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# Why Do Some Union Members Vote Republican? The Role of Workplace Political Discussion

David Macdonald[1,*]

[1]Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, US

**Abstract** Labor union members are more likely to vote than their nonunionized counterparts, and when they do vote, are more likely to support the Democratic Party. However, a sizable minority of union members vote Republican. This is puzzling, given that the national Republican Party has long been hostile toward organized labor. Extant research has clearly demonstrated that union and nonunion members differ in their voting behavior, but we know little about such variation among union members. I explore this latter phenomenon here, arguing that the frequency of workplace political discussion plays an important role in shaping how labor union members vote. I test this with data from the 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES). Overall, I find that workplace discussion of politics is positively and significantly associated with the probability that labor union members vote Democrat. This appears to occur via a "learning" mechanism, in which greater workplace discussion of politics leads union members to recognize which candidate is more "prolabor." Overall, these findings help us better understand the consequences of the workplace, political discussion, and the politics of American labor unions.

The Democratic Party and organized labor have long been political allies in the United States (Asher et al. 2001; Dark 2001; Lichtenstein 2002; Frymer 2008). This is evidenced by the fact that national labor groups such as the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) consistently endorse and donate large sums of money to Democratic politicians and candidates (Francia 2006). Relatedly, Democratic politicians are, on average, more likely to support prolabor policies than their Republican counterparts (Anzia and Moe 2016; Bucci and Jansa 2021), and are more likely to oppose Republican-led efforts to pass so-called "right to

*Corresponding author: David Macdonald, Department of Political Science, University of Florida-Gainesville, Gainesville, FL, US; email: davidmacdonald@ufl.edu.


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work" (RTW) legislation that can undermine labor unions, and by extension, the electoral prospects of the comparatively prolabor Democratic Party (Hertel-Fernandez 2018). At the mass level, labor union members and people in labor union households have long been more likely to identify as a Democrat and to vote for Democratic presidential candidates (Sousa 1993; Asher et al. 2001; Macdonald 2021).[1]

While the strength and warmth of this relationship (between organized labor and the Democratic Party) ebbs and flows over time (Dark 2001), and despite a decades-long decline in the membership and political clout of organized labor (Rosenfeld 2014), union affiliated Americans remain more "pro-Democrat" than their counterparts who are not union affiliated. In short, existing research has clearly identified partisan differences *between* unionized and nonunionized Americans but has not focused on partisan differences *among* unionized Americans. In other words, considerable attention has been paid to answering the question of *Are union members more likely to support the Democratic Party?*, while comparatively little attention has been paid to answering the question of *Why do some union members support the Republican Party?* I address this oversight here.

This paper proceeds as follows. I first show, using survey data from 1952 to 2020, that a sizable minority of union members who cast a ballot in presidential elections do so for Republican candidates. I next consider one potential explanation for this. I specifically argue that the frequency of workplace political discussion plays a role, net of individuals' socioeconomic status and other social group identities, in shaping union members' voting behavior. I draw on work that illustrates labor unions' ability to shape their members' political attitudes and behaviors and argue that more frequent workplace discussion likely reflects an environment in which union members are exposed to more "pro-Democrat" messages. Accordingly, I expect that union members who engage in more frequent workplace political discussion will be more likely to favor Democratic political candidates.

I test this with data from the 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES), a large, nationally representative phone survey of the US adult population. This survey is uniquely valuable because it not only asks about voting behavior and workplace political discussion, but also includes a sufficient number of union members to examine within-group variation, rather than simply comparing union and nonunion members. Overall, the results show that workplace political discussion is positively associated, to a substantively significant degree, with union members' likelihood of favoring

1. The mass-level relationship between labor union affiliation and Democratic Party support can be conditioned by factors such as individuals' race (Zingher 2023) and/or levels of political awareness (Jones 2023), but, on average, union-affiliated Americans are more likely to exhibit "pro-Democrat" sentiment.

Democrat John Kerry over Republican George W. Bush in the 2004 election. I then explore two potential mechanisms, "learning which candidate is more prolabor" versus "developing a stronger union identity," and find that the former appears to more strongly underlie this observed relationship.

Finally, I conclude by discussing why these findings are politically consequential. I argue that they advance cumulative knowledge about the politics of organized labor and help us better understand why some union members vote Democrat, as we would expect based on their social group identities and economic self-interest, and why some do not. More broadly, these findings help us better understand the political consequences of the workplace, the dynamics of "intragroup" attitudes, and illustrate when, how, and why organizations may be able to shape their members' electoral behavior.

## Background and Theoretical Argument

Despite the long-standing political alliance between organized labor and the Democratic Party, a nontrivial number of rank-and-file union members support Republican political candidates. The Democratic Party's share of the labor vote in national elections varies over time (Aldrich et al. 2022, chapter 5), but even during Democrat Lyndon B. Johnson's landslide victory in 1964, nearly one in five labor union members voted for archconservative Republican Barry Goldwater. While Democratic candidates have long won the labor vote, various Republicans have consistently garnered a sizable minority of it.

In table 1, I examine variation in the voting behavior of labor union members in US presidential elections. In the first three columns, I pool data from the 1952–2012 American National Election Studies (ANES). In the latter three columns, I pool data from the 2016 and 2020 Cooperative Election Studies (CES) to examine voting behavior among union members when Donald Trump, who, particularly in 2016, ran on a less consistently conservative economic platform than his Republican predecessors (Barber and Pope 2019), was on the ballot. The descriptive results in table 1 show that, on average, Republican presidential candidates (both pre- and post-Trump) are favored by nearly four in ten union members.[2]

Overall, the results in table 1 show considerable heterogeneity in the voting behavior of American labor union members and that, puzzlingly, a nontrivial share of these individuals do not vote for the comparatively "prolabor" Democratic candidate. One possibility is that being a labor union member is

2. I pooled ANES data (from 1952 to 2012) in order to garner a sufficient number of labor union members who voted. The CES has a much larger sample size than the ANES, and thus pooling across several decades is not necessary for more recent elections. The results in table 1 do not, of course, include nonvoters.

**Table 1.** Presidential vote choice among labor union members, 1952–2020.

| | ANES (1952–2012) | | | CES (2016–2020) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Democrat | Republican | Other | Democrat | Republican | Other |
| % | 59.4 | 36.6 | 4.1 | 57.7 | 37.4 | 4.9 |
| N | 1,421 | 808 | 97 | 2,903 | 1,480 | 310 |

*Note:* Shows the distribution of presidential vote choice (Dem vs. Rep vs. Other) among labor union members. Sources are the Cumulative ANES (respondents who were interviewed face-to-face) and the Cumulative CES (validated voters), survey weights applied for both. Please see Supplementary Material section B, pp. 6–7, for additional information on the variables used in these analyses.

simply not the sole, nor the most salient, social group to which people belong (Bruno 2000). As such, it is possible that their various other group memberships (Mason 2018) may "cross-pressure" (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954) labor union members, leading them to "defect" and vote Republican.

Net of such dynamics, I argue that the frequency with which union members engage in and/or are exposed to workplace political discussion matters as well. I argue that more frequent workplace political discussion reflects an environment with greater union efforts to inform, socialize, and mobilize rank-and-file members, and that such a dynamic is likely to shift these individuals toward union-endorsed candidates, who are most often Democrats.

In a recent qualitative study of several counties in Western Pennsylvania, Newman and Skocpol (2023) expertly combine data on interviews with current and former union members with historical analyses of how unions atrophied in this area to help explain why this former bastion of organized labor and Democratic stronghold has shifted toward the Republican Party. They specifically argue that the disappearance of unions from the workplace and from people's broader social networks has led to a collapse in left-wing and pro-Democrat messaging. This decline in meaningful union ties, and thus a disproportionately left-wing and "pro-Democrat" social network, became commonplace for many of these working-class individuals, and their previous "labor-centric" social networks and associated information flows were increasingly replaced by right-wing cues from disproportionately conservative "megachurches" and/or organizations such as the National Rifle Association (NRA) that stepped into the role that robust labor unions once played.

A few quantitative studies, also focusing on the so-called "Rust Belt" region of the United States, have sought to better understand why certain union members are more likely to vote Democrat than others, examining differences *among* union members, rather than between unionized versus nonunionized individuals. In one study, Juravich and Shergold (1988) show,

using data from a survey of AFL-CIO affiliated labor unions in Pennsylvania, that union members who attended meetings and who reported receiving "useful" union literature were more likely to support Walter Mondale, the 1984 Democratic nominee. Clark and Masters (2001) also examine Pennsylvania. They specifically show, using data from a 1995 survey of AFL-CIO union members, that union members who said they supported their union's political goals were more likely to vote Democrat for governor and the US Senate in the 1994 midterm elections. Zullo (2003) shows, using data from a survey of union members affiliated with the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, that exposure to workplace political education efforts was positively associated with support for Al Gore, the 2000 Democratic nominee. While insightful, these collective studies are not nationally representative and study only a few select unions in the Midwest. As such, it is unclear whether these findings are generalizable to US elections more broadly.

In short, existing work provides an important foundation upon which to build, and evidence to argue that labor unions can shape their members' voting behavior. What we lack is evidence from a large and nationally representative sample of union members, and a specific focus on how and why workplace political discussion matters for how union members vote.[3]

I argue that nonexistent or infrequent workplace political discussion plausibly reflects the absence of a social network and information environment that can promote, among union members, support for the Democratic Party (Macdonald 2021; Newman and Skocpol 2023). This dynamic, that is, nonexistent or infrequent workplace political discussion, could also mean that union members will be more susceptible to "cross-pressures" from their various other social group memberships (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Brader, Tucker, and Therriault 2014), for example, that a union member who frequently attends church will be more likely to make electoral choices based on their religious identification rather than their union affiliation (Bruno 2000; Bielski Boris and Bruno 2010). In short, labor union members in an environment where workplace political discussion is more common, something that likely reflects greater union communication, socialization, and mobilization efforts, should be more likely to hear and absorb

3. There are, of course, ways beyond workplace political discussion through which organized labor can mobilize, inform, and/or communicate with their members. This could include more impersonal contact methods such as newsletters, postcards, and/or emails. My claim here is not that workplace political discussion is *the only* way by which labor unions can reach their rank-and-file membership. Rather, my claim is that the presence of workplace political discussion (vs. not) reflects an environment (or a lack thereof) in which union members are more likely to be "exposed" to labor information flows and mobilization efforts that can "push" them to vote for (or against) a particular political candidate.

organized labor's political messaging, which, on average, articulates reasons to vote Democrat and/or reasons to not vote Republican.[4]

Union leaders have considerable ability to "set the agenda" and thus exert control over the nature of information flows (Lipset, Trow, and Coleman 1956; Ahlquist and Levi 2013). As such, political discussion in a union workplace is likely to center around the topics that union leadership want their rank-and-file to hear, for example, policies that are germane to their workplace, various political issues and debates, and, particularity during election years, what organized labor thinks about the various candidates and parties. This argument, that is, that the kind of union environment in which people are situated is politically consequential, is supported by a body of work, primarily in the United States but also in Europe, showing that labor unions are capable, through a variety of mechanisms, for example, information provision and socialization processes, of shaping their members' political attitudes, often in a manner consistent with organized labor's priorities.

Indeed, labor unions' ability to shape their members' political attitudes and behavior has been demonstrated in a variety of domains, including economic redistribution (Mosimann and Pontusson 2017; Macdonald 2019), trade (Ahlquist, Clayton, and Levi 2014; Kim and Margalit 2017), race (Frymer and Grumbach 2021), immigration (Donnelly 2016), workers' rights (Lyon 2020), identification as a member of the more economically egalitarian "working class" (Franko and Witko 2023), as well as partisanship and vote choice (Sousa 1993; Francia and Bigelow 2010; Arndt and Rennwald 2016; Macdonald 2021).

In sum, more frequent workplace political discussion, which, I argue, can help capture the extent to which union members are exposed to organized labor's communication, socialization, and mobilization efforts, should, all else equal, orient union members toward the "prolabor" Democratic Party and away from the "antilabor" Republican Party.

## Data and Methods

I test my hypothesis with data from the 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES). While these data are, at the time of this writing, nearly twenty years old, they are well suited for my purposes. Unlike the gold-standard American National Election Studies (ANES), the 2004 NAES specifically measures workplace discussion of politics, my main independent

4. For example, the AFL-CIO formally endorsed John Kerry for president on February 20, 2004. This formal statement included both "pro-Kerry" and "anti-Bush" language (https://aflcio.org/about/leadership/statements/senator-john-kerry-president). Of course, not all labor union organizations formally endorse Democrats in all elections, but the large majority do. For instance, the AFL-CIO, the largest US labor union organization, has never endorsed a Republican presidential nominee.

variable of interest. The 2004 NAES also has a sufficiently large sample size to examine variation in voting behavior *among* labor union members, rather than simply comparing such behavior between unionized versus nonunionized Americans.

In all of my analyses, I examine a sample of approximately 4,000 currently employed union members (4,917 prior to listwise deletion) who were interviewed between January 28 and November 1, 2004, from just after the New Hampshire Primary to just before Election Day. The response rate for this survey (completed interviews ÷ total households called) is 22 percent. All of my main regression analyses include demographic control variables, but are unweighted, given that the 2004 NAES distributed the data without any survey weights.[5]

The 2004 NAES is a nationally representative study of the American electorate (in the forty-eight contiguous states + DC). It is a rolling cross-sectional study conducted over the phone between October 7, 2003, and November 16, 2004. This means that numerous samples were interviewed at different points in time, over an approximately thirteen-month period. The total valid sample size (combining all of these interviews) consists of 81,422 respondents, from which a smaller sample of currently employed union members is drawn.[6] This large sample size allows for me to conduct statistically valid tests of candidate preference *among* union members. The 2004 NAES is also far more representative of national labor union members than the surveys used in past studies, for example, focusing on a few select labor unions in the "Rust Belt." My design thus improves upon past work by allowing me to make stronger national-level inferences regarding union members' political behavior.

## Why the 2004 Election Cycle?

The primary reason I chose to use the 2004 NAES to test my hypothesis is because it was the only dataset, to my knowledge, that had a sufficiently large sample of union members *and* a measure of workplace political discussion. As previously noted, this variable is important because it helps capture the extent to which union members are exposed to disproportionately "pro-Democrat" and/or "anti-Bush" messaging in their union environments. Of

5. See the 2004 NAES codebook (pp. 41 and 47 specifically) for additional information.

6. The final valid sample size is much smaller. This is for several reasons. The first is because I am exclusively examining labor union members, the second is because not all respondents are asked all questions, and the third is that I restrict my analyses to currently employed union members who were interviewed just after the New Hampshire Democratic Primary (January 28, 2004) and just before Election Day (November 1, 2004). There is also, of course, sample reduction that results from listwise deletion of missing data.

course, workplace political discussion is not the only manner through which union members are mobilized and/or informed, but I argue that the presence of frequent (vs. infrequent) workplace political discussion reflects an environment in which union members are likely to be exposed to such dynamics, that is, union communication efforts that should, on average, orient members toward Democratic Party candidates.

The 2004 NAES also has a measure of presidential vote choice, and a robust battery of theoretically relevant control variables. Furthermore, the 2004 Bush–Kerry contest was a polarized and competitive election that yielded relatively high turnout. As such, the empirical tests and findings here should generalize well to contemporary US elections. Analogous NAES studies were conducted in 2000 and 2008, but unfortunately, they lack the questions needed to replicate my empirical tests in other election years. This is also true of the gold-standard American National Election Studies (ANES).[7]

In short, the 2004 NAES is not perfect, but these data are certainly not worthless. While these data lack the fine-grained detail of specific studies of one particular labor union, or the broad external validity of a study that encompasses multiple elections and/or one that examines multiple countries, these data do yield nationally representative inferences from a competitive and highly polarized US election, and have a sufficient sample size to meaningfully explore both heterogeneity not only among labor union members, but also across specific geographies and occupations. Indeed, there is much we can still learn from research designs even when they inevitably fall short of perfection (Gerring 2011).

## Dependent Variable

My dependent variable is presidential vote choice, specifically whether respondents (my sample of currently employed labor union members) intend to vote for Democrat John Kerry, then a US Senator representing Massachusetts, or for Republican George W. Bush, then the incumbent US president.[8]

7. The Cumulative ANES asks, in various years from 1984 to 2020, about general political discussion (VCF0733) and political discussion with friends and family (VCF0731), but does not include a question that specifically asks about workplace political discussion. The 2000 National Annenberg Election Survey does include a question about workplace political discussion, but unfortunately does not ask whether a person is personally a labor union member. In contrast, the 2008 National Annenberg Election Survey does ask about personal union membership but does not ask about workplace political discussion. In short, existing datasets simply lack the same combination of key questions as the 2004 NAES, those being a measure of personal union membership *and* workplace discussion of politics.

8. Due to the design of the 2004 NAES (a rolling cross-section survey), where nearly all respondents were interviewed *before* the November election, I measure candidate preferences before November 2, 2004, with questions that ask people about their vote intention. For example,

The 2004 NAES first asked about a Bush versus Kerry matchup on January 28, 2004. This was the day after the New Hampshire Democratic primary, where Kerry was victorious. Various cross-sectional samples of Americans were asked about a Bush versus Kerry contest at different points (everyone was queried once) from January 28, 2004, through November 1, 2004, the day before the (Tuesday) election.

I pool responses over this time period and harmonize them into a single dichotomous variable that measures whether respondents intend to vote Republican or Democrat for president (0 = Kerry; 1 = Bush). In short, my sample consists of currently employed labor union members who planned to vote for either George W. Bush *or* John Kerry, *and* who were interviewed between January 28 and November 1, 2004.[9]

## Independent Variable

My main independent variable is workplace political discussion. I focus on this variable because it is the best available measure of my concept of interest, that being the extent to which union members are in an environment with (in)frequent information flows and mobilization efforts. Moreover, workplace political discussion, and what it can represent, namely exposure to information, has been shown to be politically consequential (e.g., Mutz and Mondak 2006) and thus merits further attention, here on how it potentially shapes voting behavior among American labor union members.

Respondents in 2004 NAES are asked the following: *How many days in the past week did you discuss politics with people at work?* Valid responses range from 0 to 7 days. The mean value (for my sample of currently employed union members, interviewed January 28, 2004–November 1, 2004) is 2.5 days, with a standard deviation of 2.3 days. Approximately 31 percent of this sample reported no workplace political discussion in the past week, compared to 37 percent who reported discussing politics between 1 to

some respondents were interviewed from January 28, 2004, to April 29, 2004, and saw the following text: *Thinking about the general election for president in November 2004, if that election were held today, and the candidates were George W. Bush, the Republican, and John Kerry, the Democrat, for whom would you vote?* Respondents who were interviewed at other time periods in 2004 (March 5–April 29; March 16–April 5; April 7–April 29; April 30–July 20; July 6–November 1; or April 30–November 1) saw very similar text, with the main differences being whether partisan labels, for example Democrat/Republican, were used to identify Bush and Kerry, and whether Independent candidate Ralph Nader's name appeared as an option.

9. I combine responses from seven NAES questions that ask about intended vote choice (between January 28, 2004, and November 1, 2004) and drop responses that were not for Bush or Kerry. The mean value of this intended Bush vote variable (vs. Kerry) for all respondents (not just my sample of employed labor union members) was 49.5 percent, which is close to Bush's eventual 51.2 percent share of the two-party vote.

3 days in the past week, and 32 percent who reported discussing politics between 4 and 7 days in the past week. For my main analyses, and for purposes of simplicity, I recode this into a dichotomous variable (0 = did not discuss politics at work in the past week; 1 = discussed politics one or more days in the past week).

While an ideal question would ask something along the lines of "How often does your labor union communicate with you about political issues?," such questions are not, unfortunately, available. As such, I use a proxy—frequency of workplace discussion. I argue that this variable captures, albeit imperfectly, rank-and-file union members' exposure to labor union efforts to communicate, socialize, and mobilize, with less workplace discussion reflecting less exposure to such an environment and thus reduced information flows that might reduce social group "cross-pressures" and result in people who might otherwise vote Democrat "defecting" and voting Republican.[10]

## Control Variables

I also include a battery of variables to help account for people's socioeconomic status, life experiences, and their various social group memberships. I do so to help address omitted variable bias, given that such factors could plausibly correlate with people's willingness to engage in political discussion (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Mutz 2006), as well as their general partisan loyalties (Campbell et al. 1960; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). These variables also help account for potential factors that may "cross-pressure" voters in general (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Brader, Tucker, and Therriault 2014), and union members more specifically (Bruno 2000; Bielski Boris and Bruno 2010), for example, simultaneously being a union member, which is likely to push people toward Democrats, and a White male, which is likely to push people toward the Republican Party (e.g., Mason 2018).

I first account for several workplace-related characteristics. I specifically control for whether respondents are working full time (0 = full time; 1 = part time); this could affect one's socioeconomic status as well as how often they are exposed to union information flows and/or how often they have the opportunity to engage in workplace political discussion. I also control for sector of employment (base category = private sector vs. public sector vs. police/fire).[11] This can help account for how often people are likely to be exposed to workplace discussion, and the nature of such discussion. This could clearly vary across the

10. In subsequent analyses (see table 3), I seek to address concerns that union members' self-selection into/out of political discussion is driving the results.

11. Private sector refers to people who do not work for the government; public sector refers to people who are employed by a government but not as a police officer/firefighter; police/fire refers to people who are employed by the government as a police officer or firefighter.

public versus private sectors, given that a once large private-sector labor movement has, over time, given way to a well-organized public-sector movement (Rosenfeld 2014; Anzia and Moe 2016). This also helps account for the more "right-leaning" and outlier status of police and firefighters in the broader labor movement (DiSalvo 2015; Wade 2018; Zoorob 2019).[12]

I also include several variables to help account for individuals' socioeconomic status, life circumstances, and additional social group memberships, all of which may shape their proclivity to engage in workplace political discussion and to vote Democrat. I specifically control for: gender (0 = male; 1 = female), race (0 = non-White; 1 = White, non-Hispanic), educational attainment (0 = less than a four-year degree; 1 = four-year degree or higher), marital status (0 = not married; 1 = married), age (in years), whether one's household income is above the national median (0 = less than $50,000; 1 = $50,000 or higher), religious affiliation (0 = not a born-again Christian; 1 = born again Christian), a measure of residential stability based on the time one has lived at their current residence (0 = one year or less; 1 = more than one year), the type of area where one lives (0 = rural/suburban area; 1 = urban area), military household status (0 = nobody in household currently serving in the military; 1 = somebody in household currently serving in the military), gun ownership (0 = no guns in household; 1 = one or more guns in household), whether there are any unemployed adults living in one's household (0 = no; 1 = yes), and whether there are any other union members living in one's household (0 = no; 1 = yes), which could potentially serve as another source of union information and/or partisan cues.[13]

I also control for whether my sample of union members live in a so-called "right to work" (RTW) state (0 = no; 1 = yes). Controlling for RTW status helps account for state laws and/or regulations that may affect labor unions' resources and organizational capacity (Murphy 2023; VanHeuvelen 2023), and, by extension, how often union members may have opportunities to engage in workplace political discussion. This can assuage some concerns about self-selection, for example, that the kinds of people who choose to join/remain in labor unions and/or engage in more frequent workplace political discussion are more likely to support Democrats, rather than more political discussion in labor union workplaces leading to greater Democratic

12. The 2004 NAES asks employed respondents about their line of work (CWB02) and whether they are employed by the government (CWB05). I construct my three-category variable of employment sector (base category = private sector vs. public sector vs. police/fire) by combining responses to these two questions.

13. The 2004 NAES does not ask questions that ask how long someone has been a union member and/or how long they've been in their particular job. Age and/or length of residence can serve as rough proxies.

support among union members. The logic is that RTW laws can undermine and financially weaken organized labor by allowing workers to "free-ride" and avoid having to join a union and/or pay dues as a precondition for employment in a union workplace. As such, people who belong to labor unions in RTW states may be union members for partisan/political reasons, rather than economic job-related reasons.[14]

Finally, I control for whether respondents live in a competitive "swing" state that either candidate had a plausible chance of winning and that both parties contested via candidate visits and advertisements (0 = no; 1 = yes) and whether respondents were interviewed before John Edwards was chosen as John Kerry's vice presidential running mate (0 = interviewed before July 6, 2004; 1 = interviewed July 6, 2004, or later). These two variables are intended to help capture "campaign effects" (e.g., Hillygus and Jackman 2003) that may correlate with how often union members are mobilized/contacted, and by extension, how often they have opportunities to engage in workplace political discussion and/or whether workplace political discussion actually matters in and of itself, or if it simply reflects being in a more electorally competitive context.

## Main Results

I test my hypothesis in table 2. Using a sample of currently employed union members from the 2004 NAES, I regress the dependent variable of intended presidential vote choice on a measure of workplace political discussion and a battery of relevant control variables.

On average, I find that union members who engaged in workplace political discussion are approximately 9.0 percentage points (the marginal effect, when holding all other variables constant at their observed values) less likely to report intending to vote for Republican George W. Bush over Democrat

14. While it is prudent to account for state RTW status, there is little evidence to suggest that people join unions for political reasons (e.g., Macdonald 2021). Indeed, data from a 2004 Zogby/Mackinac Center poll of labor union members shows that respondents' top priories for organized labor are to focus on benefiting workers rather than pursuing political ends (Lehman 2004). For instance, 73 percent of respondents in this survey said that "bargaining for better wages, benefits, and working conditions for its members" is the most important responsibility of a labor union. In contrast, just 2 percent of respondents said that "engaging in political activities" is the most important responsibility. Furthermore, 34 percent of respondents said that their union spends too much of their dues money on "things like supporting political candidates and helping them get elected," compared to just 4 percent of respondents who said their union spends too much on "direct benefits to you and your family, like efforts to secure better wages, benefits and working conditions."

**Table 2.** Workplace political discussion and voting behavior among union members, 2004.

| | DV = Vote Bush over Kerry | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | probit coef | std err | *p*-value |
| Workplace political discussion | −0.271 | (0.048) | 0.000 |
| Part-time employee | −0.149 | (0.078) | 0.058 |
| Employed in public sector | 0.043 | (0.049) | 0.377 |
| Employed as police or fire | 0.412 | (0.088) | 0.000 |
| Female | −0.098 | (0.047) | 0.035 |
| White | 0.602 | (0.062) | 0.000 |
| College degree | −0.137 | (0.049) | 0.005 |
| Married | 0.167 | (0.050) | 0.001 |
| Age | −0.007 | (0.002) | 0.001 |
| Household income over $50,000 | 0.122 | (0.052) | 0.020 |
| Born-again Christian | 0.577 | (0.049) | 0.000 |
| Residential stability | −0.129 | (0.063) | 0.039 |
| Live in an urban area | −0.121 | (0.050) | 0.016 |
| Military household | 0.137 | (0.050) | 0.006 |
| Gun in household | 0.309 | (0.047) | 0.000 |
| Other union member in household | −0.122 | (0.068) | 0.074 |
| Unemployed adult in household | −0.231 | (0.074) | 0.002 |
| RTW state | 0.084 | (0.056) | 0.134 |
| Swing state | −0.176 | (0.046) | 0.000 |
| Interviewed post Edwards VP | −0.010 | (0.044) | 0.821 |
| Constant | −0.563 | (0.125) | 0.000 |
| Observations | 3,881 | | |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.107 | | |

*Note:* Dependent variable is intended vote choice (0 = John Kerry; 1 = George W. Bush). All variables except for age are dichotomous (0 vs. 1). Sample consists of currently employed union members who were interviewed between January 28, 2004, and November 1, 2004. Probit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. The *p*-values are based on a two-tailed test. Source is the 2004 NAES.

John Kerry.[15] This relationship is both statistically and substantively significant. This is evidenced by the fact that the coefficient for *Discussed Politics at Work* is larger (in terms of the absolute value) than the majority of variables, all of which (except for age) are dichotomous (0 vs. 1) in the model,

15. John Kerry was officially endorsed by the AFL-CIO on February 19, 2004. My analyses begin on January 28, 2004. Restricting the data to begin after this endorsement, rather than the day after the New Hampshire Democratic primary, does not substantively change the results.

eclipsed in magnitude, but not drastically so, only by *Police or Fire*, *White*, *Born-Again Christian*, and *Gun in Household*.[16]

Interestingly, there are no significant differences between the intended vote choice of private-sector and public-sector union members, nor among union members who live in antilabor RTW states versus those in more pro-union states who lack such laws. However, union members employed in public safety (police or fire) are, on average, approximately 13 percentage points more likely to support George W. Bush than their union member counterparts who are not employed in public safety occupations. This may reflect the conservative tilt and outlier status of these unions in the broader labor movement (Wade 2018; Zoorob 2019) and jibes with later Republican-led efforts, for example, post-2010 in states such as Wisconsin, to exempt these unions from antilabor legislation that sought to broadly curtail collective bargaining rights (DiSalvo 2015).

In terms of demographics, older labor union members are more likely to vote Democrat, as are those with longer-term residential roots. These variables, which are meant to serve as proxies for the duration of one's employment and/or their time as a union member, could potentially reflect the socializing ability of long-term union affiliation (e.g., Mosimann and Pontusson 2017). Overall, the demographic control variables generally relate to vote choice as expected. Indeed, the results in table 2, which show substantively significant differences in candidate preference across gender, race, educational attainment, marital status, household income, religious affiliation, the urban-rural divide, military affiliation, gun ownership, and the demographic composition of people's households, make sense based on the kinds of people we would expect to support Republican candidates, particularly circa 2004. These various vote divisions reflect long-standing social cleavages in American politics (Mason 2018; Zingher 2019), as well as social group dynamics that were germane to the 2004 US presidential election (Langer and Cohen 2005; Francia and Bigelow 2010).

In short, the results in table 2 yield support for my hypothesized expectations. Among labor union members, workplace political discussion is significantly associated with decreased support for Republican George W. Bush (vs. Democrat John Kerry). I attribute this to increased exposure to an

16. This is also a somewhat conservative test of how much workplace political discussion matters, given that I am measuring this as a dichotomous variable (discussed politics vs. not) rather than comparing labor union members who discuss politics nearly every day versus those who never discuss politics. I explore further variation across the range of this variable (workplace political discussion) in figure 1.

information environment that provides a meaningful volume of politically consequential "anti-Bush" and/or "pro-Kerry" cues.[17]

In figure 1, I expand my analyses by considering how the *frequency* of workplace political discussion shapes labor union members' voting behavior. The main results in table 2 simply compared intended presidential vote choice among union members who engaged in *any* workplace political discussion with those who did not engage in such discussion. This could be viewed as a somewhat "conservative test" of my hypothesis, as this variable puts people who discuss politics one day a week and those who discuss politics five or more days per week into the same category. The substantive results could be even larger if I compare labor union members who discussed politics at work most days with those who do not engage in workplace political discussion, rather than simply comparing those who discuss politics (any number of days) versus those who do not. It can also provide a test of whether this average "effect" in table 2 is being driven by a specific group of individuals, for example, by hyper-engaged union members who discuss politics every day.

Using a probit model, I regress my dependent variable of intended presidential vote choice (0 = Kerry; 1 = Bush) on a categorical measure of workplace political discussion frequency (base category = 0 days in the past week vs. 1–3 days in the past week vs. 4–7 days in the past week), and the same set of control variables as in table 2. The results of this model show that, on average, union members who do not discuss politics at work have an approximately 43.0 percent probability of intending to vote for George W. Bush (over John Kerry). Among labor union members who discuss politics a moderate amount (1–3 days per week), this shifts to an approximately 36.7 percent probability of intending to vote for Bush. For union members who report discussing politics quite often (4–7 days per week), the probability of intending to vote for Bush decreases to approximately 30.4 percent.

Overall, the results in figure 1 suggest that the frequency of union members' workplace discussion of politics is substantively meaningful. A shift from the lowest to the highest level of discussion results in union members having a more than four in ten chance of voting Republican, to having just a three in ten chance of doing so. In a hypercompetitive era of American politics (Lee 2016), even small shifts in voting behavior can be decisive.

17. In Supplementary Material table B1, I show that the main results hold up when I control whether for whether respondents discussed politics with their family and friends (probit coefficients = −0.271 vs. −0.238; *p*-values = 0.000 for both; sample sizes = 3,881 vs. 3,872), in addition to in their [union] workplace. This suggests that my measure of workplace political discussion is not simply capturing people's general tendency to discuss politics, but rather something about exposure to a union workplace that is politically consequential. This also helps account for mobilization efforts and/or information provision that could result from, for example, neighbor-to-neighbor communications, something that could, in turn, lead union members to vote for the traditionally and comparatively "prolabor" Democratic Party and/or not "defect" and vote Republican.

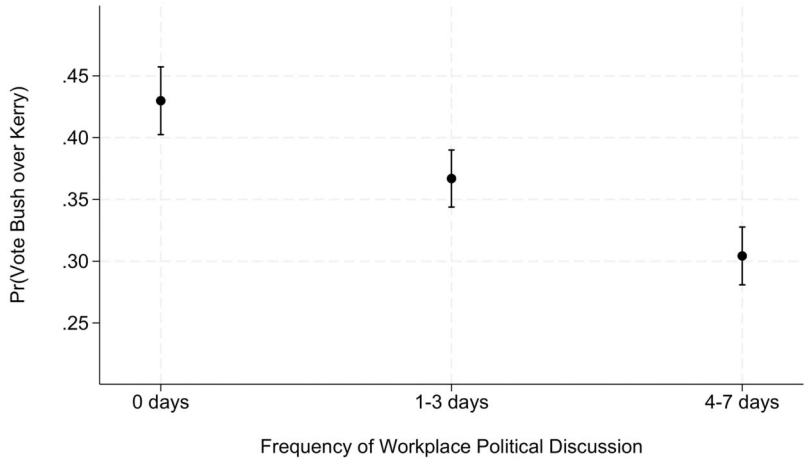


**Figure 1.** Frequency of workplace political discussion and voting behavior among union members, 2004. Shows the predicted probability of intending to vote for Republican George W. Bush over Democrat John Kerry. Based on a probit model that regresses intended vote choice (0 = Kerry; 1 = Bush) on a three-category measure of workplace political discussion (base category = 0-days vs. 1–3 days vs. 4–7 days) and the same set of control variables as in table 2. Sample consists of currently employed union members who were interviewed between January 28, 2004, and November 1, 2004. Point estimates are predicted probabilities; bars are 95 percent confidence intervals (robust standard errors, two-tailed test). See Supplementary Material table B2 for the full model. N = 3,881.

## Addressing Self-Selection

In table 3, I further address an additional endogeneity concern, that being the problem of self-selection. By this I mean, consistent with classic scholarship on the "spiral of silence" theory in public opinion (e.g., Noelle-Neumann 1974), that certain types of union members, specifically those who are left leaning, will feel more comfortable speaking up and/or participating in union-driven workplace political discussion. Indeed, it is possible that any observed statistical relationship between workplace political discussion and support for John Kerry (over George W. Bush) is being driven by left-leaning union members choosing to engage in workplace political discussion and absorbing the associated political messaging, and more centrist and/or right-leaning union members choosing to abstain from workplace political discussion, thus rejecting the associated political messaging.

In my main analysis (table 2), I have attempted to address this selection problem by accounting for a variety of demographic variables, for example,

race, gender, education, occupation, religiosity, and gun household residence, that can plausibly shape both union members' likelihood of engaging in workplace political discussion (and/or absorbing the associated partisan messaging), as well as their general likelihood of voting Democrat (vs. Republican). I have also controlled for whether people reside in a "right to work" (RTW) state where workers cannot be compelled to contribute union dues as a condition of employment, as well as by noting that existing scholarship (e.g., Macdonald 2021) and survey data (Lehman 2004) yield little evidence to suggest that politics drives the decision to join a labor union. It is still possible, however, that such demographics cannot sufficiently address this problem or adequately rule out the possibility that people who are already more likely to support John Kerry and/or oppose George W. Bush systematically "select" into/out of absorbing the messages associated with union-driven political discussion because of the comfort/discomfort they may feel in receiving messages and information that comport with/run counter to their general political orientations (e.g., Zaller 1992).

I further address this concern in table 3. I do so by replicating my main analyses (from table 2) but with additional controls for party identification (Democrat vs. not) and ideology (liberal vs. not).[18] These two variables are intended to capture ordinary people's general, long-standing political orientations (Kinder and Kalmoe 2017), and, most relevantly for my purposes here, to help better account for the possibility that Democrats and liberals may be more likely to engage in political discussion and absorb messages, which are, on average, in labor union settings, more likely than not to be pro-Democrat (Macdonald 2021; Newman and Skocpol 2023). In short, if these results hold both with and without these additional controls (for partisanship and ideology), it would further underscore the robustness and validity of my argument and main findings.[19]

Overall, the results in table 3 show that the main results hold up even when accounting for union members' party identification and ideology. In short, the coefficient for workplace political discussion remains negative, meaning it is

18. The 2004 NAES asks about party identification (CMA01) as follows: *Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?* I code this to be dichotomous (0 = Republican/Independent/Something Else/Don't Know; 1 = Democrat). The 2004 NAES asks about ideology (CMA06) as follows: *Generally speaking, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?* I code this to be dichotomous (0 = Very Conservative/Conservative/Moderate/Don't Know; 1 = Liberal/Very Liberal).

19. While there is some concern that including such controls may introduce "posttreatment" bias (e.g., Montgomery, Nyhan, and Torres 2018), that is, because union members' identification as a Democrat and/or possession of a liberal political ideology may result *from* greater workplace political discussion, any such concerns are, I argue, offset by the ability of these variables to more powerfully control for individuals' general political orientations and thus their proclivity to select in/out of workplace political discussion.

**Table 3.** Workplace political discussion and voting behavior among union members when controlling for partisanship and ideology, 2004.

| | DV = Vote Bush over Kerry | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | coef (se) | *p*-value | coef (se) | *p*-value |
| Workplace political discussion | −0.271 (0.048) | 0.000 | −0.230 (0.055) | 0.000 |
| Controls for demographics | Yes | | Yes | |
| Controls for party & ideology | No | | Yes | |
| Observations | 3,881 | | 3,861 | |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0.107 | | 0.334 | |

*Note:* Dependent variables are intended vote choice (0 = John Kerry; 1 = George W. Bush). All variables except for age are dichotomous (0 vs. 1). Partisanship is dichotomous (Democrat vs. not). Ideology is dichotomous (liberal vs. not). Sample consists of currently employed union members who were interviewed between January 28, 2004, and November 1, 2004. Probit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. The *p*-values are based on a two-tailed test. Source is the 2004 NAES. The constant terms and control variables are not displayed here. See Supplementary Material table B3 for the full model.

associated with support for Kerry over Bush, and statistically significant. This suggests that the results are not solely a function of "self-selection" and that there appears to be something about engagement with and/or exposure to workplace political discussion that matters for how labor union members vote.[20]

## Heterogeneity in the Relationship

In this section, I consider how the observed relationship between workplace political discussion and voting behavior among labor union members may vary. I specifically consider variation across states and employment sector. I do so with data from the 2004 NAES.

### *Swing states*

I first consider whether the relationship between workplace political discussion and voting behavior among union members differs across "swing"

20. The main results hold, that is, the relationship between workplace political discussion and vote choice among labor union members is still negative and statistically significant ($p = 0.000$), when using a two-stage least squares regression model that employs dichotomous (0 vs. 1) measures of political discussion with one's friends/family (CBK01) and political discussion online (CKB05) as instruments for workplace political discussion (CKB03), which may, even after including a wide range of control variables, still be endogenous to vote intention. The logic for choosing such instruments, the best and most plausible options in the 2004 NAES, is that they are, as a result of taking place outside work, still likely to correlate with whether a person engages in workplace political discussion, but also far less likely to correlate with vote choice, that is, by the "spiral of silence" that may lead certain union members to abstain from workplace political discussion.

versus "nonswing" states. This is important to test, given that US presidential elections are contested on a state-by-state basis, rather than nationwide. Moreover, the 2004 election was decided by razor-thin margins in a few states. Instead of controlling for respondents' swing-state status, the analyses in figure 2 interact workplace political discussion and swing-state residence. In short, I regress intended vote choice (0 = Kerry; 1 = Bush) on a *Discussed Politics at Work* × *Swing State* interaction, along with the same set of variables in my main analysis (in table 2).

In figure 2, I present the marginal effects from this interaction. Overall, the results show that workplace political discussion appears to matter for union members' voting behavior in both types of states (swing and nonswing), but that it appears to matter more in swing states ($p = 0.054$), as evidenced by the stronger negative association between workplace political

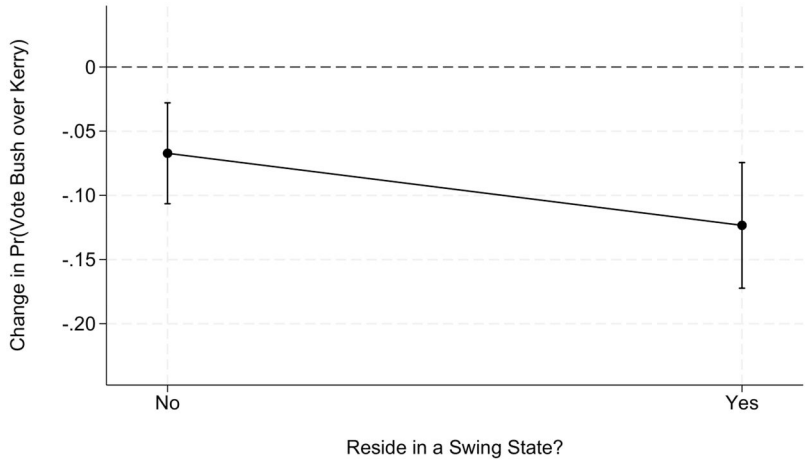


**Figure 2.** Workplace political discussion and voting behavior among union members by swing-state residence, 2004. Shows the marginal effect of workplace political discussion (0 = no; 1 = yes) on the probability of intending to vote for Republican George W. Bush over Democrat John Kerry, conditional on swing-state residence (0 = no; 1 = yes). Based on a probit model that regresses intended presidential vote choice (0 = Kerry; 1 = Bush) on a workplace political discussion × swing-state interaction and the same set of control variables as in table 2. Swing states = (CO, FL, IA, MI, MN, NV, NH, NM, OH, OR, PA, and WI). Sample consists of currently employed union members who were interviewed between January 28, 2004, and November 1, 2004. Point estimates are changes in predicted probabilities; bars are 95 percent confidence intervals (robust standard errors, two-tailed test). See Supplementary Material table B4 for the full model. N = 3,881.

discussion and support for George W. Bush (vs. John Kerry) in "swing" states. In short, the results in figure 2 suggest that workplace discussion of politics matters broadly for how labor union members vote, and importantly, that it is somewhat more meaningful in the small group of states that ultimately decide presidential elections.

***Employment sector***

I next consider whether the relationship between workplace political discussion and voting behavior among union members differs by employment sector. As previously discussed, the labor movement in the United States has changed drastically over the past several decades (Rosenfeld 2014). A once large and powerful private-sector labor movement has declined considerably, while a powerful and well-organized public-sector movement has emerged since the 1960s and 1970s (Anzia and Moe 2016). Within the public sector, labor unions representing public safety workers, specifically police officers and firefighters, occupy a unique place in the broader labor movement and stand out as uniquely right leaning. As such, it is possible that the "average" effects found in table 2 (the main results) may differ across employers. In particular, it is possible that workplace political discussion in private-sector unions is not, relative to their more powerful and well-organized public-sector counterparts, sufficient to orient union members toward John Kerry, the prolabor candidate in the 2004 contests. Additionally, it may be that workplace political discussion in more right-leaning public safety unions orients rank-and-file members toward George W. Bush, who, for example, received the endorsement of the Fraternal Order of Police in 2004.[21]

I test this in figure 3 by regressing intended vote choice (0 = Kerry; 1 = Bush) on an interaction between workplace political discussion (0 vs. 1) and a categorical measure of employment sector (base category = private sector vs. public sector vs. police/fire). I present the marginal effects of this interaction in figure 3. Overall, the results show that workplace political discussion appears to matter to a roughly equivalent degree in both the private and public sectors. In both sectors, union members who engage in workplace political discussion were, on average, approximately 10 percentage points less likely to favor George W. Bush (over John Kerry). However, in the public safety sector (police and fire), the relationship between workplace political discussion and union members' support for Bush is *positive*. However, the small number of respondents in this category yields noisy results and

21. In contrast, John Kerry received the endorsement of the International Association of Fire Fighters. I am unfortunately unable to split the data further by separating out police officers and firefighters (they are grouped into one small category in the 2004 NAES). But the larger point is that public safety unions tend to be more conservative and are far more likely than most other labor unions to endorse Republican candidates.

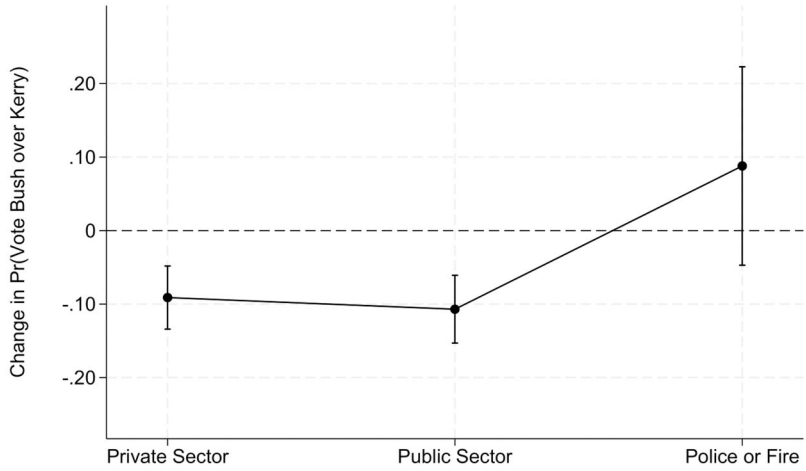


**Figure 3.** Workplace political discussion and voting behavior among union members by employment sector, 2004. Shows the marginal effect of workplace political discussion (0 = no; 1 = yes) on the probability of intending to vote for Republican George W. Bush over Democrat John Kerry, conditional on a three-category measure of occupation (base category = private sector vs. public sector vs. police/fire). Based on a probit model that regresses intended presidential vote choice (0 = Kerry; 1 = Bush) on a workplace political discussion × employment-sector category interaction and the same set of control variables as in table 2. Sample consists of currently employed union members who were interviewed between January 28, 2004, and November 1, 2004. Point estimates are changes in predicted probabilities; bars are 95 percent confidence intervals (robust standard errors, two-tailed test). See Supplementary Material table B5 for the full model. N = 3,881.

thus a coefficient, for the "effect" of workplace political discussion among public safety union members, that is not significantly distinguishable from zero ($p = 0.202$). As such, these results should be viewed tentatively. In short, these results suggest that in most labor unions, workplace political discussion is associated with a lower probability of favoring Republican presidential candidates, but not in right-leaning public safety unions.

In the Supplementary Material, I further explore whether the results are being driven by teacher's unions, a group that is powerfully organized, well funded, and has long backed Democratic candidates (e.g., Hartney 2022). I do this by replicating my main analyses with and without teachers. I measure this occupation, as best as I am able to in the 2004 NAES, by coding respondents who (1) work for the government, (2) have at least a four-year college degree, and (3) fall into a "profession worker" category, as

teachers.[22] I present the results of this analysis in Supplementary Material table B6. Overall, these results show that the relationships between workplace political discussion and labor union members' voting behavior are broadly similar (probit coefficients = −0.271 vs. −0.204; *p*-values = 0.000 for both; sample sizes = 3,881 vs. 3,021) when including versus excluding teachers. This suggests that the results are not solely being driven by one particular group of union members, and that the political machinations of organized labor can matter broadly.

I also conduct an additional test in Supplementary Material table B7 that adds an additional control for union members' self-reported occupational category, rather than relying on variables such as private versus public sector and educational attainment to capture this.[23] Overall, the results are similar to my main analyses (probit coefficients = −0.271 vs. −0.283; *p*-values = 0.000 for both; sample sizes = 3,881 vs. 3,684). Combined, these additional tests (see Supplementary Material tables B6 and B7) should help assuage concerns that any observed relationship between workplace political discussion is simply being driven by one particular group of union members or by a failure to sufficiently account for respondents' occupation, and thus the extent to which union members are exposed to workplace political discussion and associated mobilization, communication, and socialization efforts that should, on average, articulate reasons to vote Democrat and/or not vote Republican.

## Exploring Plausible Mechanisms

In this section, I consider two potential mechanisms through which workplace political discussion could plausibly shape candidate support. The first is via the development of a stronger "union identity," and thus a greater likelihood of supporting candidates who present themselves as an ally to one's preferred social group, and the second is by "learning" about where each candidate stands on labor-related issues and then supporting the one who, via favoring prolabor policies, is more likely to advance union members' interests.

I measure strength of union identity with a variable that asks respondents how favorably they feel toward labor unions (0 → 10). These types of variables, that is, survey questions that ask people to rate the social group to which they belong on a feeling thermometer-esque scale, have been used as

22. This "teacher" variable is based on the following 2004 NAES variables: CWB02, CWA03, and CWB05.

23. This "occupation" variable is based on the 2004 NAES variable CWB02. The "base" category for this variable is *profession worker*, and the other categories I examine are (listed as they appear in the codebook): *skilled trade-person*; *clerical/office worker; service worker; laborer; semi-skilled worker;* and *Other*.

a proxy for measuring the strength of one's social group identity (e.g., Jardina 2019). The exact text is as follows: *On a scale of zero to 10, how would you rate labor unions?* I recode responses to range between 0 and 1, with lower (higher) values indicating a weaker (stronger) "union identity" among union members. I measure knowledge of which candidate is more "prolabor" with a question that asks the following: *To the best of your knowledge, who wants to make it easier for unions to organize—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?* I code responses so that a value of "0" indicates a lack of awareness that John Kerry wants to make union organizing easier (incorrect responses of Bush, Both, Neither, or Don't Know) and a value of "1" indicates knowledge that John Kerry is the prolabor candidate (a correct response of Kerry).[24]

In table 4, I compare, for my sample of labor union members, the mean values for each of these two variables, labor union favorability (ranges 0–1) and knowledge of the candidate's policy stances (0 vs. 1), across workplace political discussion (0 = zero days in the past week; 1 = one or more days in the past week). Finding that labor union favorability is higher among union members who engage in workplace political discussion (vs. those who do not) would lend support to the "union identity" mechanism. Similarly, finding that knowledge of Kerry's prolabor stances is higher among union members who engage in workplace political discussion (vs. those who do not) would lend support to the "learning" mechanism.

Overall, the results in table 4 suggest that while both mechanisms may be at play, the "learning" mechanism has greater validity. This is evidenced by the ten-point difference (across workplace political discussion) in the percentage of union members who are aware that John Kerry is the prolabor candidate (0.67 vs. 0.77) versus a three-point difference (across workplace political discussion) in terms of labor union favorability (0.69 vs. 0.72). This pattern of findings suggests (but, of course, cannot prove) that workplace political discussion informs labor union members about which party/candidate is their political ally; this lends support to the idea that greater political awareness facilitates stronger linkages between social group memberships/identities and political behavior (Jones 2023).

## Conclusion and Political Implications

This study began with a puzzle: Why do large minorities of labor union members support Republican candidates, the standard-bearers of a

24. There are two versions of this question (one asked from July 8, 2004 to August 9, 2004 and the other from August 10, 2004 to October 7, 2004). The only meaningful difference is whether respondents see the word "unions" versus the phrase "labor unions." I combine responses from both versions of this question into a single harmonized variable (0 = not aware that Kerry is prolabor; 1 = aware that Kerry is prolabor).

**Table 4.** Comparing potential mechanisms linking workplace political discussion and vote choice among union members, 2004.

| | Favorability: labor unions | | Know Kerry is prolabor? | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Observations | Mean | Observations |
| No workplace discussion | 0.69 | 508 | 0.67 | 475 |
| Any workplace discussion | 0.72 | 1,075 | 0.77 | 908 |
| Difference | 0.03 | | 0.10 | |
| *p*-value | 0.020 | | 0.000 | |

*Note:* Shows mean labor union favorability (ranges 0–1) and mean knowledge of which candidate wants to make union organizing easier (0 vs. 1), by workplace political discussion. Sample consists of currently employed union members. *Favorability toward labor unions* (columns 1–2) was asked from January 28, 2004 to August 19, 2004. *Knowledge of candidate stances on making union organizing easier* (columns 3–4) was asked from July 8, 2004 to October 7, 2004. The *p*-values (for the mean differences) are based on a two-tailed test. Source is the 2004 NAES.

historically pro-business and antilabor political party? I argue that one such factor is the frequency of workplace political discussion. I argue that a union workplace where members participate in and/or are exposed to more frequent political discussion is likely one in which union leadership is making a stronger effort to inform, socialize, and mobilize their rank and file. As a result, labor union members who engage in/are exposed to more frequent workplace political discussion should be more likely to be exposed to "pro-Democrat" (and/or "anti-Republican") messaging that, all else equal, should give them additional reasons to support the historically "prolabor" Democratic Party and its candidates. I tested this with survey data from the 2004 NAES and found that more frequent workplace political discussion is indeed associated with a significantly lower probability of union members voting Republican.

While I believe that the results here are robust and substantively significant, this study is not without limitations. Short of randomly assigning labor union members to be exposed to an environment in which workplace political discussion is frequent (vs. not), it is very difficult to establish a clear causal relationship. As such, I have done the best I can, by including a large battery of control variables and by attempting to assuage concerns about self-selection, with the cross-sectional data that I have here.

Future work would also do well, data permitting, to see if this pattern of results holds up when using other (more direct) measures of union efforts to inform, socialize, and mobilize their membership, and to see if it holds up in other election years and to see whether the results differ as both the Democratic and Republican parties shift away from their Reagan- and Bush-

era coalitions and policy positions. Future work would also do well to focus on *who* has opportunities to engage in workplace political discussion (vs. not), rather than focusing on the political consequences of such discussion. For instance, is workplace political discussion systematically more commonplace in labor unions representing certain industries, outside of antilabor states with so-called "right to work" (RTW) legislation, or in competitive electoral contexts? This could have important implications for understanding whether the workplace distributes political information and/or efficacy in an egalitarian manner (e.g., Pateman 1970; Mutz and Mondak 2006).

Overall, these findings help us better understand the politics of organized labor and the electoral behavior of labor union members. These findings also add to a growing literature that uses survey data to explore variation in political attitudes and behavior *within* smaller social groups in the American mass public (e.g., Kuo, Malhotra, and Mo 2017; Hickel et al. 2020; Jefferson 2023), rather than the more traditional approach of examining differences in attitudes and behavior *across* different groups of people. These findings also underscore the political relevance of the workplace. For example, depending on how such workplaces are structured, for example, with active labor unions where political discussion and collaborative decision-making is more prevalent, work can promote political efficacy and participation (Pateman 1970), facilitate cross-cutting discussions and political tolerance (Mutz and Mondak 2006), or can, if extensive corporate monitoring of employees is present, potentially serve the ends of conservative interest groups and political elites (Hertel-Fernandez 2017).

The degree to which labor unions inform, socialize, and/or mobilize their rank-and-file membership, reflected here (in part) by the frequency with which labor union members discuss politics at work, can shape the voting behavior of ordinary union members, a key bloc nationwide, but especially in Midwestern swing states, where the decline of organized labor has been most significant and where increasingly high-stakes elections are decided.

## Supplementary Material

Supplementary Material may be found in the online version of this article: https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfaf042.

## Data Availability

Replication data and documentation are available in the Harvard Dataverse at the following link. https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/LQ1TDN. It can also be found by searching for relevant keywords in the Dataverse at the following link: https://dataverse.harvard.edu/.

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