U.S. hold jobs in the low-wage workforce. This means that both Democrats and Republicans experience the diminished working conditions it entails. Why might those who work in diminished and insecure areas of the labor market come to think of unions differently?

Labor unions have long been vital institutions that improve working conditions for workers. Indeed, this is part and parcel what a union is and what it does: an institution that takes its strength from the collective power of individual workers who then wield and

direct that power to shape their experiences, their treatment at work, and their well-being on their own terms rather than have those terms dictated to them by their employer. This view of unions is not theoretical. Empirical research has repeatedly found that unions improve working conditions and the well-being of workers in numerous ways. Unions increase workers' control over their schedules (Lyness et al. 2012), inform workers of their rights (Kramer 2008), allow workers to feel more secure in their jobs (Brochu and Morin 2012), increase workers' wages and benefits (Budd and McCall 2004; Card 1996; Schmitt et al. 2008), and create safer and healthier working conditions (Hagedorn et al. 2016; Reynolds and Brady 2012).

These considerations raise questions about the extent to which partisanship dominates attitudes toward unions. On the one hand, Republican elites have offered clear signals that unions should not be seen favorably. On the other hand, low-wage work is widespread in the U.S. labor market and unions do much to improve working conditions, a consideration that is rooted in the importance of work to individuals' well-being and that binds workers according to a common experience. If the latter argument, which rests on the importance of labor market experience, is valid, we should see lower-income Republicans who work in manual labor and service sector work exhibit more positive views of unions than other Republicans who either work in areas where working conditions are better or come from higher income households.

Similarly, a conflict between partisanship and work experience may be present for Democrats as well. Although support should be generally high among Democrats, upper-income Democrats may not see labor unions as important entities or offer only tepid support on the basis of party cues rather than any substantive commitment to improving

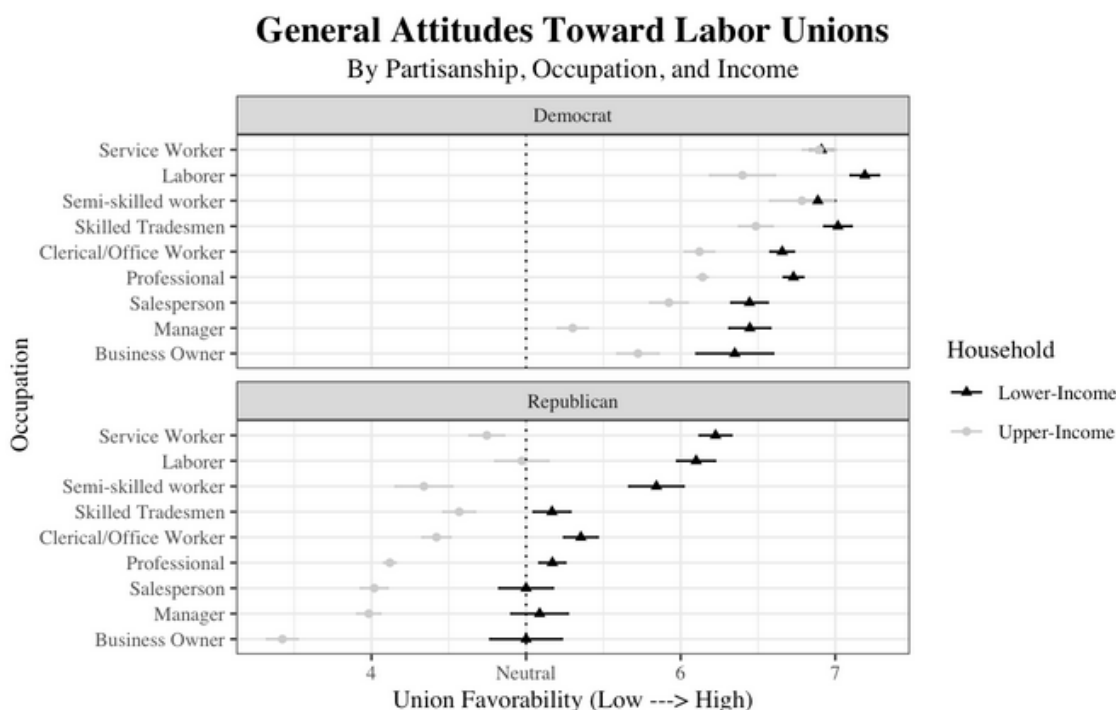
working conditions. Furthermore, Democrats who are in positions in the labor market where antiunion sentiment is particularly high—such as management—may absorb these norms and integrate them into their attitudes about unions. If so, management Democrats’ attitudes toward unions may be tempered by the inculcation of antiunion sentiment.

To examine these attitudinal dimensions, this section draws on data from the NAES. This is a particularly appropriate source of data as it contains a question about general attitudes toward unions that was asked to a large enough sample to allow for subgroup analysis on the basis of both occupation and household income. To analyze attitudes toward unions, I disaggregate the data and calculate mean ratings of unions offered by respondents across subgroups conditional on party identification, occupation, and household income.

A brief note on the data and measures is in order before proceeding to the results. First, party identification includes those who identify as Republicans or Democrats as well as those who “lean” toward one party or the other. Second, household income is disaggregated into lower-, middle-, and upper- as described above. Third, occupation is grouped according to the nine categories included in the NAES survey. Lastly, the outcome measure—attitudes toward unions—is an item that asks respondents to rate labor unions on a scale of 0 to 10. The question includes wording that explains that 0 is very unfavorable, five is neither favorable nor unfavorable, and 10 is very favorable. To assess attitudes, mean scores are calculated for all possible combinations of the three variables above.

The results are presented in the plot below in Figure 6.2. The plot contains a lot of information so it is worth pausing to explain what it is showing. Along the x-axis is the

mean level of labor union favorability. As a reminder, the scale runs from 0 to 10. The horizontal dotted line is set at the x-intercept of 5. Values at 5 are considered neutral while those below 5 (to the left of the dotted line) are unfavorable and those above 5 (to the right of the dotted line) are considered favorable scores. The two panes show the values for Democrats (top pane) and Republicans (bottom pane). The values are then displayed by household income (middle-income results are omitted in the interest of clarity) and occupation. Lower-income individuals' ratings are black and marked by a triangle while upper-income individuals' ratings are shown in gray and marked by a circle. Finally, the occupations are displayed along the y-axis.



Note: By party identification, occupation, and household income.
Favorability scale from 0 (low) to 10 (high).
Data from NAES 2004, n = 41,369.

Figure 6.2: General Attitudes Toward Labor Unions

Combining all of this, we can see for instance, that of all subgroups, upper-income Republican business owners, on average, hold the least favorable view of labor unions with a mean rating of 3.42 (SD = 2.37) out of 10. At the other extreme, labor unions are held in the highest esteem, with an average rating of 7.19 (SD = 2.53) out of 10, by lower-income Democrats who work as laborers (e.g. plumber's helper, construction worker, garbage collector, other physical work).

Some general observations, aside from the poles of favorability, are also evident. In line with the ANES data in the last section, lower-income individuals in both parties tend to hold more positive views of labor unions than their upper-income co-partisans. In terms of the differences between lower- and upper-income partisans, in all but two occupations (semi-skilled and service sector Democrats), the differences are significantly different. In addition, the average scores for Democrats are all positive, although to different degrees. Additionally, most lower-income Republicans hold views that are significantly positive, with the exception of those who work as salespersons, managers, and business owners for whom attitudes toward unions are roughly neutral.

In terms of the expectations outlined above, partisanship does appear to be an important factor for individual attitudes toward unions. However, there are some important cleavages across occupations that suggest that individuals' attitudes are also affected by their workplace experiences. Specifically, the two cross-cutting influences outlined above appears to find support in the data: Republicans who have experience in workplaces with diminished working conditions appear to translate this experience into greater support for an institution that could improve that experience while Democrats' attitudes toward unions are tempered when in a segment of the labor market where

antiunion sentiment is pervasive, well-known, and interwoven into the norms of the position.

This can be seen by looking more closely at some subgroups. Lower-income Republicans who work in service (e.g. waiter/waitress, maid, nurse's aide, health attendant, hair stylist), as a laborer (plumber's helper, construction, garbage collector, manual labor), or as a semi-skilled worker (e.g. truck driver, taxi driver, assembly line worker) tend to see labor unions in a fairly positive light, with mean scores hovering around 6 to 6.5. One plausible explanation is that the working conditions and labor market experiences combine to yield fairly high support among these Republicans, despite the explicit opposition to labor unions among Republican elites.

There are also cleavages among Democrats that are likely a result of labor market experience. Specifically, Democrats who are upper-income business owners and managers are considerably less supportive of labor unions. On a scale of 0 to 10, an upper-income Democrat manager's favorability toward union stands at a relatively low rating of 5.30 (SD = 2.35). This is in contrast to lower-income Republicans who work in the occupations in the service sector (M = 6.22, SD = 2.62), as a laborer (M = 6.10, SD = 2.80), and as a semi-skilled worker (M = 5.85, SD = 2.94). This can be seen in the simplified plot below which subsets the data to more closely compare lower-income Republican workers to upper-income Democratic managers and owners.

This point is worth emphasizing and is illustrated in Figure 6.3. If we consider the long line of research documenting the powerful influence of partisanship on individual attitudes toward issues and policies, the notion that Republican partisans are significantly *more supportive* of labor unions than Democratic partisans borders on outlandish.

However, while we do not know the causal mechanism driving this, I have proposed throughout this study that the labor market experience of individual partisans—with many lower-income Republicans facing highly diminished working conditions and upper-income Democrats immersed in environments where antiunion sentiment is strong and pervasive—appears to shape attitudes about labor unions in ways that illustrates the limits of partisanship and the importance of the workplace.

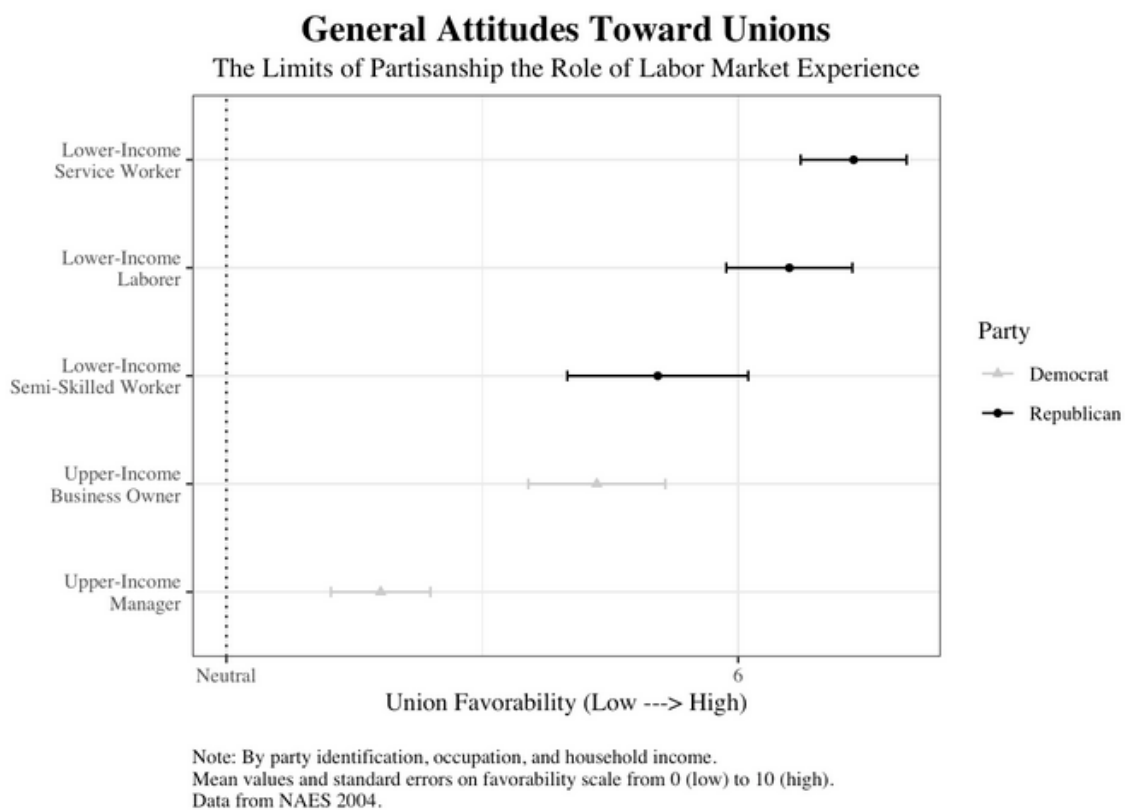


Figure 6.3: General Attitudes Toward Unions

Of course, we cannot rule out the possibility that some individuals who happen to be less favorable toward unions tend to seek out certain positions, such as Democrats who have low opinions of unions seeking a job in management. Yet if this is true—that union sentiment guides one’s labor market choices—then the inverse must also be true:

Republicans who are more supportive of labor unions seek out low-wage positions such as service work, manual labor work, or other semi-skilled work. This is far less plausible.

Instead, a more realistic causal sequence is that individuals of whichever party enter into the labor market and then come to see labor unions in a different light. A low-wage worker—whether Republican, Democrat, or independent—may come to find that unions appear to a viable path to redress the circumstances found in the workplace—whether it be low pay, lack of benefits, little control over scheduling, or more pernicious elements of the workplace such as wage theft, harassment, or intimidation. In any event, the evaluation of labor unions may be less subject to the otherwise powerful influence of partisanship and the preferences of political elites and instead tethered to a more immediate experience common to nearly all Americans: work.

Policy-Specific Attitudes: Worker Rights and Unionization

General attitudes toward unions offer insight into the general, and somewhat abstract, perceptions that individuals have about unions. If someone holds a favorable view of labor unions, they are probably supportive of other, more specific policies that relate to the workplace and to labor unions. However, it is not clear—in terms of substantive policy—what a rating of 7 out of 10 actually indicates. Does it mean the person merely likes the idea of unions and no more? Does it mean that they think unions are important institutions in society because they help people? Maybe it means the person thinks unions should be stronger or maybe the right to actually join a union is important. It simply isn't clear.

This concern is valid. Policy is not designed on the basis of arbitrary scores or ratings. Take the example of labor policy described earlier. In that example, we considered a group of workers seeking to form a labor union. But labor policy can take different forms. On the one hand, labor policy can be used to ensure workers' rights are upheld and protected during the unionization and employers who use illegal tactics are subject to considerable penalties that are strongly enforced. On the other hand, labor policy can do little to protect workers' rights and deter illegal behavior by employers who seek to impede workers' efforts to form a labor union.

In these two scenarios of labor policy, labor policy materializes in concrete actions, changes, penalties, enforcement, and decisions. This means that arbitrary ratings provide limited insight into policy-specific attitudes related to labor and the workplace.

This section addresses this shortcoming by examining attitudes toward two policy-specific aspects of the workplace: (1) worker rights; and (2) unionization.

Workers' Rights

The right to join a union is enshrined in the National Labor Relations Act that was passed into law in 1935. Highlighting the significance of the law for worker rights, President Roosevelt, in his signing statement, described the Act and the enforcement of the rights contained within it to be, "necessary as an act of both common justice and economic advance."

The Act, however, faced considerable opposition from the business community. To this day, staunch opposition to unionization among managers and owners in the American business community persists. Similarly, Republican political elites, largely

sympathetic to the preferences of business and other economic elites, are highly averse toward labor unions as they represent the only institution with the capacity to counterbalance the concentrated political and economic power of economic elites.

A core thread that runs through this project is that labor unions disproportionately benefit lower-income individuals. This chapter, however, has considered how individuals, particularly lower-income individuals, view unions and labor policy generally. In particular, we have seen how, despite the predictions in the public opinion literature that individuals follow the dictates of the party elites on policies and issues, lower-income Republicans appear to exhibit fairly positive views of labor unions. These views run contrary to the attitudinal signals that come from Republican elites suggesting that lower-income Republicans weigh their labor market experience more heavily than their partisanship.

However, given that the strength of labor unions depends on membership, individuals must, at some point, form and join unions. In chapter two, we saw that employer opposition to the formation of unions is intense and multifaceted, with employers using a range of tactics to dissuade workers from voting for a union.

In this section, we take up the question from the perspective of workers: do individuals think the right to join a union is important or not? Does the experience at the lower-end of the labor market where working conditions are diminished lead lower-income individuals to see the right to join a union as an important protection for workers or do they follow their party's lead yielding a split in which Democrats see it as important and Republicans do not?

The data to investigate this question come from an item on a survey conducted in 2010 by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) on behalf of the Public Welfare Foundation (NORC/Public Welfare Foundation 2010). In the survey, respondents were asked to what extent they consider the right to join a union is an important standard that the government should protect. The respondents were offered four answers: very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, or very unimportant. To examine attitudes toward worker rights, I recoded the answers as a binary variable: 1 if the respondent answered very important or somewhat important, and 0 otherwise. The respondent could also say that they did not know or refuse the question. If they answered either of these, they were coded as missing and dropped from the analysis.

The data are disaggregated by household income—lower, middle, and upper—and by party identification, measured by those who identified as a Republican or Democrat or said they “lean” toward one of the two parties. The bars represent the percentage who agree that the right to join a union is very or somewhat important while the bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Lower-income individuals not only express high levels of favorability in the general attitudinal measures as shown above, but also see the right to join a union as an important right—in some ways echoing President Roosevelt. Lower-income individuals are more likely than their richer co-partisans to say that the right to join a union is important. Among lower-income Democrats, 93% (CI 90%, 97) think the right to join a union is important. The proportion of agreement falls slightly to 87% (CI 76%, 91%) and

83% (CI 77%, 90%) among middle- to upper-income Democrats, respectively.¹⁶ The large confidence intervals are partially a result of the fairly small sample size.

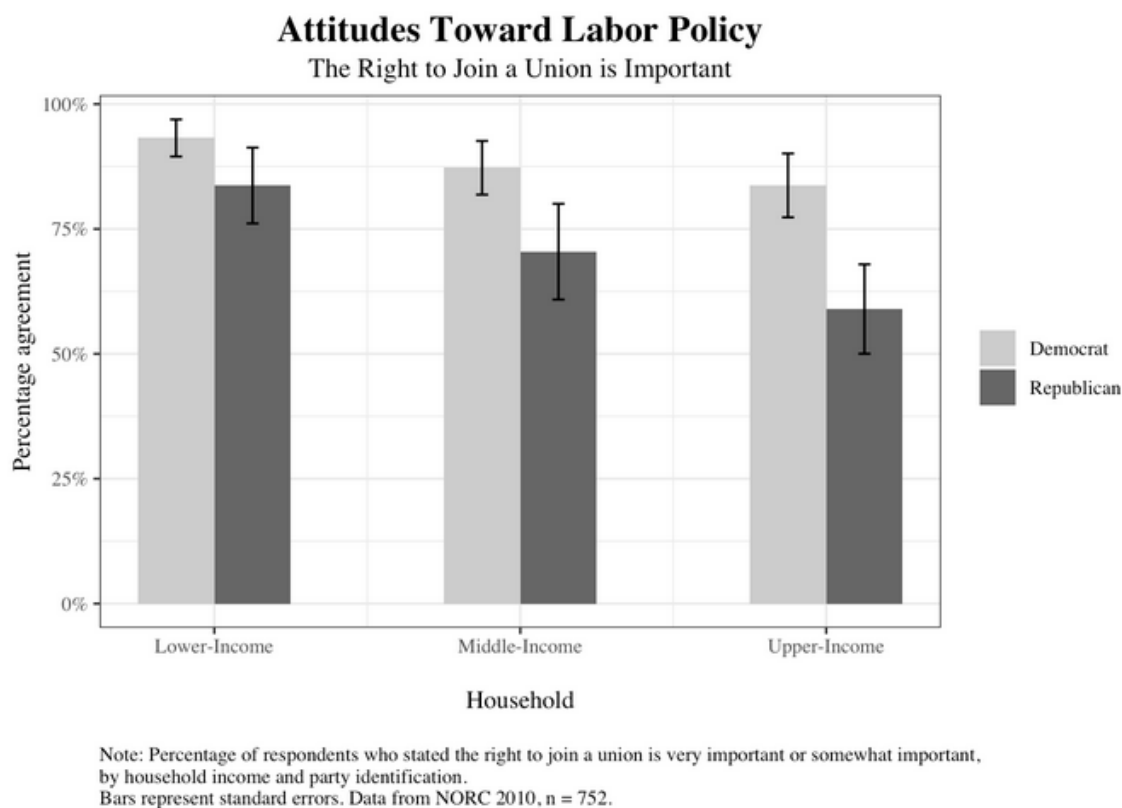


Figure 6.4: Attitudes Toward Labor Policy

Lower-income Republicans, most notably, appear to again deviate from the influence of partisanship. Among lower-income Republican respondents, 84% (CI 76%, 91%) think that the right to join a union is an important labor standard that government should protect. Of Republicans from middle-income households, 71% (CI 61%, 80%) believe the right to join a union is important, while only 59% (CI 50%, 68%) of upper-income Republicans believe it is important.

¹⁶ Weighted percentages are provided in the appendix are substantively similar.

Unfortunately, the NORC survey did not ask respondents about their occupation nor whether they or someone in their household is a member of a union. The occupational information is important as a proxy for labor market experience, as we saw in the previous section. We might expect lower-income service, manual, or semi-skilled workers—those most likely to face diminished working conditions—would be even more likely than others to see the right to join a union as an important right that should be protected.

In addition, it appears Republicans who come from union households may draw on this experience instead of the preferences of their party's elites and exhibit relatively high levels of support for worker rights—even offering support for unionization in low-wage sectors such as fast-food and retail—and see unions as important institutions in the workplace (Lyon 2018). If we had this information in the NORC survey, we might see that some of the middle and upper-income agreement is driven by Republicans who come from union households as they weigh this experience more heavily than their directives from their party elites.

Unionization

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) was written over 80 years ago. At the time, manufacturing constituted roughly a third of employment in the U.S. Today, manufacturing, as an industry, makes up only 8% of the U.S. labor market, while service work (including retail and education) comprises nearly 60% of the jobs in America.

This change has been substantial and has vastly reorganized the landscape of jobs in the U.S. Whereas factories and mills were the sites of highly contentious disputes between workers and owners in the early 20th century, today, large swaths of workers toil away in areas such as fast-food restaurants, retail chains, healthcare services, and delivery fulfillment.

The evolution of the labor market is important to note because the NLRA was written at a time when workers had access to substantial economic power and could completely shut down entire industries in order to obtain union recognition, better working conditions, and respect at work. In today's environment, service sector workers face substantial hurdles to form a union at work. These challenges are amplified by a sophisticated union opposition industry of consultants and lawyers that has evolved over the past few decades to assist employers in monitoring employee activity and stifling unionization campaigns (Windham 2017).

As the labor market has evolved, the laws governing the workplace have not. While the impact of a union may be substantial and beneficial for lower-income workers, the path to unionization is extremely fraught. Scholars have increasingly pointed to the antiquated nature of U.S. labor law and fundamentally reform a legal infrastructure almost a century old that is misaligned with contemporary labor markets (Andrias 2016).

In this section, I examine individual attitudes on policy that would ease the process of unionization, a reform many scholars point to as realign labor laws with contemporary labor markets. Assessing prospective policy adds an additional dimension to the question that has run through this section: what do people think about labor unions

and labor policy? This section is somewhat forward-looking: should labor policy be changed?

In particular, this section draws on the 2004 NAES survey, one of the few large-scale surveys to have asked a specific question about labor policy and unionization. The question asked respondents whether they favor or oppose “making it easier for labor unions to organize.” Two versions of the question were asked. One version had two answer options: favor or oppose. The second version offered five options from strongly favor to strongly oppose. To analyze these questions, the second version has been recoded to take the values of 1 if they respondent said they strongly favor or somewhat favor the policy, and 0 otherwise. The first version is coded the same way and the two questions have been merged (respondents only received one version of the question).

The nature of the question is arguably the most “political” of the items examined so far in this section. Unlike the general attitudes toward unions or views on the importance of the right to join a union, this question invokes *policy change*. In this sense, the question most closely approximates a policy that could figure into the political platform of a party or candidate. This is important since the question is more likely to invoke partisan affiliations and therefore provides a fairly stringent test of the party-dominance theories in much of the public opinion and political attitudes literature in political science.

The results are reported in the Figure 6.5 below. There is a lot of information contained in the figure so it is worth pausing to walk through what the plot is showing. First, the horizontal axis indicates the percentage of respondents who favor making it easier for labor unions to organize. Second, the top pane displays the results for

Democrats and the bottom pane reports the results for Republicans. The figures include individuals who identify with the party as well as those who said they lean toward one of the parties. Next, data are disaggregated within each party by two additional respondent characteristics: occupation, listed down the left side, and their household income, with black bars representing lower-income respondents and gray bars signifying upper-income respondents. Lastly, in order to ease interpretation, a dotted vertical line is added at the 50% mark. Bars that cross the dotted line to the right indicate simple majority support for making union organizing easier.

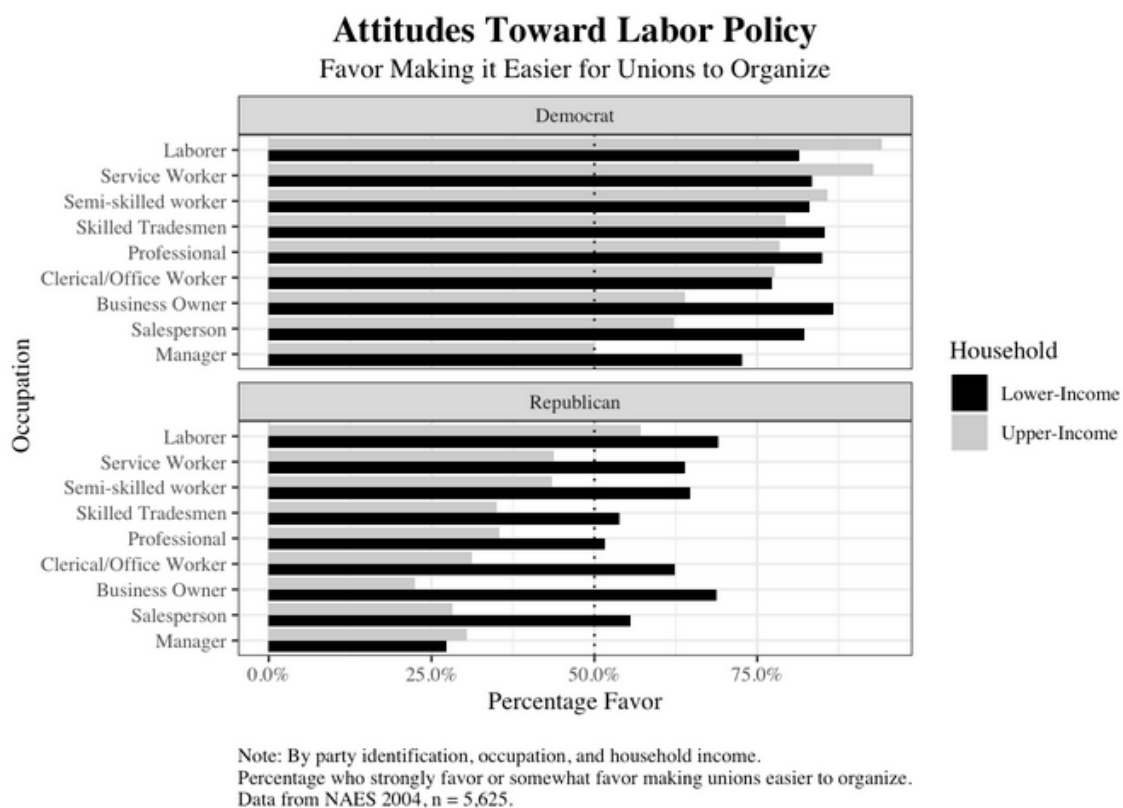


Figure 6.5: Support for Making Union Organizing Easier

At first glance, it is immediately clear that simple majorities of lower- and upper-income Democrats and lower-income Republicans all favor labor policy that would make union organizing easier. Over half of upper-income Republicans in the sample also favor

such a policy. Upper-income Republicans in all other occupations are less supportive of such a policy, with managers and upper-income Republican business owners particularly opposed with only 24% favoring such a policy.

Looking at intraparty differences by respondents' income and occupation illustrates the cross-cutting influences of partisanship and labor market experience. Among Democrats, a policy that would make it easier to unionize appears to have considerable support across income level and most occupations. For instance, 94% of upper-income laborers support the policy, 87% of lower-income tradesmen, and 86% of lower-income service workers favor easing the path to unionization. Noteworthy exceptions within the party are upper-income individuals who work in sales, as business owners, or in management. Although support is still above 50% for each of these, support for such a policy among upper-income Democratic managers, for instance, falls dramatically to just 57%.

This finding—that there are large differences within the Democratic party on this basis of labor market or occupational experience—is particularly noteworthy in light of recent work that assesses the political preferences of economic elites in the technology sector—an industry that is increasingly involved in seeking influence the political sphere and within the Democratic party specifically.

In a novel survey of technology executives, Broockman et al. (2019) found that technology elites endorse a number of positions that might be termed “liberal” including support for same-sex marriage, abortion, immigration, and higher taxes. However, on issues such as labor market regulation and labor unions, these otherwise typically liberal elites were strongly opposed to more expansive labor policy with 76% indicating that

they would like to see labor unions' influence decline (Broockman et al. 2019, 229). In a striking example of how labor market experience and position in the process of production interacts with, or overrides, partisanship, the authors note that, in terms of labor market regulation and worker protections, "technology entrepreneurs are indeed more conservative even than Republican citizens," (2018, 222).

Moving to the bottom pane of Figure 6.5, there are notable differences across occupations within the Republican party that seemingly reinforces the finding the authors describe. Although their survey was a targeted instrument designed to assess economic elites in a particular industry, the results here, admittedly less fine-grained given the more expansive categories, are similar and echo the results above in which upper-income Democratic managers and owners are *less supportive* of labor unions than lower-income Republican workers.

In the bottom pane of Figure 6.5, the percentage of lower-income Republicans who favor more expansive labor policy is above 50% for all occupations except management. Lower-income Republican business owners (likely small shopkeepers), laborers, and service workers are among the most supportive with support around 70%.

Another way to examine the data is to subset according to those who have direct experience with labor unions and those who do not. Empirically, unions have been found to provide positive benefits to workers—and by extension their families—in a range of areas (Brochu and Moring 2012; Budd and McCall 2004; Card 1996; Hagedorn et al. 2016; Lyness et al. 2012; Reynolds and Brady 2012). Therefore, for Democrats, direct experience with the benefits unions provide may augment the cues from their party and increase support for labor policy to make it easier to form unions. Republicans, on the

other hand, may weigh their experience with unions more heavily than the generally antiunion attitudinal cues stemming from Republican political elites and offer support for making unions easier to organize.

In Figure 6.6, the percentages of support for making unions easier to form are presented by party identification and union experience—whether the respondent indicated they or someone they live with is a member of a union. The results are consistent with expectations. Support is above 50% for each category except Republicans from non-union households. Support is very high among Democrats who come from union households—92% support making unions easier to organize. Non-union Democrats and Republicans from union households hold similar views with 78% and 70%, respectively, expressing support for expansive labor policy. The lowest level of support is found among Republicans who do not have any experience with a union. Of this group, 42% favor making it easier to organize unions.

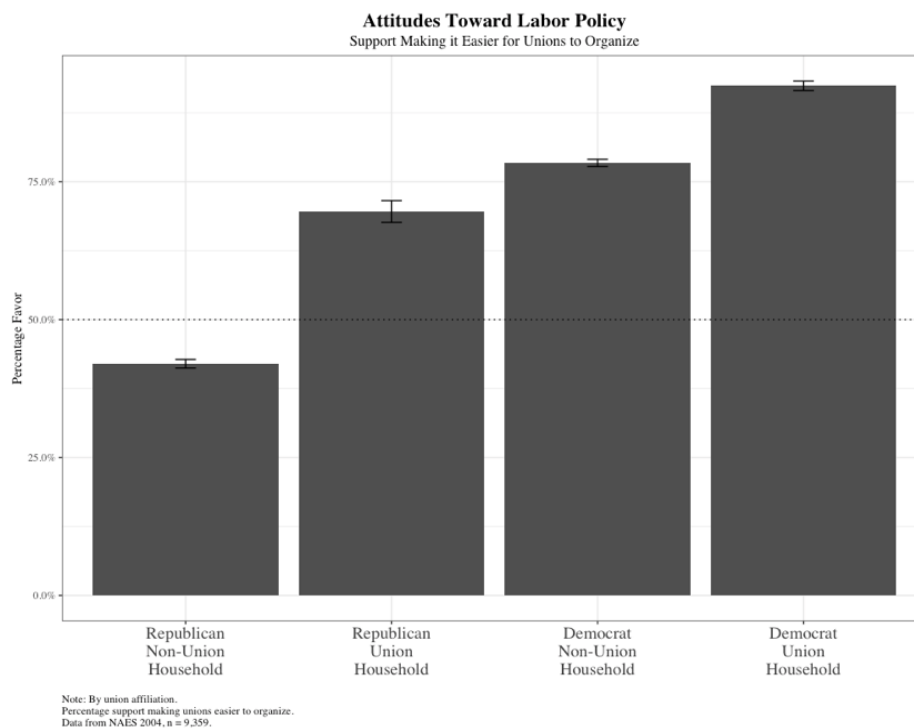


Figure 6.6: Attitudes Toward Labor Policy

The results of this chapter raise a number of points and important avenues for future research. While other factors likely play a role in attitudes toward labor policy—such as educational attainment—the results here nonetheless present preliminary evidence that suggests that there is much to be learned about the ways that partisanship, labor market experience, and attitudes toward labor policy interact.

Discussion

First, the results, while preliminary, indicate that the lack of response by policymakers may stem, in part, from the fact that support for unions is highest among lower-income individuals. Given that policymakers tend to respond to those individuals who are most participatory and can reciprocate with votes and donations (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012; Strollovitch 2006; Rigby and Wright 2013), the lack of response to declining unionization may be partly due to the lower levels of support among richer individuals. Indeed, many of these individuals are likely vehemently opposed to the expansion of labor unions as unions—both historically and empirically—represent the main reservoir of contestation against unchecked political economic power—something upper-income individuals have accumulated at dizzying rates since the 1970s.

Although upper-income individuals see unions less favorably, those who identify with the Democratic party often, but not always, see unions more favorably. This is understandable as unions have long supported the Democratic party with donations, get out the vote campaigns, endorsements, and other forms of political and electoral power (Francia 2010).

Second, there appears to be latent support for expansive labor policy that cuts across party lines. There is considerable support—from Democrats, Independents, and Republicans—that may fall on deaf ears among many policymakers who are attuned to the preferences of the wealthy. However, the latent support suggests that a policymaker who offers a political program that is built on the importance of labor policy, working conditions, and wages and how unions affect them may attract support from large swaths of the U.S.

However, by some measures, lower-income Democrats and lower-income Republicans hold roughly similar views, both offering strong support for labor unions. Although partisanship is known to be an important source information in the formation of political attitudes (Campbell et al. 1960), emerging research indicates that individuals' experiences can override their partisan allegiances in important ways in areas such as health policy (Lerman and McCabe 2017) and labor policy (Lyon 2018).

An important factor in views on unions appears to be the industry or occupation in which an individual works. Those who are exposed to environments characterized by low pay, scarce benefits, and diminished working conditions may weigh these experiences more heavily than the stance of their party in their views on labor policy (Lyon 2018). For instance, by some measures, lower-income Republicans who work in the service sector—including low-wage occupations such as food server, maid, nurse's aide, and hair stylist—or in a “semi-skilled” job—positions such as truck driver, taxi driver, or assembly line worker—see unions positively. In fact, these workers tend to hold views about unions similar to upper-income Democrats who work as managers or business owners.

Conclusion

In earlier chapters, we saw how labor unions are politically beneficial as they foster and facilitate political engagement in the form of political knowledge, concern about politics, and political participation in low-turnout, but consequential, elections such as primary elections. A crucial point emphasized in those chapters, however, was that the

impact unions have on these outcomes is conditional on one's resources. Lower-income individuals experience the most substantial benefits by virtue of union affiliation.

Unions may be beneficial for lower-income individuals, but this chapter asked: what do lower-income individuals think about unions? Do they want unions? On this point, the answer is certainly yes. Across a range of different measures, surveys, and time periods, lower-income individuals hold much more positive views of unions, are more likely to think that the right to join a union is an important right for the government to uphold, and are much more supportive of labor policy that would make it easier to organize labor unions.

In addition, much research on political attitudes and public opinion has been rooted in the notion that individuals tend to follow their party's elites and adopt the policy stances that align with their partisanship. In this sense, Democrats should support unions as they have long been a vital group working on behalf of Democratic candidates and priorities. Similarly, those who identify as Republican have no shortage of signals from Republican party elites that unions are undesirable and problematic.

This chapter challenges this partisan-dominated opinion view by considering the importance of labor market experience on attitudes toward unions. And, indeed, there was cross-cutting evidence that labor market experience does, in fact, interact with partisanship. For Democrats, those who work in industries or occupations where antiunion sentiment is high and routinely inculcated—such as high-income managers—support for unions was considerably tempered relative to other Democrats who work in other segments of the labor market.

Conversely, Republicans—who according to much research on political attitudes should hold relatively negative views of labor unions given unions’ close proximity to the Democratic party—also appeared to weigh their labor market experience when considering labor policy. Most notably, lower-income Republican service sector workers, manual laborers, and semi-skilled workers expressed higher levels of support for unions than upper-income Democrats who work as managers and owners.

Future research should build on the findings in this chapter by drawing on both quantitative research that considers attitudes in a multivariate setting as well as qualitative research that probes into the depths of *how* people think about labor policy and unions, not just *what* they think.

In addition to the conventional considerations such as political ideology and partisanship, future research that draws on exposure to areas of the labor market where working conditions are diminished and insecure may add important insights to how individuals think about work, labor policy, and the role of unions in a democratic society.

Chapter 7

Institutions, Inequality, and American Democracy

How do lower-income individuals get involved in politics? The answer to this question—one that is at the heart of the current study and invokes core questions of political participation and inequality—is that labor unions are a crucial piece of the answer. Labor unions—seen here as non-substitutable, democratizing institutions—are foundations upon which lower-income individuals are drawn into politics, have opportunities to engage with their political system, and level the participatory playing field in American politics.

Given the challenges posed by federalism for political action, the results point to a crucial institution capable of helping lower-income individuals overcome the hurdles and engage in the political sphere. Labor unions, a *non-substitutable* institution with the capacity, unlike other institutions in American politics, to organize and mobilize individuals *horizontally*—transcending demographic divisions such as race and gender—as well as *vertically*—permeating the layers of the American federal system from local to state to national politics—and foster a more democratic and robust American democracy. Moreover, disentangling the notion of political engagement sheds light on the importance of institutions for different individuals across different areas of political engagement. The findings in this study speak to larger trends in American politics and locate institutions as central to political participation.

First, research on institutions has largely focused on formal political institutions such as courts or legislatures or political parties. These insights are important for understanding how institutional structure affects policy outcomes, but these are largely

top-down institutions in which power rests at the upper levels of the institution. Other research on broad-based—or democratizing—institutions has focused on religious institutions. In this study, I locate labor unions as central institutions that are distinct from other groups and that serve as a vital institutional source of political engagement for individuals across the income distribution but that are most significant for those from lower-income households.

Second, drawing on a range of data and original coding of union websites, I find unions are conditionally consequential for *lower-income individuals* and foster deeper, non-procedural forms of political engagement—such as political knowledge, interest, and political discussion—but in terms of procedural acts such as voting, unions are associated with higher levels of political activity for individuals *across* the income distribution.

Third, the theoretical distinction between procedural and non-procedural political engagement expands our understanding of a concept that is multidimensional and encompasses different types of political involvement. This study elaborates on this distinction and finds empirical support by drawing on latent variable analyses. Importantly, the distinction between these two dimensions of political engagement is consequential for the way we understand the relationship between labor unions and individual political engagement. Labor unions are associated with higher levels of procedural engagement for individuals across the income and occupational distributions as unions serve to augment the link between individuals and their political system. However, unions serve to distill information and clarify the link between lower-income individuals and the political system in ways that other factors—such as education or social networks—do for higher income individuals.

Fourth, lower-income individuals across party lines hold very favorable views of unions. Although public opinion research indicates that partisanship plays an outsized role in individuals' attitudes, the findings suggest that individuals may have another source of reasoning—such as their labor market experience and immediate concerns—that informs policy attitudes in the realm of work and labor. Research on attitudes toward labor policy is a relatively underdeveloped area of work in political science. Given the increasingly fractured and eroding labor market in the U.S., the results in this study suggest that there is fertile ground for research on how individuals balance their labor market experience and partisanship in the domain of labor policy.

Limitations

The results in this study draw on large scale surveys to examine the role of unions across different measures of political engagement. Although this approach is important to yield generalizable and reliable estimates, it remains unclear whether unions *cause* higher levels of political engagement. Politically engaged individuals may be more likely to join unions. This raises the prospect of the “selection effect.” Additionally, although the models in this study control for a range of factors known to be powerful predictors of political engagement, there may be a third factor that affects both the likelihood of joining a union and the tendency to be politically engaged. Although concerns about “reverse causation” are valid, there are at least two reasons that militate against such concerns.

Concerns about reverse causality—such that politically engaged individuals are more likely to join a union rather than the union making them more politically engaged—

depends on two assumptions. Second, it assumes joining a union is a choice. For most workers—depending on their state—it is not a choice.

The second, more significant, assumption is that individuals can easily and readily join unions as they please. This assumption is highly questionable on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Unionized jobs have been steadily declining for decades and unionizing is an extremely difficult process in which workers face intense and sophisticated opposition from employers including poor treatment at work, termination, leaflets sent to workers' homes, one-on-one meetings, and threats of job loss (e.g. Brofenbrenner 2000, 2009). The difficulty of such a process is amplified still in the context of lower-income workers—such as retail, food service, delivery, or hotel workers—who have much to lose and seldom few resources to sustain unionization drives against large and powerful multinational businesses. The notion that politically engaged workers can seek out and join unions with ease is a valid concern in the cross-section analysis. However, such concerns rest on bold assumptions on which empirical evidence casts considerable doubt.

Another limitation of this study is that we cannot be sure about the causal mechanism that runs from union affiliation to political engagement. This is discussed in detail in chapter two which highlights the ways that unions explicitly emphasize the role of the political system, political engagement, and the union as a central source of political information in workers' lives. Unions organize voter drives, provide information on policies and policymakers, hold meetings, encourage members to get involved with the political efforts of the unions, and explicitly seek to tie workers' well-being to the local, state, and national policy processes. These avenues expose workers to politics in a range

of forms and are likely to increase one's level of political knowledge, interest in politics, and many workers who are members of a union will probably find themselves discussing politics much more often than otherwise comparable workers who lack an institution with political infrastructure to channel political developments to them.

However, with the methods employed in this study, the mechanism at play is not certain. Additional research that draws on more fine-grained methods may be useful to examine such mechanisms. For instance, in-depth interviews with workers themselves may be particularly useful to tease out these factors and ask them how and when the union provides opportunities for political engagement and what difference that makes to them. Additionally, panel analyses that allows for within-respondent analysis on questions of political engagement may help examine the causal impact of union affiliation by offering empirical insight into one's engagement before and after joining a union.

Future Research

This project lays the groundwork for a number of avenues for future research. There are three main streams of work that could extend our understanding of the workplace, unions, political behavior, and political processes—and the relationship between them.

First, this study examines a number of indicators of political knowledge as a component of political engagement, but future research may extend these analyses to examine knowledge of particular policies that may be most relevant to lower-income workers. For instance, Kramer (2008) finds that union members are significantly more

likely to be aware of their legal right to take parental leave than non-union members. Bernhardt et al., in a novel survey of low-wage workers, found that workers who could correctly identify the minimum wage were significantly less likely to experience wage theft (2013, 822-3).

Extending these insights to other policies—including expansive labor policies increasingly enacted at the local and state level in the U.S. such as paid sick leave and fair scheduling policies—could yield important insights about the role of institutions, political engagement, and the diffusion of policy information and could have concrete implications for workers and their well-being. Moreover, research points to the ways that both governmental regulation and labor market institutions coordinate to ensure labor laws are upheld for all workers—particularly those in low-wage industries (Fine 2017; Fine and Gordon 2010; Fine and Lyon 2017). Closer attention to the processes through which institutions such as unions or worker centers provide policy information and assist workers to ensure their rights in the workplace are upheld and respected may be important avenues to pursue in future research on the relationship between workplace institutions, workers’ knowledge, and the political process in which it is embedded.

Second, public opinion research has long documented the ways that public attitudes are shaped and influenced by partisanship and party identification (Campbell et al. 1960) and the actions of elites (Zaller 1992; Lenz 2009, 2012). However, research on public attitudes toward labor unions, or labor policy generally, has received little attention in political science. Emergent work that examines the cross-pressures of labor market experience and partisanship may uncover important insights. Are all Democrats supportive of labor unions and all Republicans opposed as the party stereotypes might

suggest, or are there cross-cutting cleavages between and within parties in which preferences run counter to party stereotypes? If Republicans and Democrats experience similar working conditions and wages, do they form attitudes according to some common interest in improving those conditions? These questions have received surprisingly little attention, but represent potentially fruitful avenues for future research.

Third, American federalism presents structural challenges for mobilization, particularly among groups with few resources and organizational capacity (Miller 2007, 2008). A sharper focus on the ways that unions—institutions that typically transcend state boundaries—facilitate efficacy or engagement among members from different parts of the country could expand our understanding of the ways that institutions and federalism interact to affect social and political outcomes. For instance, 2018 saw an eruption of strikes by public school teachers, many of which took place in politically conservative or Republican-leaning states. In 2019, we saw over 30,000 unionized workers at a national supermarket chain go on strike in one of the largest cities in the United States.

Past research suggests that these experiences are politically consequential for the workers involved (Fantasia 1988). For instance, Lender (1997) examined a four-year strike at a firearms factory and found the strike spurred workers to become more politically engaged and informed and adopt more collectivist attitudes. Does a successful mobilization and strike increase efficacy among members of the same umbrella union who are in a different state and school system? Furthermore, what effect does striking with fellow workers—particularly those from different political parties—have on one's political attitudes about unions or engagement with labor policy? These lines research are promising avenues to pursue that would contribute much to our understanding of

collective action, political attitudes, and the often competing influence of partisanship and work.

Conclusion

A healthy democracy is dependent on a robust and engaged electorate. For the past three decades, American politics has been marked by polarization and rising economic inequality with two durable trends: immense concentration of resources in fewer and fewer hands and the persistence of low-wage work, industries home to nearly a quarter of all working Americans. These well-documented developments have pernicious consequences for a democratic society and representative system of government.¹⁷ Given a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the institutions necessary to mitigate unequal levels of political engagement, trends like rising inequality that may on their face seem intractable, become comprehensible, mutable, and surmountable, rendering it a problem that is not beyond the reach of policy.

¹⁷ Aside from the moral perversion widening chasms between the rich and poor implies, high inequality has been empirically found to yield more widespread authoritarian attitudes in society (Solt 2012), greater intolerance of sexual minorities (Andersen and Fetner 2008), substantially weakened democratic institutions (Houle 2009), more widespread and fervent belief in nationalism (Solt 2011), and poorer societal health outcomes (Pickett and Wilkinson 2015).

Appendix

Unions included in website coding.

Name	Members
National Education Association of the United States	2,731,419
Service Employees International Union	1,901,161
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees	1,459,511
Teamsters	1,400,000
United Food and Commercial Workers	1,300,000
American Federation of Teachers	828,512
United Steelworkers	860,264
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers	704,794
Laborers' International Union of North America	669,772
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers	653,781
United Auto Workers	990,000
Communications Workers of America	545,638
United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America	522,416
UNITE HERE	270,000
International Longshore and Warehouse Union	424,579
International Union of Operating Engineers	392,584
United Association	324,043
National Association of Letter Carriers	292,221
American Postal Workers Union	286,700
International Association of Fire Fighters	271,463
National Postal Mail Handlers Union	269,204
American Federation of Government Employees	289,023
Amalgamated Transit Union	190,000
National Nurses United	152,294
Sheet Metal Workers International Association	216,000
International Union of Painters and Allied Trades	127,278
Ironworkers/International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental, and Reinforcing Iron Workers	125,437
Transport Workers Union of America	125,398
International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees	122,000
American Association of Classified School Employees	111,851
National Rural Letter Carriers' Association	104,717

Bakery Confectionery Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers	155,000
United Mine Workers	80,000
Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union	60,000
SOURCE: https://www.dol.gov/olms/	

Question wording for variables in analyses.

Chapter 3

General Political Knowledge Six-Item Scale (2004)

Institutional item #1: Vice president (variable name: cMC01)

“Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Dick Cheney?”

Institutional item #2: Supreme Court (cMC03)

“Who has the final responsibility to determine if a law is constitutional or not? Is it the president, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?”

Institutional item #3: Two-Thirds Veto (cMC05)

“How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto?”

Institutional item #4: House majority (cMC07)

“Do you happen to know which party has the most members in the United States House of Representatives?”

Ideological placement #1: Bush (cAA30)

“Which of the following best describes the views of George W. Bush—very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?”

Ideological placement #2: Kerry (cAB27)

“Which of the following best describes the views of George W. Bush—very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?”

General Political Knowledge Six-Item Scale (2008)

Institutional item #1: Supreme Court judges (variable name: cMC01)

“To the best of your knowledge, do you happen to know how Supreme Court justices are chosen? Are they nominated by a nonpartisan congressional committee, elected by the American people, nominated by the president and then confirmed by the Senate, or appointed if they receive a two-thirds majority vote of the justices already on the court?”

Institutional item #2: Supreme Court (MC01_c)

“Who has the final responsibility to determine if a law is constitutional or not? Is it the president, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?”

Institutional item #3: Two-Thirds Veto (MC02_c)

“How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto?”

Institutional item #4: House majority (MC03_c)

“Do you happen to know which party has the most members in the United States House of Representatives?”

Ideological placement #1: McCain (AAm04_c)

“Which of the following best describes the views of John McCain—very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?”

Ideological placement #2: Kerry (ABo04_c)

“Which of the following best describes the views of Barack Obama—very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?”

Policy-Specific Knowledge: Minimum wage (2004: cCB66)

“To the best of your knowledge, which candidate favors/favored increasing the \$5.15 minimum wage employers must pay their workers—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?”

Policy-Specific Knowledge: Ease unionization process (2004: cCB73)

“To the best of your knowledge, who wants to make it easier for unions to organize—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?”

Chapter 4

Political Discussion (2000: ck05; 2004: cKB01; 2008: KB01_c)

“How many days in the past week did you discuss politics with your family and friends?”

Political Concern (2000: ck04)

“Generally speaking, do/did, you care a great deal which party wins the 2000 presidential election or don’t/didn’t you care very much?”

Primary Voting (2000: rR15; 2004: cRB11; RBb02_c)

“In talking with people about politics and elections, we often find that they do not get a chance to vote. Did you happen to vote in your state’s recent presidential primary election?” (2000)

“In talking with people about politics and elections, we often find that they don’t get a change to vote. Did you happen to vote in your state’s recent presidential primary election or caucus?” (2004)

“Did you vote in the 2008 presidential primary or caucus in your state, or not?” (2008)

Chapter 6

Feeling Thermometer: Labor unions (ANES: VCF0210)

“We'd also like to get your feelings about some groups in American society. When I read the name of a group, we'd like you to rate it with what we call a feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees-100 degrees mean that you feel favorably and warm toward the group; ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorably towards the group and that you don't care too much for that group. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward a group you would rate them at 50 degrees. If we come to a group you don't know much about, just tell me and we'll move on to the next one.”

Right to Join a Union (NORC: Q1_2)

“The government sets various standards to protect workers’ rights. How important do you consider the following measures: right you join a union? Would you say they are very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, or very unimportant for workers?”

Response options: Very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, very unimportant, don’t know, refused.

Labor Unions Favorability (NAES 2004: cAE03)

“On a scale of zero to 10, how would rate labor unions? Zero means very unfavorable, and 10 means very favorable. Five means you do feel favorable or unfavorable. Of course you can use any number between zero and 10.”

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