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Worker Voice and Political Participation in Civil Society

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Abstract

Worker voice can relate to political and civic participation in numerous ways. Individual and collective voice can equip individuals with skills and attitudes that increase political engagement, and unions also explicitly encourage members to be politically aware, vote, and run for office. Labor unions and union federations are also often direct participants in the political and policy-making process. This chapter outlines the key theoretical channels by which worker voice can affect political and civic participation, highlights important methodological challenges in identifying causal relationships and mechanisms, and summarizes the major research findings pertaining to nonunion and union voice. In summarizing the major theoretical alternatives, a distinction is made between (a) experiential spillovers in which political and civic participation is facilitated by workers' experience with voice, and (b) intentional efforts by voice institutions, especially labor unions, to increase political and civic participation. In practice, however, the experiential versus intentional transmission mechanisms can be hard to distinguish, so the review of the empirical record is structured around individual-level voice versus collective voice, especially labor unions. Attention is also devoted to the aggregate effects of and participation in the political arena by labor unions. Overall, a broad approach is taken which includes not only classic issues such higher voting rates among union members, but also emerging issues such as whether union members are less likely to vote for extremist parties and the conditions under which labor unions are likely to be influential in the political sphere.

Keywords: worker voice, employee voice, political participation, civic participation, voter turnout

JEL codes: J51, J54, M540

Introduction

Worker voice can take many forms, from individual autonomy and self-determination, to nonunion forms of collective consultation, to labor union representation and collective bargaining (Befort and Budd 2009; Wilkinson et al. 2020). All of these forms of worker voice are important not only for workers and the organizations that employ them, but also for the communities and countries in which they reside (Budd 2014). One way in which worker voice has significance beyond the workplace is by affecting workers' direct and indirect political participation in civil society. At an individual level, this can include voting, joining political protests, running for political office, engaging with charitable work, and other behaviors or activities. At a macro level, this can include the participation of labor unions in politics, policy-making, and social dialogue. Moreover, some of the effects of worker voice can happen intentionally—as when labor unions conduct get-out-the-vote efforts or train individuals to run for political office—while the potentially broader but harder to identify effects happen when an individual's experience with workplace voice leads to the development of skills and attitudes that spillover into the political arena.

This chapter focuses on contemporary scholarship, but concerns with how the workplace experiences affect the political arena are longstanding.[1] In the 18th century, Adam Smith (1827: 327) noted that "the understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments" and thus expressed concern with the social impact of narrowly-defined jobs, a concern then echoed by Karl Marx in *Capital*. In the 1930s, U.S.

[1] In a related vein, going back at least as far as Mill (1848) (also, Vanek 1971), perceived complementarities between economic and political democracy have formed the basis for championing worker cooperatives and participatory economic systems. This form of economic democracy includes giving workers a financial stake in their enterprises. While some of the early empirical research focused specifically on cooperatives (e.g., Greenberg 1981) this chapter reflects the dominant approach of defining worker voice as non-financial participation and is not limited to worker cooperatives or participatory economic systems.

Senator Robert Wagner championed collective bargaining rights because "Fascism begins in industry, not in government. The seeds of communism are sown in industry, not in government. But let men know the dignity of freedom and self-expression in their daily lives, and they will never bow to tyranny in any quarter of their national life" (quoted in Keyserling 1960: 216). The extent to which diverse forms of worker voice impact political participation is thus a significant issue.

This chapter starts by focusing on individual-level political and civic participation. In summarizing the major theoretical alternatives (section 1), a distinction is made between (a) experiential spillovers in which political and civic participation is facilitated by workers' experience with voice, and (b) intentional efforts by voice institutions, especially labor unions, to increase political and civic participation. In practice, however, the experiential versus intentional transmission mechanisms can be hard to distinguish, so the review of the empirical record in section 2 is instead structured around individual-level voice such as autonomy versus collective voice, especially labor unions. In section 3, attention turns from individual political and civic participation to the aggregate effects of and participation in the political arena by labor unions. Overall, the research record largely supports the existence of a relationship between voice and political and civic participation, but methodological concerns make it challenging to confidently identify causal relationships and the precise transmission mechanisms.

1. Individual-Level Political and Civic Participation: Conceptual Issues

This section presents the central theories through which individual and collective worker voice are hypothesized to increase individuals' political and civic participation, and also highlights key methodological challenges for research. This sets the stage for section 2 section which summarizes the empirical evidence on individual political and civic participation.

1.1 Theorizing the Experiential Effects of Worker Voice

First consider the linkages between worker voice and an individual's political and civic participation that are rooted in the experiences of individual forms of worker voice. Modern academic theorizing on the linkages between individual forms of workplace voice and political engagement frequently begins with Carole Pateman's (1970) seminal book *Participation and Democratic Theory*. Pateman argued that when organizations provide individuals with autonomy in their work, this creates self-assurance in which the individual believes they are capable of engaging in autonomous action. When this self-assurance extends to political behaviors outside the organization, increased political action is predicted to occur. In sociological terms, the democratization of work activities allowing for some individual control over how work is done helps create an identity that values democratic actions in all aspects of life (Montgomery 2000). Note that in this line of theorizing, feelings of confidence and effectiveness that come from workplace voice are the root cause of greater political participation. In other words, workplace voice can create "psychological supports" for political engagement (Cohen 1989).

A second line of theorizing focuses instead on skill development. Specifically, Verba et al. (1995) postulated that skills are transferrable from the workplace and other areas of life to the political arena. Exercising voice in the workplace can enhance skills pertaining to decision-making, advocacy, communication, running meetings, and the like. As these are useful civic skills in the political arena, workplace voice is posited to increase political participation by improving these skills. While recognizing that there is considerable overlap between these two lines of theorizing (Adman 2008), the Pateman approach theorizes that political participation is governed by political efficacy that stems from workplace voice, while the Verba et al. approach theorizes that political participation is prompted by skills acquired through participating in workplace voice. Building on Greenberg et al. (1996), Carter (2006)

further emphasizes that important context-specific factors likely shape the existence or strength of spillovers from work to politics, including the voice structure (e.g., direct or indirect), whether participation is undermined by a lack of job autonomy, and the level of individual conflict.

Both lines of theorizing can also be extended beyond individual forms of workplace voice to collective forms including labor unions. That is, when workers experience and participate in collective voice, this can enhance confidence, instill beliefs about the importance of democratic decision-making, and develop transferrable skills. For example, workers who participate in labor union organizing and bargaining processes can become educated about their rights on the job such that advocacy for changes in the workplace may develop a degree of awareness regarding the political elements governing these workplace functions and also develop the skills needed to advocate for these changes politically (Wasser and Lamare 2014). O'Neill and White (2018: 258) label this as building "democratic character: the willingness and capacity of individuals to engage in democratic politics and to do so in ways that are informed by judgements of the common good." It is reasonable to theorize that this is much more likely to be developed by workers' experiences with voice that is itself democratic—as in a labor union—relative to corporate-promulgated forms of individual voice.

Belonging to a labor union also introduces the possibility that social identity theory provides an additional channel linking voice to political participation. More specifically, being a union member can give rise to feelings of social identification with that union such that members align themselves with the union's goals and act in ways that promote these goals. This is then predicted to lead to advocacy and activism (Cregan et al. 2009). Note, however, that in all of the channels presented thus far, any increased political and civic participation is an unintended byproduct of workers' experience with voice. Labor unions may also intentionally try to increase workers' political participation; this is discussed next.

1.2 Intentional Institutional Efforts to Increase Individual Participation

The previous theories provide avenues through which the presence of and experience with individual and collective workplace voice can lead to increased political and civic participation. But institutions of worker voice can also adopt strategies that seek to intentionally increase individual workers' political and civic engagement. This is probably clearest in the case of labor unions, and more recently worker centers, but other institutional forms of worker voice like works councils might also undertake similar initiatives.

The hallmark example of an intentional strategy to increase individual political participation is a get-out-the-vote effort in which a labor union, worker center, or other body visibly encourages and helps workers vote in political elections. But similar strategies can also target other forms of individual political and civic engagement, such as contacting politicians, joining a demonstration or protest, boycotting a product, or participating in a charitable activity (Kerrissey and Schofer 2013). Commonly this involves union efforts to reduce members' ignorance about political and social issues, and to connect members' union membership and identification with political action and with the public interest. To these ends, unions offer political training programs for their members, provide support for workers interested in pursuing public office, and encourage leadership development among bargaining unit representatives.

1.3 Methodological Challenges

While there are various theoretical possibilities as to how a worker's experience with voice or membership in a voice organization can increase the likelihood of political and civic participation, what happens in practice is an empirical question. However, before turning to the empirical evidence in section 2, it's useful to recognize that an empirical relationship between voice and political and other forms of civic participation could be observed for several reasons beyond the causal theories presented in sections 1.1 and 1.2. Inspired by Bryson et al. (2013),

Figure 1 captures possible causal and non-causal pathways linking worker voice and political and civic participation.

<insert Figure 1 near here>

Panel A in Figure 1 shows the straightforward causal relationship envisioned by the theories noted in sections 1.1 and 1.2 in which worker voice affects an individual's level of political and civic participation. Hadziabdic and Baccaro (2020) characterize this as a "molding" effect in which voice shapes political and civic attitudes. If the underlying dynamic between voice and political participation really is a causal, molding phenomenon, then organizational or public policy efforts to increase worker voice would cause greater levels of political and civic engagement, too. However, research would also find an empirical relationship between these constructs if other panels in Figure 1 more accurately portray the nature of the linkage.

Panel B portrays reverse causality in which political participation causes worker voice. This could reflect a situation in which political participation causes an individual to value self-determination or develop participatory skills that then lead to a demand for increased self-determination and participation in the workplace. But increases in voice do not result in greater political participation. Panel C shows a situation in which attitudes and skills in the workplace and political arenas are mutually-reinforcing. In this scenario, there is a causal pathway from the workplace to the political sphere, but it does not fully capture the relationship between the two domains, and it can be hard to tease out what causes what because of the repeated reinforcement and complementarities.

Panel D in Figure 1 is a reminder that research might find an empirical relationship between worker voice and political participation, but this is explained by a failure to account for a confounding factor that can be an outcome of workplace voice. In particular, higher income individuals might have the resources to more frequently participate in the political

process or in other civic activities. As labor unions tend to increase pay, there might be an income effect in which unionization increases political and civic participation because union members have higher pay. But this is not a channel in which worker voice is enhancing worker qualities or attitudes that spillover into the political arena which are acquired by the union member's own actions and experiences, in contrast to higher wages that require an additional step by others—namely, collective bargaining by union staff. In other words, in panel D it is not the experience of worker voice that is shaping a worker's level of political participation; rather, it is the omitted variable of income.

Lastly, panel E in Figure 1 portrays a class of relationships the reflect self-selection or a common underlying cause. For example, suppose an individual has a predisposition towards wanting a high degree of autonomy in all aspects of their life, including at work and in the political arena. This individual, then, would be expected to seek out workplaces that include voice while simultaneously looking for opportunities to be politically engaged. The same would be expected for someone who values autonomy in all aspects of their life, or for someone who has advocacy, communication, or other skills that simultaneously facilitate both workplace and political participation. Or there might be some specific occurrence, such as an injustice, that triggers a worker to simultaneously seek more influence or change in the workplace via voice and also more influence or change in the political arena. In all of these situations, a researcher would observe individuals with higher levels of workplace voice also exhibiting greater levels of political participation, but this would not be rooted in a causal relationship.

Putting these pieces of Figure 1 together, then, illustrates important methodological challenges that researchers face in analyzing the relationship between worker voice and political and civic participation—namely, there are multiple alternatives to a strictly causal relationship. Moreover, even if research can confidently identify a causal relationship between voice and political and civic participation (panel A), a second methodological challenge is that

it can be difficult for a researcher to isolate the specific transmission mechanism(s), such as increased agency as in Pateman (1970) or enhanced transferrable skills as in Verba et al. (1995). This difficulties lies in the fact that the transmission mechanisms can overlap and also be hard to observe or measure. A third methodological issue is allowing for the possibility of heterogeneous, context-dependent or moderated effects of voice on political and civic participation. All of these challenges are important to remember when considering the empirical record.

2 Individual-Level Political and Civic Participation: Evidence

Continuing the focus on linkages between worker voice and an individual's political and civic participation, this section describes key empirical findings. Empirical research on these linkages is frequently motivated by variations of the theories described in sections 1.1 or 1.2, but the research varies regarding the extent to which it confronts the methodological challenges described in section 1.3.

2.1 Individual Voice and Political and Civic Participation

The typical methodological strategy for analyzing whether individual voice is related to political and civic participation is to use regression analysis with individual-level data in which the individual respondents vary in their use of or access to various forms of voice and also in their self-reported political and civic attitudes or behavior. In other words, political and civic attitudes or behaviors are regressed on one or more measures of worker voice, along with additional control variables based on what's available in a particular data set.

The first wave of studies examining Pateman's (1970) spillover thesis were focused, small-scale studies. For example, Elden (1981) analyzed the correlation between workplace autonomy and political participation at one non-union factory in the United States, and found that job autonomy was positively related to individual feelings of political efficacy and social

participation. Smith's (1985) study is notable for drawing on workers from 55 companies, and again found evidence supportive of a spillover. Some of this research also analyzed different dimensions of individual workplace voice. For example, Arrighi and Maume (1994) found that individuals in a U.S. sample were more likely to be politically active if they were involved in workplace decision-making, but low-level job autonomy was unimportant. Some of this research also investigated contextual effects. In a sample of workers from 15 lumber mills, Greenberg et al. (1996) found that direct and representative voice had differential effects on political participation. Using a small telephone survey from a single U.S. city, Jian and Jeffres (2008) documented a spillover from job autonomy to political participation that was influenced by an individual's political efficacy. Carter (2006), however, appraised this early research largely in negative terms by emphasizing that supportive results are limited to specific contexts.

Later research expanded to countries beyond the United States and also tended to use nationally-representative data sets. Lopes et al. (2014), for example, analyzed data covering 15 European countries and found that worker voice in the form of individual autonomy is positively related to civic behavior, which is a pooled measure reflecting whether or not an individual was involved in voluntary, charitable, union, and/or political activities. Timming and Summers (2018) used data from 27 European countries and found that greater autonomy and participation in workplace decision-making are associated with increased trust in political institutions and an increased commitment to democracy. Budd et al. (2018) used similar data and the same measure of workplace voice but focused on analyzing eight political actions rather than attitudes or an aggregated measure. They uncover a positive association between workplace voice and eight political actions: voting in the last national legislative election, contacting politicians, being a member of a political party, working in a political party or action group, displaying campaign materials, signing a petition, demonstrating, and boycotting. Interestingly, Budd et al.'s (2018) result also suggest that the impact of individual worker voice

is just as large as the impact of union membership. Budd et al. (2018) also exploited the large number of countries represented in the data to show that the results cannot be explained by a small number of specific countries—rather, these are broad patterns—and they are moderated by the number of political parties in a country's electoral system and whether or not the country is an old or new democracy. Geurkink et al. (forthcoming) found that supervisor support or suppression can also affect the workplace-political linkage. Recent research therefore continues to expand the early findings that the strength of the worker voice–political participation relationship can depend on a wide-range of institutional contextual factors.

Reflecting the fact that there is now a non-trivial number of studies on individual voice, the voice-civic arena link was included in a recent meta-analysis. Specifically, Weber at el. (2020) found that worker voice in the form of direct participation in workplace decision-making is positively related to engaging in charitable, cultural, or democratic concerns; however, organizational-level workplace democracy (e.g., employee ownership) is not a significant predictor of this scale.

Returning to the methodological challenges noted in section 1.3, most of the research lacks sufficiently-specific measures to separate alternative mechanisms that transmit the effects of voice to the political and civic arenas; rather, the focus is on testing the overall relationship, often with different measures of voice and political participation as dictated by what's available in the data set used. Several studies have also tried to directly confront the challenge of identifying causality. Using Swedish panel data, Adman (2008) found no effect of worker voice on political participation once previous political participation was controlled for. This suggests that the results from cross-sectional analyses—which dominate the literature—reflect individual predisposition to political action rather than a causal effect of worker voice. However, using an instrumental variables approach, Budd et al. (2018) found that for many of the hallmarks of political participation (e.g., voting, contacting government officials,

supporting candidates, signing petitions), accounting for reverse causality and endogeneity resulted in positive, significant effects of individual employee voice consistent with a causal chain from the workplace to the political arena (also see Lopes et al. 2014). Lastly, also supportive of a causal relationship are the results of two field experiments in which involving workers in participatory meetings led them to be more willing to participate in political decision-making (Wu and Paluck 2020).

2.2 Union Voice, Voter Turnout, and Voting Patterns

The empirical research on individual voice analyzes diverse measures of political and civic participation, and so, too, does the research on the effects of union voice and membership (see section 2.3). But first, there is also a significant body of research that specifically focuses on voting.

2.2.1 Voter Turnout and the Union Vote Premium

Among U.S. workers, multiple studies find that union members are significantly more likely to vote in political elections than are comparable non-members (Rosenfeld 2010; Kerrissey and Schofer 2013). Playing off of the longstanding characterization of the wage gap between comparable union and nonunion workers as a "union wage premium," Freeman (2003) labels the voting difference as the "union vote premium." Analyzing nationally-representative samples of individuals who self-report whether or not they voted (e.g., in the most recent election or most recent presidential election) and using regression analysis to control for other individual characteristics, estimates of the union vote premium in the United States range from 4-6 percentage points (Freeman 2003; Rosenfeld 2010) to 18 percentage points (Kerrissey and Schofer 2013).

Similar research in Canada found an unadjusted 12 percentage point gap between unionized and nonunion workers before accounting for any differences in other individual characteristics (Bryson et al. 2013). Once demographic differences between unionized and

nonunion workers are controlled for, the union vote premium falls to 6 percentage points, which is further reduced to 3 percentage points when controlling for income differences Applying this methodology across a range of European countries also yields results of a similar magnitude (Bryson et al. 2014). Interestingly, in their European analyses, Bryson et al. (2014) additionally found that ex-union members are more likely to vote than are individuals who never have been union members, though this difference is not as great as the gap between current members and never members. Using similar data, D'Art and Turner (2007) likewise found that having a union in their workplace increases the probability that an individual will vote even for non-members.

These results can potentially help identify the mechanisms by which unionization translates into increased voting. Explicitly controlling for income differences helps rule out income as the sole explanation for the union vote premium (recall panel D in figure 1) (Bryson et al. 2013, 2014). Bryson et al. (2014) also argue that the persistent effect for ex-union members means that the union vote premium cannot be explained by peer pressure and they instead point to union efforts at raising awareness of the importance of political involvement. But this cannot rule out other transmissions mechanisms, nor can it disprove a non-causal linkage resulting from self-selection (recall panel E in figure 1). As Hadziabdic and Baccaro (2020) have emphasized, the literature generally relies on control variables to rule out non-causal explanations, but at best this is an imperfect solution. Using panel data to explicitly model self-selection into unions, Stegmueller and Becher (2019) did indeed find that selection is an important explanation for the union vote premium, but also concluded that a significant causal effect remains after accounting for selection.

Moreover, concerns over causality apply more to the experiential theories that link voice to political and civic participation via hard to observe attitudinal and skills changes. Theories that instead emphasize labor unions' intentional efforts are easier to observe and

study. For example, in a study of several elections in Los Angeles, Lamare (2010a) found that contact by a union activist significantly increased voter turnout. In a related study, contact by a union activist had the greatest impact on occasional voters (Lamare 2010b).

2.2.1 Union Member Voting Patterns

In addition to the extent to which union members are more likely to vote in political elections, research also examines whether union members vote differently from non-members. Traditionally, union members and households have been more likely to vote for left-wing and social democratic parties and candidates, albeit not monolithically (Sousa 1993; Arndt and Rennwald 2016). But these ties have weakened in recent decades and competition has arisen from extremist political parties (Rennwald 2020). Indeed, extremist political parties frequently claim to be defending the rights of workers when invoking nativist, anti-immigrant, and other common populist rhetoric (Mudde 2007). These parties, particularly on the far right, have made some inroads based on class identity (Afonso and Rennwald 2018). Yet trade unions act as an important counterweight to extremist voting, possibly by espousing principles of solidarity between workers, although as with other union membership research, selection effects cannot be entirely discounted (Mosimann et al. 2019).

Indeed, research on how union members vote is subject to the same causality concerns as the research on the union vote premium. In a study of the effect of unions on individuals' political participation and partisan preferences, Hadziabdic and Baccaro (2020) emphasized this methodological concern in using panel data from Britain and Switzerland to distinguish a causal "union molding attitudes" explanation from a non-causal selection explanation. Their use of longitudinal data allowed observing workers as they transition from being non-members to being union members. Consequently, Hadziabdic and Baccaro (2020: 467, emphases in original) found "an *anticipation* effect, which means that in some cases workers begin modifying their attitudes *before* joining unions, and a *maturation* effect, i.e., an attitudinal

change which becomes noticeable only after a certain duration of membership (and thus may fail to materialize if workers do not remain members for a sufficiently long time)."

2.3 Union Voice and Political and Civic Engagement Beyond Voting

Empirical research has also analyzed the relationship between union membership or coverage and political and civic behaviors and attitudes beyond voting. With respect to political behaviors specifically, one common strategy is to separately analyze specific forms of political participation. For example, Kerrissey and Schofer (2013) analyzed whether U.S. union members were more likely to volunteer for an election campaign, be present at a political rally, attend a protest, and sign a petition, and they found that the answer is "yes" for each of these behaviors. Similar results were found for a similar set of political activities in Canadian (Bryson et al. 2013) and European (Bryson et al. 2014; Budd et al. 2018) data sets. These results have also been found to extend to an even more diverse set of countries including some in the global South (Kerrissey and Schofer 2018).

An alternative approach is to aggregate types of political behavior into an index of political participation or activism. Examples here include Schur (2003) using U.S. data and D'Art and Turner (2007) using European data. Given that research analyzing specific actions consistently finds positive correlations between union members and those actions, it is unsurprising that positive relationships are found between union membership and aggregated indexes of political participation. Some studies also analyze the union effect on an individual's interest in politics (Budd et al. 2018) whereas other research uses such measures as key controls to further isolate other transmission mechanisms (D'Art and Turner 2007). As another attitudinal indicator, Turner et al. (2020) found that the average commitment to democracy score is higher for union members than non-members. Schur (2003) is notable for decomposing the union effect on overall political participation into portions attributable to income, civic skills, workplace recruitment to be involved in political issues, and political efficacy, and found

recruitment to be a key factor but not the sole one (see also, Kerrissey and Schofer 2013). While less widespread than typical forms of political participation, labor unions can also assist members run for and get elected to political offices (Sojourner 2013).

Moving beyond the political arena, research also examines patterns of other civic behaviors by union members as to compared to other individuals. Zullo (2011) found that communities with higher union density and more labor unions per square mile had higher aggregate donations to the United Way charity. In individual-level data, Zullo (2011) also found that union members volunteer more than non-members, particularly in activities like counseling, coaching, tutoring, and mentoring. Zullo (2013) found that union activists are significantly more likely to have engaged in variety of apolitical volunteer activities. Booth et al. (2017) found that compared to other similar workers, union members are more likely to make charitable donations and make larger donations. Moreover, by using panel data and finding that individuals who join unions still increase their giving, Booth et al.'s (2017) results point toward a causal connection between union membership and charitable giving.

Focused case studies also dig more specifically into how unions affect political and civic engagement. Nissen (2010) documented how a Florida union's grassroots approach to political mobilization not only resulted in more members involved in political activities, but they are also more actively involved in charitable and other civic activities. Nissen (2010) attributed these results to the way in which the union framed involvement as serving the public interest. Terriquez (2011) studied how members of a janitors' union were involved in their children's schools and found that active union members were more likely to be involved in ways that allow them to articulate their own interests rather than participating in ways prescribed by school personnel. Moreover, this study revealed differences in how being in a union facilitates this civic participation with some drawing on enhanced confidence (recall Pateman 1970) and others using new-found civic skills (recall Verba et al. 1995). Putting a lot

of this research together, then, it would seem more productive to see the accumulated research as identifying the multiplicity of ways in which union voice shapes broader political and civic engagement rather than as successfully finding a single dominant transmission channel.

3 Labor Unions' Aggregate Participation in Politics

The previous sections focus on the linkages between worker voice and individual political and civic participation, but institutional forms of voice—particularly, labor unions—can also be seen as influencing and participating in the political arena at a system or aggregate level. In democratic states, labor unions can affect the broad nature of the citizenry while also acting as representatives of union members and the working class more generally. In undemocratic states, labor movements can be a voice for democratic political reform.

3.1. Indirect Effects on Political (In)equality

One way to think about the aggregate effect of unions on political participation is to ask whether the impact of union-induced individual political participation adds up to more than the sum of the individual effects. This is difficult to explicitly observe but the broad nature of the individual effects weave together in ways in which this seems compelling. In other words, by helping create a working-class electorate that is politically-educated with the skills to be politically engaged and possesses a "democratic character" or "psychological supports", by mobilizing large number of working-class voters, and by training union members to run for office, it is argued that unions significantly enhance the democratic nature of a polity (Ahlquist 2017; O'Neill and White 2018).

In the aggregate, labor unions can also impact the quality of a democracy as a byproduct of union efforts to increase wages. Political participation and political knowledge are lowest among low-income individuals (Erikson 2015). In other words, income inequality fuels political inequality. But when unions increase wages for the lowest-paid and reduce income

inequality, then unions indirectly foster broader political participation (Ahlquist 2017). Conversely, the decline in union density observed in many countries coincides with an increase in income inequality, and also coincides with an "oligarchic shift" in which elites increasingly dominate policy-making; unions, then, are seen as important for reversing this oligarchic shift by countering trends toward greater inequality (O'Neill and White 2018).

3.2 Participation in the Democratic Political Arena

Labor unions can also be more intentional in their aggregate level political participation. As noted by Ahlquist (2017:424), "unions almost always have some sort of alliance with political parties" (also James 2004). In some countries, such as the United States, this typically takes the form of supporting specific candidates for office via financial contributions and mobilizing efforts, lobbying elected officials, and publicizing pertinent issues. Political expenditures and lobbying efforts by U.S. unions have been found to be related to a union's demographic, economic, and internal democratic characteristics (Delaney et al. 1988). U.S. unions' organizational resources are also important predictors of union participation in Congressional hearings (Albert 2013).

In other electoral systems unions can play a more direct role, and research examines what shapes the form of labor unions' political involvement and when it is expected to be more or less influential. With high levels of proportional representation, it is difficult for any single party to govern. In such systems, business has incentives to seek influence as a social partner rather than relying on influence within specific political parties (Martin and Swank 2008), and politicians can avoid backlash from unpopular reforms by using social pacts as a shield (Hamann et al. 2015). Compared to majoritarian political systems, then, labor unions are predicted to participate in policy-making via corporatist social partnerships. When proportional representation electoral systems weaken political party power and make it difficult for governing entities to unilaterally impose policies, unions maybe called upon to serve as a

consensus-building intermediary and thus are expected to have greater policy-making influence (Rathgeb 2018). Conversely, unions likely have less influence in majoritarian systems which give hegemonic power to a single party that does not need alliances to enact policy changes.

Budd and Lamare (forthcoming) further theorized that labor unions will have greater political legitimacy in representative electoral systems due to the higher likelihood of the presence of labor-friendly legislators, even under right-wing governments, resulting in a structural, rather than purely ideological, connection between unions and political systems. Moreover, as a reminder of the complex, multi-directional relationships between workplace and political voice, Budd and Lamare (forthcoming) further theorized that these and other implications of representative electoral systems in which labor unions have greater political influence will spill over into the workplace and enhance workplace voice, and found empirical support for these propositions.

3.3 Building Democracy Under Authoritarian Regimes

The historical development of many Western democracies included parallel, reinforcing advances in labor union rights and political rights for workers. Labor unions are thus an integral part of the historical maturation of Western democracies (Ebbinghaus 1995; Baccaro et al. 2019). In post-war authoritarian societies, labor unions have often continued this legacy by championing democratic freedoms and serving as independent monitors of government power (Collier and Mahoney 1997; Kraus 2007; Caraway et al 2015). Though when unions are the subject of repression, their work might be done through alliances with safer groups such as non-government organizations (NGOs) or community groups (Kerrissey and Schofer 2018). Lee (2007) empirically documented the centrality of unions among civic actors in promoting good political governance. But, as would be expected, there is variation across time and space due to corruption, control, disinterest, or repression.

As authoritarian regimes have existed on every continent, the issue of how unions have navigated the political and civic arenas in non-democratic societies has widespread relevance. As just one example, consider Indonesia (Caraway and Ford 2019). Leftist unions were crushed in the 1960s, and for several decades the single, official union was a source of government control of workers. In the early 1990s, mass wildcat strikes were part of a broader push for workplace improvements, union rights, and democratic freedoms with students activists and NGOs. When democratization emerged after the Asian financial crisis, the regime change was led by students and the urban poor, not labor unions. But unions were active in the early years of the democratic regime, and "there is no doubt that the organized labor movement not only helped lay the groundwork for Indonesia's democratic transition, but has contributed to democratic consolidation by mobilizing for labor rights and by providing a conduit for working-class engagement in politics" (Caraway and Ford 2019: 74).

So while each case has its own complexities, the democratization and decolonization efforts of labor unions should not be overlooked when considering the intersection between worker voice and political participation. Moreover, authoritarian legacies rooted in the particulars of each national context continue to shape the ways in which labor unions operate in new democracies (Caraway et al 2015).

Summary

While individual and collective forms of worker voice are accurately viewed primarily as workplace phenomena, the interconnections to and ramifications for political and civic engagement should not overlooked. Labor unions, with their own internal participatory, democratic systems and their incentives for political education and mobilization, are perhaps the form of worker voice in which is it easiest to expect there to be spillovers into the political and civic arena—including spillovers that are the byproduct of experiencing unionization and others that result from intentional union strategies. But even the experience of individual forms

of workplace voice such as in-job autonomy can have spillovers by fostering democratizing attitudes and civic skills. Individual voice is likely to only have individual-level effects, but labor unions and other institutions might be sufficiently impactful to have measurable, aggregate impacts on a country's democracy, too, and it is important to understand the nature and determinants of these aggregate effects.

In assessing the empirical relevance of the impact of workplace voice on political and civic participation, there are important methodological challenges, both in terms of identifying causal relationships and in separating out alternative transmission mechanisms that might be context-dependent. Consequently, the greatest confidence lies in concluding that there is a relationship between the workplace and broader arenas. Concluding that this is a causal relationship should be a little more tentative. And the greatest uncertainty of all is in pinning down specific transmission channels. With that said, the research that specifically addresses issues of causality generally concludes that non-causal complications cannot explain the entire magnitude of the estimated relationships—in other words, there appears to be causal connections from the workplace to the political and civic arenas, although perhaps not as large in magnitude as unadjusted estimates would suggest. With respect to specific channels, an important conclusion is that the accumulated research is better seen as identifying the diverse ways in which worker voice shapes broader political and civic engagement rather than as successfully finding a single dominant transmission channel and ruling out others. Future research would be better served by adopting this pluralistic mindset rather than one that focuses on exclusivity.

The findings summarized here generally hold across a wide-range of countries—but of course not uniformly—which underscores the validity and importance of the relationships between the workplace and the political and civic arenas. Across time and space, then, what happens at work is not expected to stay at work. Researchers and commentators often present

this in a positive frame, as has been done here—that is, higher levels of workplace voice are associated with higher levels of political and civic participation. But it is important to remember that if this is true, then so is the corresponding negative framing—that is, dictatorial and authoritarian workplaces in which workers lack individual and/or collective voice likely lead to lower levels of political and civic participation, with consequent negative impacts on society. Hence, the research record has important implications for democratic and civic well-being.

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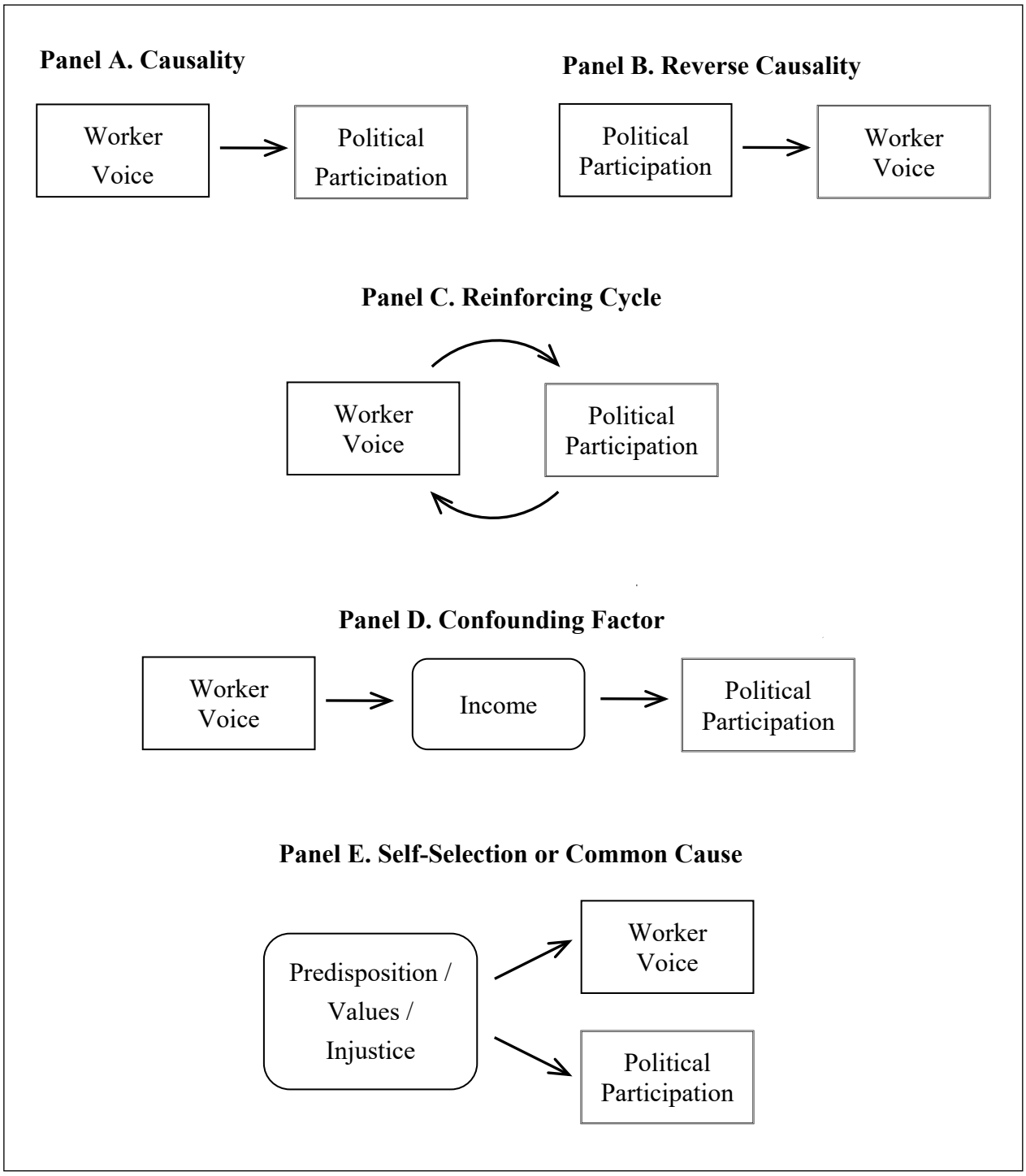
Figure 1. Pathways Linking Worker Voice and Political Participation