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Workplace Democracy:  
The Structure of Individual Worker Preferences  
for Labor Representation**

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# **How U.S. Workers Think About Workplace Democracy: The Structure of Individual Worker Preferences for Labor Representation<sup>1</sup>**

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*Abstract:* Although never as powerful as in other advanced democracies, unions remain incredibly important economic and political organizations in the United States. Yet we know little about the structure of workers' preferences for labor unions or other alternative labor organizations. We report the results of a conjoint experiment fielded on a nationally representative sample of over 4,000 employees. We explore how workers' willingness to join and financially support labor organizations varies depending on the specific benefits and services offered by those organizations. While workers value some aspects of traditional American unions very highly, especially collective bargaining, they would be even more willing to join and support organizations currently unavailable under U.S. law and practice. We also identify important cleavages in worker support for labor organizations engaged in politics and strikes. Our results shed light on the politics of labor organization, as well as civic association and membership more broadly.

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Although labor unions in the United States have declined from a post-war membership peak of over a third of workers to just 10.5% in 2018, they remain incredibly important economic and political institutions.<sup>2</sup> Unions still provide voice for millions of workers in shaping their wages, benefits, and working conditions (Card 2001; Farber et al. 2018; Freeman and Medoff 1984; Rosenfeld 2014; Western and Rosenfeld 2011). They also continue to have significant political and civic consequences by educating workers about political issues, mobilizing them to support candidates, contributing financially to political campaigns, and lobbying for changes in policy at the local, state, and federal levels (Ahlquist and Levi 2013; Anzia and Moe 2015; Kim and Margalit 2017; Leighley and Nagler 2007; Moe 2011; Schlozman 2015; Schlozman et al. 2012; Stegmueller et al. 2018). And unions underpin workers' collective rights, which political theorists have argued are essential to the health of a representative democracy (Dahl 1986; Gourevitch 2018).

While the capacity for traditional labor unions to carry out these functions has diminished as their membership dropped, the share of the workforce who report they would vote to join a union has increased substantially since the 1970s to nearly half of nonunion workers in 2017 (Kochan et al. 2019). Moreover, a growing number of worker advocacy groups are experimenting with new approaches to organizing and representing workers outside of the traditional labor law framework, like worker centers and the Fight for Fifteen movement (Andrias 2016; Fine 2006; Galvin 2016; Rolf 2016). Together, these trends have sparked a growing debate among academics and advocates over how organized labor might rebuild its

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<sup>2</sup> Estimates from the Troy-Sheflin series reported in Eidlin 2018.

membership. Yet surprisingly little is known about what workers themselves would want out of labor representation today.

Aside from its implications for ongoing policy debates, developing a better understanding of why individual workers might join and pay dues to labor organizations is important on both theoretical and empirical grounds. A long line of political theorists (Anderson 2017; Dahl 1986; Gourevitch 2013, 2018) and industrial relations scholars (Commons 1934; Derber 1970; Webb and Webb 1897) have argued that the workplace needs to be considered as a political space in its own right—a “private” government that sets binding rules about worker behavior within a framework for governance very much like the nation-states political scientists more frequently study. Yet unlike public governments, we know little about the structure of workers’ attitudes and beliefs about these private governments in which citizens spend much of their lives (cf. Freeman and Rogers 2006; Kochan et al. 2019). This paper takes a first step towards documenting workers’ preferences for democratic representation in the workplace through labor organizations, much in the same way as longstanding work in political science has documented the ways in which citizens participate in the political process through civic associations (e.g. Han 2014; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Schattschneider 1960; Schlozman et al. 2012; Skocpol 2003; Truman 1951; Verba et al. 1995).

We address the question of how American workers think about joining and supporting unions and labor organizations using a conjoint experiment embedded in a large-scale, nationally representative survey of over 4,000 employed American workers (e.g. Hainmueller et al. 2014). Our conjoint design asked workers to evaluate different sets of labor organizations, randomly varying a number of characteristics of those organizations, including membership rules, dues structure, scope of collective bargaining, legal representation on behalf of workers, input to

management, selective benefits, use of strikes, and political advocacy. The attributes were chosen to reflect the different models of unions currently under debate in the United States, as well as models of unionism present in other advanced economies (e.g. Ebbinghaus 2002; Martin and Swank 2012; Thelen 2001). Importantly, the conjoint methodology enables us to draw direct comparisons of these attributes' effects on the same outcomes and scales (Hainmueller et al. 2014). We queried workers both about their choice between various organizations, as well as the maximum amount in dues respondents would be willing to pay to join these hypothetical organizations. This study represents, as far as we gather, the largest and most rigorous experimental analysis ever conducted on worker preferences for labor representation—including traditional unions, alternative labor organizations, and unions that might emerge from a reformed American labor law regime.

Overall, our findings indicate a surprising consensus across workers in the structure of preferences for labor representation. When thinking about joining and supporting labor organizations, workers value some features of traditional labor unions—like collective bargaining—along with features that are not currently supported under U.S. labor law, like social welfare benefit provision and formal representation on corporate boards of directors. This, in turn, has important implications for understanding the politics of labor unions in the United States, including the ways that current labor law prevents unions from maximizing their membership and financial support.

Our results also speak to debates over public opinion in an era of political polarization. In spite of very strong elite-level and interest group polarization on labor politics (McCarty et al. 2006), our findings indicate that the workplace is one domain where Democrats and Republicans share remarkably similar preferences (cf. Abramowitz and Saunders 2008, but see Fiorina and

Abrams 2008). This suggests that workers generally think about workplace representation as being separate from politics—with the important exceptions of strikes and lobbying or campaign involvements. Those were both areas in which Independent and Republican workers were skeptical of labor activities, which in turn suggests important limits on unions’ clout as organized interests. Unions’ strength in both the workplace (through collective bargaining) and in politics is limited to the extent that they cannot threaten strikes or engage in campaign lobbying (cf. Becher et al. Forthcoming; Burns 2011; Stegmueller et al. 2018).

Together, our findings help to situate the individual-level preferences of American workers within the political and economic institutions that structure American labor markets. In particular, we highlight how U.S. institutions enable, but more often constrain, labor representation in comparison to peer rich democracies. We thus view our analysis as answering the call made by Kathleen Thelen (2019) in her presidential address for the American Political Science Association for a revived focus on the political economy of the United States in comparative perspective. By illustrating how American-focused political scientists can bring methodological tools like conjoint survey analysis—more often deployed to study political candidates and elections—to questions of political economy, we hope to spur deeper study of economic democracy in the American workplace.

### *Worker Preferences for Workplace Democracy*

Why focus on participation and governance in the contemporary American workplace? Following the formulation Robert Dahl offered in *A Preface to Economic Democracy* and developed more extensively by Elizabeth Anderson in *Private Government*, we argue that political science needs to conceive of the workplace as a political space in its own right, just like the systems of government more traditionally studied in the discipline (Anderson 2017; Dahl

1986). One important implication of this theoretical move is to draw our attention to the intermediary organizations in the workplace that provide workers the opportunity to exercise their collective voice to management and also press for changes in the structure of workplace policy. Just like civic associations in broader society, labor organizations provide a vehicle through which workers can achieve more democratic representation in the workplace (Dahl 1986; Schlozman et al. 2012; Skocpol 2003).

But when do individuals join organizations that advance workplace democracy and produce collective goods—perhaps most importantly, labor unions? An early generation of scholarship in political science expected organized interests to emerge naturally to represent factions of the public with shared preferences or grievances (e.g. Truman 1951). Yet this older perspective neglected the barriers that individuals face to group formation, particularly for large groups seeking collective benefits that cannot be limited to the individuals directly contributing to the group’s efforts. Most prominently, Mancur Olson argued that rational individuals would be reluctant to support the labor movement because they could free-ride from the higher wages and benefits, better working conditions, and voice in workplace governance that unions obtained whether they contributed dues or efforts to unions or not (Olson 1965).

The solution to the dilemma posed by Olson in *The Logic of Collective Action* was threefold. Small, local, craft-oriented unions representing highly-skilled workers could depend on solidarity and social pressure between workers to encourage membership and dues payments. In larger organizations where these social pressures were insufficient, Olson pointed to the provision of noncollective goods highly valued by workers that could be targeted only at members—what Olson termed “selective incentives”—as being an important way industrial unions could gain members. Importantly, however, these benefits spurred membership

conditional on the fact that workers valued them—and so the expansion of public social welfare programs eroded the appeal of traditional selective incentives offered by unions.

The third strategy outlined by Olson involved compulsion: unions could simply require workers to join or at least pay dues to cover the collective benefits provided by the union. Accordingly, Olson emphasized how American labor unions had pursued “security agreements” with employers that required employers to hire union members (“closed shop” provisions), to require new hires to join the union (“union shop” provisions), or to require non-members to pay the costs of collective bargaining and job protections incurred by the union (“agency shop” provisions).

Scholarship since Olson has offered a variety of other potential explanations for overcoming the collective action problem he identified that are also relevant for thinking about union membership. For instance, Clark and Wilson, as well as Moe, stressed that individuals may derive purposive and solidary benefits from contributing to collective goods independent of the selective benefits that organizations provide (Clark and Wilson 1961; Moe 1988; see also reputational incentives in Booth 1985; Naylor 1990). For their part, Marwell and Oliver document that under certain assumptions, larger groups may have a broader core of committed members willing to subsidize the provision of collective goods to the whole (Marwell and Oliver 1993). Moreover, it may well make sense for prospective members of an organization to rationally support the provision of collective goods if there are increasing returns to their participation or if individuals have an outsized perception of their efficacy (e.g. McAdam 1982). Of course, these explanations need not be set against one another, and some scholars have stressed how workers’ material grievances can feed into more ideological or solidaristic reasons for supporting unionization (e.g. Premack and Hunter 1988; Wheeler and McClendon 1991; see

also Brief and Rude 1981; Kochan and Katz 1988). While these various theoretical arguments suggest different dues requirements (or non-requirements), to date they have not been subjected to empirical tests. We will do so in our analyses.

Together, these theories help us to understand when we might see workers supporting workplace collective action in general, but they do not shed much light onto the specific forms of unions that workers would be willing to support. Perhaps surprisingly, there is no study or even literature that speaks to the full set of attributes that might matter to workers as they decide whether to join a labor organization. As a result, we draw from a number of longstanding theoretical debates in comparative political economy and industrial relations over the political sustainability of different union models (e.g. Ebbinghaus 2002; Martin and Swank 2012; Streeck and Kenworthy 2005; Thelen 2001, 2015). Worker representation can take many forms. Which forms do workers most value? And how do workers weigh features of labor organizations against one another?

We begin with how globalization and technological advances, combined with shifts in employer strategies, have changed the labor market in fundamental ways that might affect workers' preferences for labor organizations—and especially the specific benefits and services they offer. In a more precarious labor market (Kallenberg 2013), workers may be particularly interested in how labor organizations can smooth their transitions across employers or jobs, especially if their existing job is vulnerable to automation. This has led some to argue that unions will need to shift from focusing on representing workers in a given job to providing labor market services and benefits that move with workers across jobs throughout their careers similar to the services unions in a number of European countries provide through “Ghent” systems (Dimick 2012; Rolf 2018).

Another variation in union forms is in the degree to which the labor organization representatives are involved in a firm's decision-making. Traditional U.S. unions have concentrated on collective bargaining over select compensation and work conditions issues but typically abstained from seeking influence on strategic business decisions or from fostering more informal workplace level participation processes aimed at improving productivity or other aspects of day-to-day operations. Union leaders believed that such involvement would endanger the independence on which they depended for effective collective bargaining (Kochan et al. 1986). Yet, Kochan, Katz, and McKersie (1986) argued that unions' absence from the long-term strategy level of industrial relations activity carried significant costs. For one, it left unions to negotiate over the consequences of employers' decisions rather than the decisions themselves. For another, unions' absence from workplace improvement efforts alienated members (or potential members) who wanted greater input in firm practices, especially on the shop floor (Kochan et al. 2019). As concerns over these strategic and workplace issues have increased, so too have calls for unions and workplace governance systems to adopt forms of representation more commonly found in Europe such as works councils and formal representation on corporate boards (e.g. Andrias and Rogers 2018; Madland 2016; Yglesias 2018).

A final dimension in union form relates to participation in politics. Past work has drawn a sharp distinction between social movement and business or economistic unionism (e.g. Robinson 1993). In the former, unions engage in politics as a means of promoting a broader solidaristic vision of the political economy, prioritizing a cohesive political ideology and continuous political mobilization, often through a representative political party. By comparison, the latter downplays the importance of politics, adopting a more pragmatic approach of "helping friends and punishing enemies" and focusing on policies that strengthen unions' abilities to bargain

collectively with employers for more generous wages and benefits and better working conditions. While no country or union fits perfectly into this typology, the American labor movement generally falls closer to the economistic or business model (e.g. Eidlin 2018), though some have recently called for unions to embrace a more explicitly social movement orientation to regain political power (e.g. Rolf 2016).

In sum, existing literatures in comparative political economy and labor relations underscore substantial differences between American unions and those in other advanced democracies—and thus invite the question of how U.S. employees think about these differences in union models. Accordingly, we seek to explore how workers think about different approaches to workplace representation, collapsing the variation we described above across union forms into four ideal types. These ideal-type models all emphasize different aspects of labor representation, and imply very different costs, benefits, and potential appeals to workers. These models include:

- *A traditional, employer-centered model* of private-sector union representation, emphasizing formal collective bargaining at the level of an individual workplace, mandatory dues for members, limited supplemental benefits and services, relatively limited input to management, and the use of strikes and direct mobilization if needed.<sup>3</sup> This is the core of the private-sector model of unionism spelled out in the 1935 National Labor Relations Act. While some private-sector unions go beyond this

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<sup>3</sup> The relevant statute governing private-sector unions states that “The [National Labor Relations] Board shall decide in each case whether, in order to assure to employees the fullest freedom in exercising the rights guaranteed by this Act, the unit appropriate for the purposes of collective bargaining shall be the employer unit, craft unit, plant unit, or subdivision thereof....”

model—for instance, offering more robust job training and placement opportunities or social welfare benefits—we are interested in testing the baseline model envisioned by the New Deal-era framers of U.S. labor law that represents the typical American union.

- An *individual services model* lacking formal collective bargaining rights but offering a broad array of benefits to workers, including labor market services (like job search help and training for current and future positions), social welfare benefits (including portable health insurance and retirement benefits, as well as unemployment insurance), and legal representation both in the workplace and for common civil law issues, like housing or immigration. This model corresponds to the approach pursued by various new alt-labor organizations operating outside of labor law, as well as recent proposals for U.S. unions to consider providing more social welfare benefits in order to attract new members (e.g. Dimick 2012; Fine 2005; Rolf 2018). Currently U.S. labor organizations are substantially limited in their ability to offer comprehensive health insurance and retirement benefits and are not involved in the direct administration of unemployment benefits.
- A *participation and voice* model that stresses increased worker representation within their firms or organizations, including informal participation and input to management, joint committees of workers and managers to address shop floor issues, and worker representation on organization boards of directors. This model corresponds to longstanding proposals to improve worker voice on the job (e.g. Kochan et al. 1986), as well as new legislative proposals to change corporate

governance requirements to build in formal representation of workers into management decisions (e.g. Andrias and Rogers 2018; Yglesias 2018). Again, some of these features are possible under current U.S. labor law (such as informal participation and input to management) but others (like enterprise-wide joint worker-management committees or councils and worker representation on corporate boards of directors) are neither required nor protected by the National Labor Relations Act.

- A *political mobilization model*, in which worker organizations would prioritize policy lobbying and electoral campaigning over workplace activities, especially broad-scale, continuous political recruitment that would bring unions closer to a social movement orientation. This is the model that the AFL-CIO has sought to implement with the creation of Working America in 2003, a mass membership organization of non-union members who nevertheless seek to elect pro-labor candidates and pass policies benefiting working-class Americans.<sup>4</sup> This is also a model pursued by the recent Fight for Fifteen movement, in which non-union workers used protests, rallies, and lobbying efforts to push for higher state and local minimum wages as well as paid sick and family leave policies. Several legal scholars, like Kate Andrias and Benjamin Sachs, have called for more politically-oriented efforts like these (Andrias 2016; Sachs 2013).

### *The Worker Organization Study*

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<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.workingamerica.org/about>.

To understand how workers think about these alternative approaches to workplace representation, we commissioned an original nationally representative survey of 4,203 employed, non-managerial<sup>5</sup> American workers from the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago using their AmeriSpeak panel in the fall of 2018. AmeriSpeak uses area probability sampling as the basis for an equal-probability sample of U.S. households, on which it administers online surveys to an ongoing panel of respondents.<sup>6</sup>

Our survey—the Worker Organization Study—probed respondents’ current employment situation (including information about their job and employer), as well as their union status and perceptions of the labor movement.<sup>7</sup> Following those questions, we then administered a conjoint choice analysis, in which we presented respondents with four pairs of hypothetical labor organizations and asked respondents to indicate which organization they would join (“Which of

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<sup>5</sup> The survey screened out respondents who reported being an “owner, member of the owner’s family, or part of upper-level management – that is, executives who make key decisions for your organization or company and oversee all operations”. This meant that some respondents still reported that they supervised others or fit into “Management” occupations.

<sup>6</sup> NORC invited 17,124 panelists to participate in the Worker Organization Study, resulting in 5,661 screening interviews and 4,673 panelists eligible for interviews. Panelists were offered the equivalent of \$4 for completing the survey, which increased to \$10 at the end of the survey to ensure completion. NORC computed statistical weights to match the estimates of the non-managerial, employed population from the Current Population Survey. Appendix 1 summarizes the AmeriSpeak methodology in more detail.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 2 for a complete copy of our survey instrument.

these organizations would you be more likely to join?”) and how much respondents would be willing to pay in dues to both organizations (“Assuming you had a pre-tax annual salary of \$50,000, or about \$4,200 per month, select the amount below that you would be willing to pay PER MONTH in dues to belong to each labor organization.”).<sup>8</sup> For the second question, we offered respondent five options, including \$0 (0% of salary) per month, \$40 per month (1%), \$100 (2.5%) per month, \$200 (5%) per month, or \$400 (10%) per month. Importantly, to ensure that respondents were considering these organizations on their own terms, we began the conjoint choice exercise with the following introduction: “For the next few minutes, we are going to ask you about hypothetical labor organizations that you might join in your workplace. These are organizations that would represent employees in your company or organization and are not necessarily unions.”

By randomizing the characteristics of the hypothetical labor organizations we presented to respondents, we are able to identify the causal effect of these characteristics on how workers evaluate the organizations—and thus make important headway over existing observational research on worker preferences for unions and labor representation (Hainmueller et al. 2014; cf. Farber and Saks 1980; Freeman and Rogers 2006). The order in which characteristics were presented remained fixed across tasks to reduce the cognitive burden on respondents, following the advice we received from NORC based on cognitive interviews and survey pre-testing.

We examined the causal effects of nine different characteristics of labor organizations, which we selected to reflect the different strategies or models of representation summarized

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<sup>8</sup> We wanted respondents to have relatively equal footing with their baseline income for this question, one for which dues would not be an onerous expense nor would they be trivial.

above that are under debate and being used to varying degrees by unions and emerging “alt-labor” groups. These characteristics included rules about *who can join the organization*; how *dues are charged*; whether the organization engages in *collective bargaining with employers over compensation, hours, and working conditions*; whether the organization provides *extra services and benefits*, like portable health insurance coverage or unemployment insurance; whether the organization provides *legal help and representation*; whether the organization engages in *political activities*, such as election campaigning or lobbying; whether the organization *consults with management* on how the employer should operate; and whether the organization uses threats of *strikes or direct action by workers*.

Table 1 summarizes the levels of each of these characteristics that we randomized and presented to respondents in the conjoint exercise (see Appendix 2 for an example of a task presented to respondents) In all, these features touch on aspects of unions as they currently exist in the United States (for instance, traditional dues collection, firm-based collective bargaining, and limited input into management decisions), aspects of alt-labor organizations, like worker centers (including no collective bargaining rights, limited dues collection, and political advocacy and direct action), and features of labor organizations that exist in other countries but not currently in the United States (such as union-provided portable health and retirement benefits, unemployment insurance, regional or sectoral collective bargaining, or representation on company boards). We will look at each characteristic individually and then examine selective combinations that reflect the models described above and debates over the future of unions and worker representation.

**Table 1: Description of Labor Organization Characteristics Tested in Conjoint Experiment**

Attribute description	Level description
Who can join	Workers in your business or organization can join
	Workers in your business or organization can join and you can keep receiving membership services and benefits after you leave your job
	Workers in your occupation at your workplace can join
	Workers in your occupation can join and you can keep receiving membership services and benefits if you change employers
Dues	All workers required to pay dues
	Workers required to pay dues only if they receive benefits from the organization
	Dues are voluntary
Negotiation with your employer	Does not negotiate with employer over compensation, hours, or working conditions
	Negotiates with employer over compensation, hours, and working conditions for all workers
	Negotiates with employer over compensation, hours, and working conditions only for dues-paying members
	Negotiates to raise wages and working conditions for all workers in your region and industry
Extra services/benefits	Does not offer any extra benefits
	Provides health insurance and retirement savings accounts to workers in between jobs or if workers do not have access to them
	Provides extra unemployment insurance benefits to workers who lose their jobs
	Offers training to keep your skills up to date as technologies change
	Offers training for skills needed for other jobs you might want
	Offers help finding and applying for new jobs (like help finding openings, comparing pay, and writing a resume)
	Offers discounts on many products and services you might buy
How you do your work	Does not get involved in how you and your coworkers do your work or in improving how your organization does its work

	Offers you and your coworkers opportunities to work with management to recommend improvements in how you and your organization does work
Legal help and representation	Does not deal with legal issues governing worker rights
	Offers information on what workers' rights are according to employer policy and labor law
	Offers legal representation to ensure that the organization upholds all workers' rights
	Offers legal representation to workers with individual workplace problems, like harassment or discrimination
	Offers legal representation to workers with common non-workplace legal problems, like housing
Political activities	Not involved in elections or lobbying
	Campaigns for pro-worker politicians
	Campaigns for policies related to the workplace like family leave and the minimum wage
Input to management	Does not advise top management on how the organization should operate, including how to use technology or opening and closing plants, stores, or facilities
	Advises top management on how the organization should operate, including how to use technology or opening and closing plants, stores, or facilities
	Represents workers in joint committee with top management to decide how the organization should operate, including how to use technology or opening and closing plants, stores, or facilities
	Formally represents workers on your organization's board of directors to have a voice in how the organization should operate, including how to use technology or opening and closing plants, stores, or facilities
Use of Strikes	Never uses the threat of a strike or direct mobilization by workers
	Uses the threat of a strike or direct mobilization by workers if needed

Although we tested more features than are typically fielded on candidate choice conjoint experiments (e.g. Carnes and Lupu 2016; Teele et al. 2018), recent research suggests a stability of causal estimates even within the range of attributes that we study (Bansak et al. 2017). Moreover, while pre-testing of the survey indicated that the instrument was more cognitively demanding than typical survey experiments, the respondents in those trials still meaningfully evaluated the attributes and organizations we presented to them.<sup>9</sup>

For the purposes of our analysis, we followed the recommendation of Hainmueller et al. (2014) and treated each organization evaluated by respondents as a distinct observation, resulting in a maximum of 33,624 cases (4,203 respondents \* 4 rating tasks \* 2 organizations in each task). We then estimated ordinary least squares regression models for both the “join” binary outcome, as well as the five-point dues scale, though our results are not dependent on this modelling decision (see Appendices 4 and 5).<sup>10</sup> We applied NORC’s survey weights and clustered standard errors by respondent.

### *How Do American Workers Think about Labor Representation?*

How did workers think about the various organizations that we presented to them? And how did these preferences vary across different subgroups of workers? Figure 1 presents our main results for the “join” outcome, which graphs the difference in the probability that a worker would join a labor organization for each of the features we tested in the conjoint experiment (i.e.,

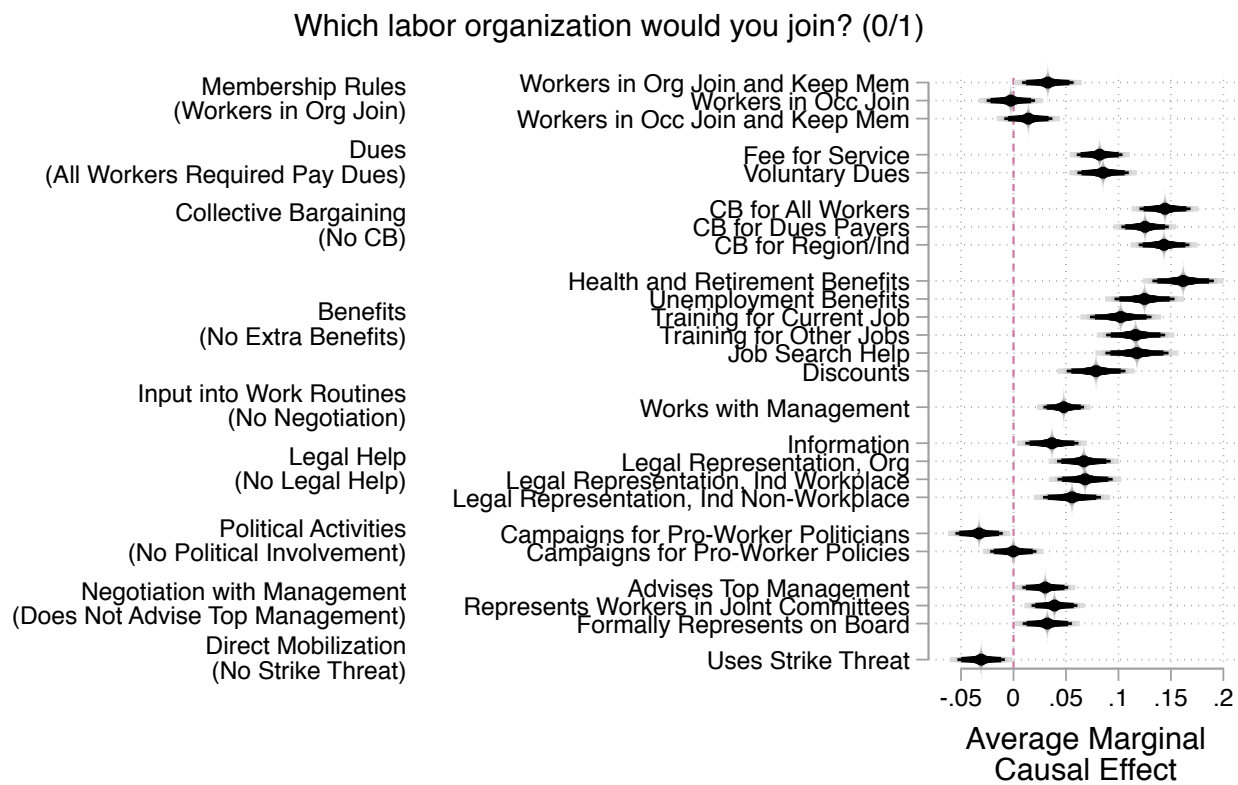
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<sup>9</sup> This pre-testing included a 100-person trial on Amazon MTurk, a 2,000-responder survey fielded by Survey Sampling International, and cognitive focus groups convened by NORC.

<sup>10</sup> Results presented in Appendix 3 review robustness checks to our conjoint analysis following the advice in Hainmueller et al. (2014).

the graph plots average marginal causal effects). The horizontal spikes around the estimates indicate 95% confidence intervals, and the characteristics below the labels on the left indicate the base (excluded) categories against which the average marginal causal effect estimates are computed. So, for instance, the first coefficient plotted in Figure 1 for the “Workers in Org Join and Keep Mem” characteristic indicates that workers were about 3 percentage points more likely to want to join a labor organization where they could enroll if they were employed at a particular business and they could keep their membership after they left that employer, compared to a labor organization where they could enroll if they were employed at a particular business but could not keep their membership if they lost or changed their job.

**Figure 1: Average Marginal Causal Effects of Labor Organizations on Likelihood of Joining**



In Figure 1 we present results for our full survey sample. (In later sections we discuss how some of these effects differ by subgroups, including education and occupation.) Beginning with the first characteristic of the experiment, involving rules about which workers could join each organization, we can see that compared to the status quo in traditional unions (where workers can only join if they are employed at a particular business and cannot keep their membership if they change jobs), respondents were more enthusiastic about models where they could keep their membership if they changed or left their jobs.

Other options that expanded union membership beyond a specific firm to all workers in a particular occupation—for instance, the model pursued by alt-labor groups focusing on specific classes of workers like the Taxi Workers Alliance, the Day Laborers Network, or the National

Domestic Workers Alliance—were slightly less popular relative to the traditional, firm-based model among workers as a whole.

Moving on to dues, we found large differences in the appeal of labor organizations depending on whether they pursued the traditional union model of mandatory dues for all members compared to either fee for service or voluntary dues approaches. Both of those alternatives, more common among alt-labor organizations, had average marginal causal effects nearly ten percentage points above the conventional mandatory dues approach to financing unions. Still, as we will see, the drawbacks of mandatory dues collection for workers can be overcome with an appropriate package of other, offsetting organizational characteristics.

More striking were the variations in worker preferences depending on the presence or absence of collective bargaining, which we described to respondents as “negotiating with employers over compensation, hours, or working conditions.” For this characteristic of labor organizations—the lynchpin of conventional unions—we provided four different alternatives, including no collective bargaining at all (as is the case among alt-labor organizations that operate outside of the labor law framework), collective bargaining on behalf of all workers in a particular employer (the American, firm-centered model of bargaining present under status quo labor law), collective bargaining for only dues-payers of a labor organization (often termed minority unionism), and lastly, collective bargaining that spans across all employers in a particular region or industry (approximating the Western European model of regional or sectoral bargaining and many proposals for labor law reform in the United States; e.g. Barenberg 2015; Madland 2016).

Compared to no collective bargaining at all, our respondents strongly favored labor organizations that had the legal right to negotiate with employers over wages, benefits, and working conditions. All three of the alternative collective bargaining scenarios we described

were over 12 percentage points more appealing to workers than the option of no bargaining rights at all. These results suggest a significant disadvantage in the popular appeal of alt-labor organizations that do not formally bargain with employers. They also indicate significant worker support for sectoral bargaining proposals—though the *absence* of sectoral collective bargaining is not apparently a drawback to workers when compared to the conventional, firm-based bargaining model.

The next set of characteristics contains the most significant predictors of workers' attitudes towards labor organizations and revolve around the benefits and services that these organizations can offer directly to workers aside from collective bargaining or negotiations with management. These benefits also capture exactly the sort of selective incentives that Olson and some labor experts have argued would be important for attracting voluntary worker support for collective organizations like trade unions. Compared to the baseline of no such selective benefits or services, workers found all of the options we provided very appealing. The most appealing benefit involved the provision of portable health insurance and retirement savings coverage to workers who lacked access to such plans from their employer and that workers could continue using even if they switched employers. The presence of these portable social welfare benefits raised the probability that a worker would join an organization by over 16 percentage points, the largest effect we identified across all organizational characteristics.

Under current law, American unions are substantially limited from offering such portable health insurance and retirement benefits on their own, though some do through multiemployer plans (known as Taft-Hartley plans). In addition, some alt-labor organizations, most prominently the Freelancers Guild and the National Domestic Workers Alliance, offer similar portable benefits to workers who would otherwise lack stable coverage because of the nature of their jobs.

Our evidence suggests that freeing unions up to offer such coverage—or even building unions into the provision of the benefits directly, as is done in many Western European countries—would substantially increase the appeal of unions to rank-and-file workers.

Closely behind health insurance and retirement benefits was the provision of unemployment benefits, which increased the probability of a worker joining an organization by 12 percentage points relative to no benefits at all. While some unions do offer supplemental unemployment insurance benefits to their members, their coverage is limited and nowhere near the scope attained by Western European countries that rely on the Ghent system for administering jobless benefits (Western 1997).<sup>11</sup> A move to a Ghent-style system in the United States therefore might have the promise of substantially increasing worker interest in labor organizations (see also Dimick 2012).

The following bundle of benefits referred to training (either for workers' current jobs or future jobs) and job search help. These benefits were valued (around 12 percentage points above no benefits) but were all less popular than health insurance and retirement benefits (the differences were all statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ ). Despite being services that many unions already provide, our results suggest that they are not typically the most important benefits that unions can offer relative to health insurance, retirement savings, or unemployment insurance. The final selective benefit we consider is the provision of discounts on “many products and

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<sup>11</sup> Only about a quarter of workers covered by collective bargaining agreements near union's historic peak of strength in 1963-4 had access to supplemental union unemployment benefits (Kittner 1964, 19). Given union's decline since then the current share of workers with access to supplemental benefits is likely much lower today.

services”, which raised the likelihood of joining unions by around eight percentage points (compared to no benefits at all) but was also substantially less appealing than health insurance and retirement coverage ( $p < 0.01$ ). This is a common union benefit offered through the AFL-CIO’s “UnionPlus” discount program.<sup>12</sup>

After benefits was a set of characteristics that directly probed the ways that labor organizations can provide democratic representation and voice into workers’ job routines, describing whether an organization “offers...opportunities to work with management to recommend improvements in how you and your organization does work.” This kind of voice is something that traditional unions that have collective bargaining rights can offer—but do not often do in practice. Indeed, Kochan et al. (2019) find that many current union members still report large voice gaps when it comes to giving workers input into how they do their jobs. Our conjoint experimental results suggest that this kind of voice is appealing to workers, increasing the probability of joining an organization by about five percentage points relative to the absence of such negotiation, and making it an important predictor but not as substantial as collective bargaining or several of the selective benefits we described above.

Another bundle of characteristics we describe involve labor organizations’ input into management decisions, including informal advising to top management, representing workers in joint committees with management, and formal representation on employer boards of directors, the most expansive proposal of “co-determination” present in some Western European countries like Germany. All three of these proposals increased workers’ likelihood of joining labor

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<sup>12</sup> See: <https://www.unionplus.org/page/about-us>.

organizations, though the magnitudes (three to four percentage points) were smaller than for many of the other features we have explored above.

Legal assistance and representation formed the next bundle of characteristics we examined, and compared to the absence of any legal help workers found various forms of legal representation and assistance appealing, on the order of about five to six percentage points. Workers generally found legal information less appealing than formal representation. Traditional American unions typically offer workplace legal representation as part of their standard services, as do many alt-labor organizations like worker centers. But unlike traditional unions and more like alt-labor organizations, workers also indicated that they found non-workplace legal representation valuable as well—that is, legal representation for common civil issues like housing or immigration. This suggests that alt-labor organizations’ strategy of helping workers with non-workplace issues might be an important way to attract membership in the absence of other formal functions of unions.

Unlike the results we have described so far, political activities were the first set of labor attributes we explored in which a feature *reduced* workers’ likelihood of joining. Compared to an organization that did nothing in politics, a labor organization that we described as campaigning for pro-worker politicians in elections was less likely to be selected by workers. Electorally-active organizations were about three percentage points less likely to be chosen than non-active ones. By comparison, there was no penalty for organizations that lobbied for pro-worker policies. This result suggests an important tension for labor organizations in the United States: particularly in the current environment where unions face substantial retrenchment of legal rights, unions need to build political power to restore those rights and expand their clout (Hertel-Fernandez 2019). Yet the activities that are necessary for rebuilding labor’s political power may require

electoral involvements that are unpopular with workers, especially when it comes to elections as opposed to legislative lobbying.

Lastly, we provided information about whether or not an organization used threats of strikes or direct action by workers, another central component of the labor movement—albeit one that has become substantially less common over time as labor’s clout has declined (Burns 2011; Rosenfeld 2006). Here too we found a somewhat paradoxical result. Strikes and direct action are generally thought of as being the fundamental source of labor’s organizational strength (e.g., Burns 2011; Gourevitch 2018; Lichtenstein 2002)—yet workers, on average, find the prospect of strike threats to be unappealing as they are considering whether or not to join a labor organization, reducing their likelihood of joining by about three percentage points.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 8 for an analysis of open-ended responses where we find further evidence for respondents’ dislike of strike actions.

**Figure 2: Average Marginal Causal Effects of Labor Organizations on Maximum Dues Willing to Pay**

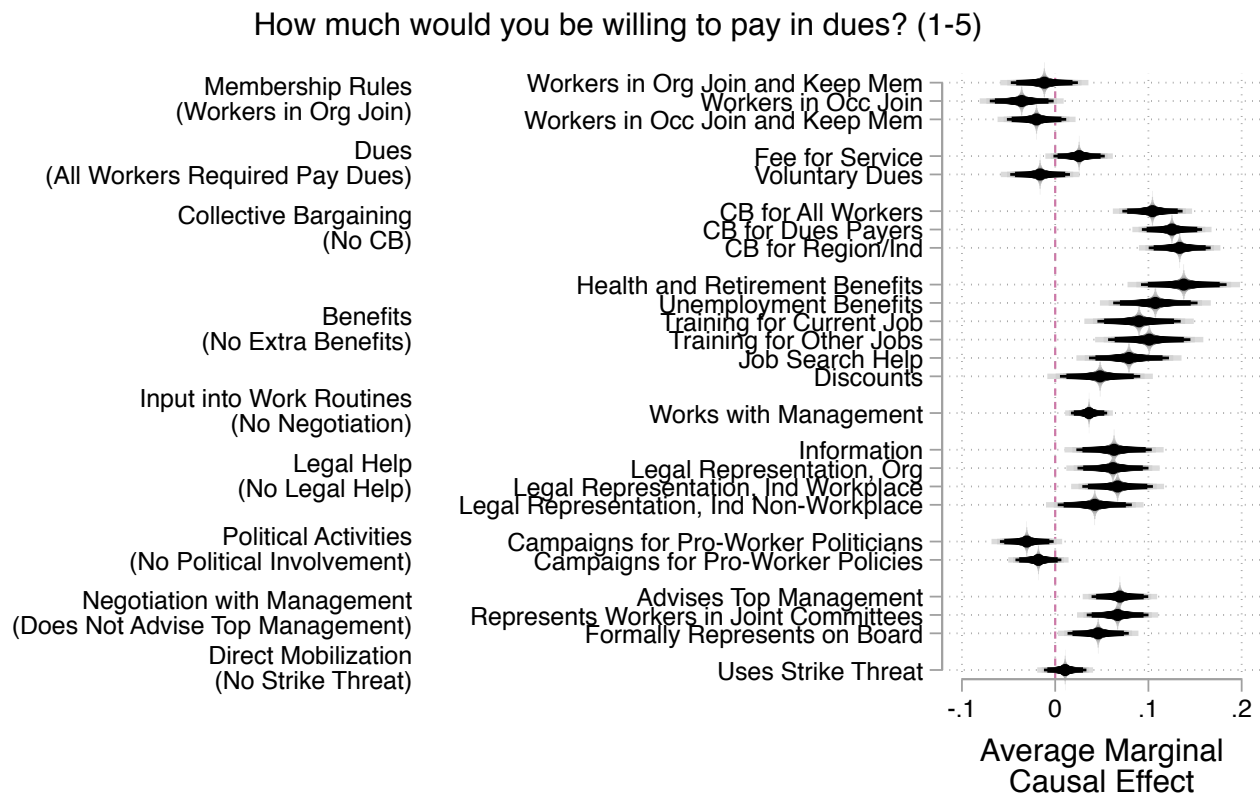
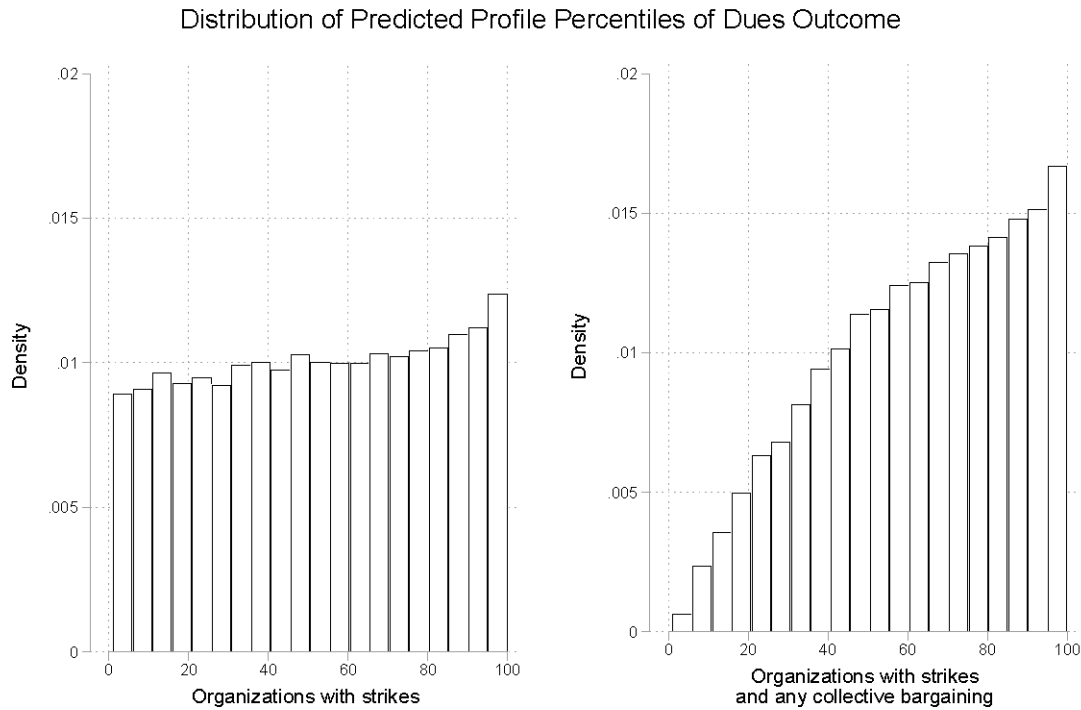


Figure 2 plots the second outcome from our survey instrument, examining the average marginal causal effect of each characteristic on the maximum amount workers indicated that they would be willing to pay in dues. (Recall that the scale for this item ran from one to five, representing \$0 in dues per month to \$400 per month.) The results encouragingly parallel those from our other outcome, indicating that workers were more likely to pay higher dues to the same organizations that they were more likely to want to join. In Appendix 5 we show that our results are very similar if we recode this variable into a binary outcome, capturing if a respondent is willing to pay any dues at all to a labor organization. Like the “join” outcome, Figure 2 documents that workers were most willing to pay more in dues to organizations that provide collective bargaining (especially sectoral bargaining), that offer valuable selective benefits,

especially health insurance and retirement plans and unemployment insurance, that provide legal representation or help, and that advise top management.

Three other findings stand out in comparison to the earlier outcome that merit discussion. First, unlike with the join outcome, we find that workers' willingness to pay for labor representation is generally unrelated to both membership rules about who can join as well as (perhaps surprisingly) the dues structure. Despite workers' tendency to favor joining organizations with fee for service or voluntary dues, respondents were no more likely to say that they would pay *more* in dues to labor organizations that lacked mandatory dues payments. This suggests that conditional on attracting members, labor organizations may have more scope to change dues structures without alienating workers. Second, when it comes to willingness to pay, workers are less enthusiastic about supporting organizations that either campaign in elections *or* that lobby for policy change, further underscoring the tension that unions face in trying to maximize their membership and revenue while also building political clout (workers preferred joining an organization that engaged in neither political activity by about 3 percentage points,  $p < 0.05$ ). Lastly, while workers were skeptical of strike threats in their membership decisions, they did not appear to penalize labor organizations that made use of direct action when considering the maximum amount of dues they would be willing to pay. Conditional on joining a labor organization, workers appear willing to support striking organizations with their dues.

**Figure 3: Distribution of Predicted Dues Profile Percentiles, by Organizational Characteristics**

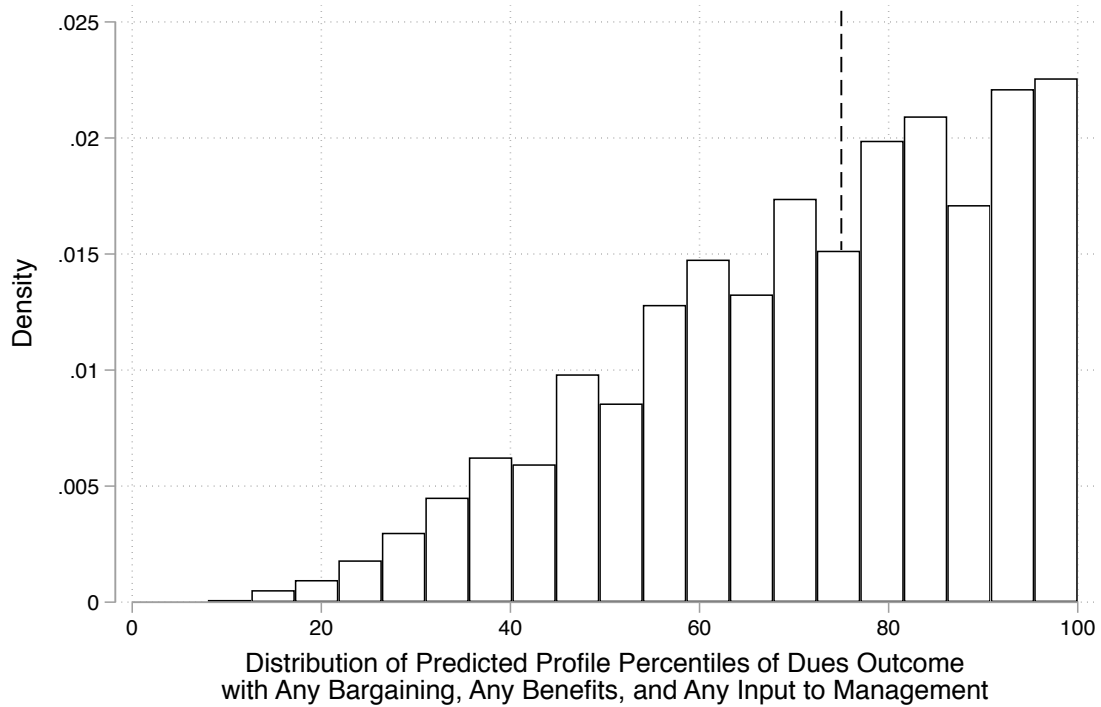


While we have focused so far on the *independent* contribution of each organizational characteristic on workers' attitudes and preferences, it is also helpful to consider *bundles* of such attributes together. We can do this by examining the distribution of rankings of organizations with specific characteristics. Based on the coefficients displayed in Figure 2, we predicted the dues that workers would be willing to pay to form a distribution of labor organization profiles. Figure 3 plots the distribution of the rankings of organizations conditional on them having two sets of characteristics: organizations that use strikes (left-hand side) versus organizations that use strikes *and* offer any kind of collective bargaining (right-hand side). The plot for organizations that use strikes (left-hand side) shows that the negative appeal of strikes can be overcome by combining strike activities with other, more popular items. As the left-hand plot indicates, strikes are just as likely to appear in organizations receiving the lowest predicted dues as those organizations receiving the highest dues. The right-hand side plot shows that when strikes are

accompanied by a very popular feature, such as collective bargaining, workers are willing to contribute more dues and therefore the distribution skews towards the upper end of predicted dues rankings.

Next, in Figure 4, we consider the three organizational features with the largest positive individual effects. We find that the combination of having any collective bargaining rights, any benefits, and any input to management pushed workers to the highest end of their willingness to pay dues. Organizations that had each of these three characteristics—regardless of other characteristics—were very highly rated by respondents. Indeed, the median profile with these three features fell at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of all profiles on the dues outcome. The difference is even more striking for organizations that combined regional or sectoral bargaining, health insurance and retirement savings, and worker representation on organization boards of directors (see Appendix 7). The median profile with these three characteristics fell at the 91<sup>st</sup> percentile of dues ratings for all profiles. In sum, if labor organizations possess those three characteristics, other characteristics matter little, including features rated as being drawbacks to workers, like mandatory dues, strike threats, or political involvements.

**Figure 4: Distribution of Dues Ratings for Organizations with Any Collective Bargaining, Any Benefits/Services, and Any Input to Management**



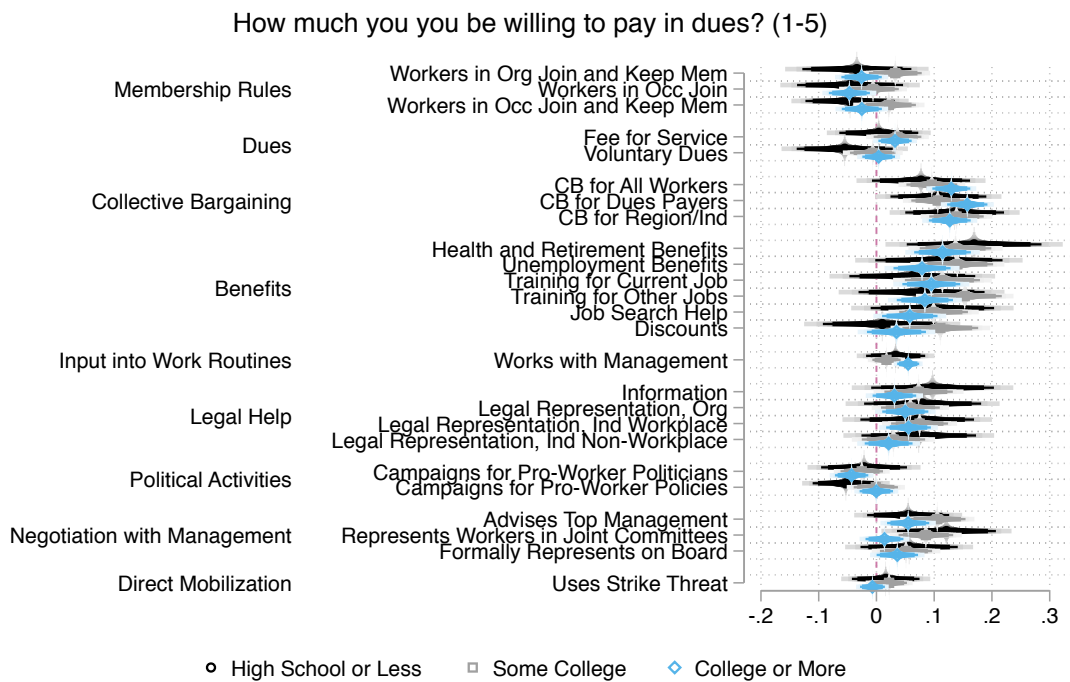
*Note:* Dashed lined indicates median value.

Returning to the four different approaches to worker representation that we introduced earlier, we identified strong support for two of these models: those focused on providing workers with new or expanded social benefits and training opportunities (the *individual services* approaches) and those emphasizing increased worker voice in management decisions (the *worker voice* approach). By comparison, workers were much less enthusiastic about the *traditional, employer-based union model* that lacked additional services or voice in management decisions, as well as a *political advocacy and mobilization* approach that prioritized political mobilization without collective bargaining or workplace benefits. We saw the highest support for organizations that combined components of these different models, especially collective bargaining, benefits and services, and input in management decisions.

### Variation in the Structure of Worker Preferences

While the results so far have assessed the effects of individual organizational characteristics on worker preferences averaging over all respondents we surveyed, our relatively large sample allows us to consider how different subgroups of respondents might react differently to the same attributes.<sup>14</sup> In general, what was remarkable about our findings is just how similar they were across respondents with very different demographic characteristics whom we might have expected to evaluate labor organizations very differently.

**Figure 5: Average Marginal Causal Effects of Labor Organizations on Likelihood of Joining, by Worker Education**



There were, however, several important exceptions to this consistency in preferences (see also Appendix 6). Workers with less education, especially with a high school degree or less,

<sup>14</sup> Note that we fielded the demographic questions *before* the conjoint exercise, alleviating concerns that answers to these questions were affected by the conjoint characteristics.

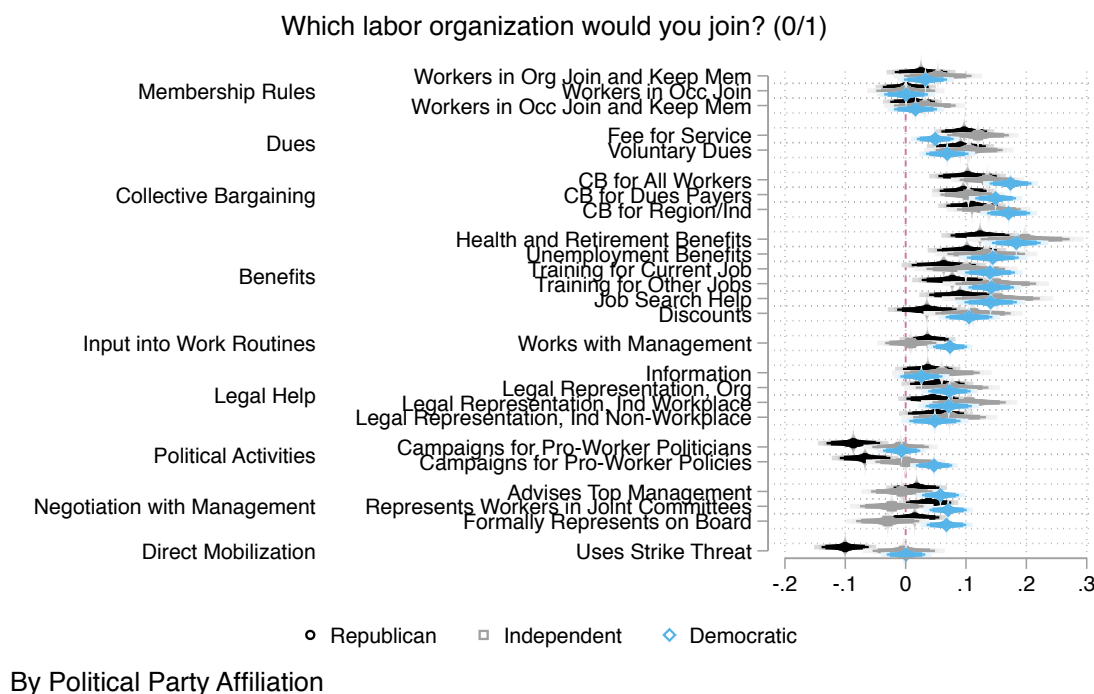
tended to be more eager to join labor organizations that offered health insurance and retirement benefits coverage and job search help. These lower-educated workers also found training for their current job less appealing than more highly-educated workers. And more highly educated workers were much more favorable towards collaborating with management on work routines, preferred less legal representation, were more favorable towards political involvements and found the threat of strikes to be much more of a negative compared to workers with less education. Figure 5 compares the average marginal causal effects for workers with a high school degree or less, some college, or college or more (importantly our results are also consistent when examining differences in marginal means as well; see Leeper et al. 2018 and Appendix 6).

In Figure 6, we break workers out by their self-reported partisan affiliation.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps surprisingly given current levels of polarization, Republicans and Democrats shared very similar preferences for the organizational features they valued. The two significant exceptions to this stability were around political involvements and strikes, with Democrats much more supportive than Republicans of labor organizations that engaged in both sets of activities. That is consistent with strikes, lobbying, and campaigning being the union activities most readily related to the political process, especially in recent years.

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<sup>15</sup> 98% of respondents provided a valid response to the partisan ID question. 33% of respondents identified as Republicans, 23% as Independents, and 44% as Democrats.

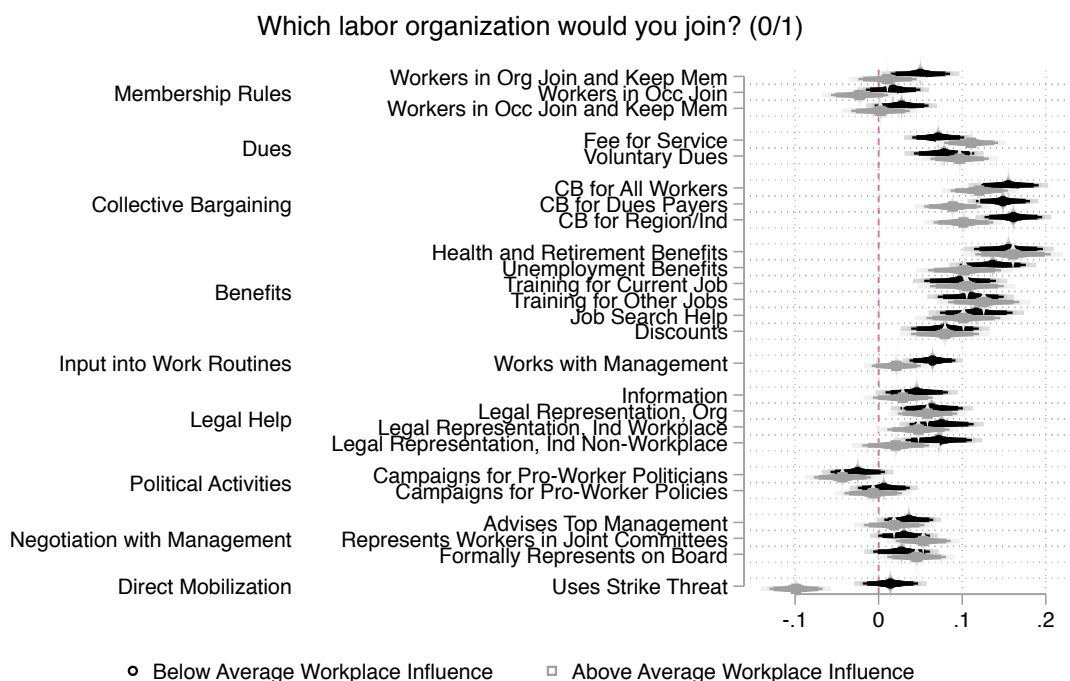
**Figure 6: Average Marginal Causal Effects of Labor Organizations on Likelihood of Joining, by Partisan Affiliation**



Third, we identified several consistent differences by occupation of workers. Dividing workers into four standard categories of occupations—managers, professionals, service workers, and manual workers—we found that manual and service workers were much more attracted to unemployment benefits than were managers or professionals.<sup>16</sup> Manual and service workers were also more invested in collective bargaining than were managers or professionals, and were more skeptical of working with management than higher-level occupations. And manual and service workers were more supportive of organizations that used strike threats as compared to managers and professionals.

<sup>16</sup> We did not include self-reported occupations in this classification, using only the responses to the closed options. This reflects about 88% of respondents.

**Figure 7: Average Marginal Causal Effects of Labor Organizations on Likelihood of Joining, by Workplace Influence**



Lastly, we probed whether workers' preferences for voice and representation varied by the level of voice they reported at their current jobs. We created subgroups based on the following item, which asked respondents "How much direct involvement and influence do you personally have in the following areas of your job?" The areas included safety, compensation and opportunities for advancement, and deciding how to do work, and for each area workers could indicate that they had "a lot of influence", "some influence", "only a little influence", "no influence at all", or that the area was "not applicable". Discarding the non-applicable respondents, we averaged each respondent's answers to this item, assigning higher values on a one through four scale to workers who said that they had more influence on the job. The average influence across respondents was 2.3 out of 4. We then divided respondents in those above and below the average level of influence. Workers who reported below-average levels of voice on the job were more supportive of collective bargaining, less supportive of working with management,

more supportive of legal representation (especially for individual representation), and more supportive of the use of strike threats. See Figure 7 for a subgroup analysis by worker influence.

*Understanding the Implications of  
Worker Preferences for Workplace Representation*

In this paper, we employed a conjoint experiment to identify the causal effect of key labor organization features on workers' willingness to join or financially support such organizations. These features together represent a variety of labor organizations in the United States and other advanced democracies. Overall, our results make clear that the primary function of the traditional union, collective bargaining, continues to be highly valued by potential members. Still, other benefits and services, such as the provision of health insurance, retirement benefits, unemployment benefits, and labor market training, are also highly valued by all workers, and this was especially true for workers with lower levels of education. Workers were also supportive of organizations offering legal representation and input to their work routines and into management decisions.

These results reinforce the value of bringing theories and evidence from comparative political economy and industrial relations into American debates about the structure of labor markets and labor law (Thelen 2015, 2019). Our results show American workers would support means of achieving industrial democracy at their workplaces that are modeled after those found in systems that provide co-determination, works councils, and more informal engagement in workplace decision-making. They also would value having unions provide valued labor market services throughout their careers as do unions in “Ghent” systems found in several European countries. This in turn is consistent with a growing number of labor law and policy scholars (e.g. Andrias 2016; Estlund 2002; Finkin 2011; Kochan 2011; Sachs 2010) who suggest that

American labor law forces unions to conform to a model that is poorly matched to the present economy and workforce with its firm-based organizing and bargaining and the limited influence the law grants unions over corporate practices. The findings we present in this paper suggest another reason that labor law is restricting growth of the labor movement: it currently limits unions from providing many of the benefits and services that workers value.

Labor law is not the only obstacle to further union growth, however. So too are workers' preferences against labor organizations that use strike threats and engage in election campaigns. Despite the fact that both of these strategies have historically been central to union economic and political power (Greenstone 1969; Lichtenstein 2002; Schlozman 2015), workers, on average, were skeptical of joining and financially supporting organizations that deployed these two tactics (at least in the abstract). This was especially true for workers who self-identify as Republicans and those reporting already high levels of influence at work.<sup>17</sup> Although our analysis of organizational bundles indicates that neither characteristic entirely rules out broad-based worker support, it does underscore the difficulty of building large membership associations dedicated to *both* representing workers' narrow workplace concerns *and* engaging in broader movement politics.

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<sup>17</sup> In results not reported here, we find a similar, even larger, divide by those who said that they would vote to join a traditional union versus those who would not. Supporters of traditional unions were less supportive of alternative dues arrangements, more supportive of collective bargaining, more supportive of political involvements, and much more supportive of using strike threats.

That tension between “business” and “social movement” unionism has been a longstanding issue for the American labor movement (Lichtenstein 2010; Zieger 2000). Yet the tension may be more acute for the labor movement today given its diminished ranks and its need to reach a broad swath of new members who have not had any experience in the labor movement—and therefore might be especially skeptical of union involvements in politics and strikes. It thus suggests that as unions try to grow, they may paradoxically run up against some limits from the mass public in how much power they can derive from strikes or political engagements, unless unions can overcome public skepticism with more popular organizational features.

Our results further illuminate how workers think about the workplace and their relationship to labor organizations and management in an era of high and rising elite polarization. Studies of Congress suggest that labor policy is one of the most polarized policy areas (Jochim and Jones 2012; McCarty et al. 2006), and state-level Republican efforts to end collective bargaining for public-sector unions and pass right-to-work laws certainly underscore the partisan divide over the future of unions (Hertel-Fernandez 2019). Yet in spite of this intense elite polarization—which might be expected to contribute to or reflect mass-level polarization (Lenz 2012; Zaller 1992)—we found that Republicans and Democrats were generally consistent in their preferences for workplace representation. Across party lines, workers largely had similar preferences for organizational membership rules, dues, collective bargaining, benefits, and input to management. The one major exception (referenced above) included the contentious areas of politics and strikes. Together, this suggests that even as the political battles between elite business and labor interest groups over access to or rules governing worker representation

continue to dominate national and state-level politics, the workplace and worker representation remains a sphere of life largely *un*-polarized politically (cf. Mutz and Mondak 2006).

Our analysis has a number of important strengths as the first large-scale study of the structure of worker preferences for new workplace representation. The conjoint design allows us to isolate the causal effect of each characteristic we examine on workers' prospective behavior. Moreover, the nationally representative sample we employ permits us to draw inferences for the relevant population: all employed American workers. Nevertheless, we recognize the limits of our conclusions and propose additional work to tackle these challenges.

Perhaps most importantly, many workers have likely not thought seriously about workplace organizations before, so these preferences ought to be interpreted as expressions of the general public in the absence of concerted informational or organizing campaigns. Further work ought to explore how these estimates might change if workers experienced the sort of “deep canvassing” that can change individuals' attitudes, even on controversial and salient issues (Broockman and Kalla 2016) and that is often part of a well-run union organizing effort (McAlevey 2016). This is especially true for convincing workers to support union political involvement and strikes (e.g. Fantasia 1988). Additionally, while our results shed light on what features might work to convince the marginal worker to join an existing organization but more can be done to understand how potentially interested workers might organize such labor organizations.

A somewhat related concern is that respondents, lacking prior experience with unions or labor organizations, responded to our exercises at random. This should downwardly bias our estimates, making our results a conservative test of the effects of union attributes on preferences. And the consistency of preferences for most labor organization characteristics across very

different workers further suggests that our respondents were thinking about the exercises in a similar manner. Moreover, as we show in Appendix 8, responses to an open text item that queried workers why they chose the organizations to join that they did revealed relatively consistent patterns to the closed-option outcomes. The most common concepts invoked by respondents in their text included benefits, dues, and strikes, and especially legal representation and health insurance coverage. This reassured us that workers were responding thoughtfully and meaningfully to the hypothetical organizations we presented to them.

Nevertheless, follow-up work might use our survey-based results to explore workers' perceptions in more detail, perhaps through focus groups, deliberative discussions, or interviews. One particularly interesting avenue for future work is understanding where workers' preferences for labor organizations come from—for instance, from family experiences, education, firsthand experiences in the labor market, or political orientations (e.g. Barling et al. 1991).<sup>18</sup>

Lastly, it is important to recognize that our results ultimately only speak to workers' stated preferences on a survey and not to actual decisions to join or fund a labor organization. Unfortunately, the restrictive nature of American labor law—itsself a central motivation of this paper—prevents researchers from exploring whether workers would actually join organizations that hold many of the features we test in this paper (cf. Hertel-Fernandez and Porter 2019). For instance, it is very difficult to construct a labor organization engaging in sectoral or regional

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<sup>18</sup> For instance, we found that having a family member who has been in a union makes one more supportive of collective bargaining and a traditional dues structure. We also came across interesting anecdotes in open-ended responses such as “I mainly chose because was against strikes and my father used to have to strike with teamsters and it was always a sad time.”

bargaining under current U.S. labor law. Still, creative researchers might use our survey-based research to examine how some of the organizational features we have tested change behavioral outcomes among workers (cf. Hainmueller et al. 2015; for a related employment context, see Maestas et al. 2018).

Beyond the specific contributions of our study for understanding workers' individual-level preferences, our hope is that this paper encourages political scientists to take the workplace more seriously as a site of civic association and political representation, especially in comparative perspective. Workplaces are not just relevant for American politics in so much as workers learn about politics and are recruited to participate in political action while on the job (e.g. Hertel-Fernandez 2018; Mutz and Mondak 2006; Verba et al. 1995). The workplace is a political site because of how "bosses govern workers in ways that are largely unaccountable to those who are governed," as political theorist Elizabeth Anderson has explained (2017, xxii). Much more scholarship is needed to understand the power relations underpinning the governance of workers by managers and how alternative forms of organization and representation at work might change that relationship.

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**Supplementary Materials for “How U.S. Workers Think About Workplace Democracy:  
The Structure of Individual Worker Preferences for Labor Representation”**

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The Structure of Individual Worker Preferences for Labor Representation”**

**Supplementary Materials Table of Contents**

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## **Appendix 1: NORC AmeriSpeak Survey Methodology**

Below, we append information on the survey methodology employed by NORC with its AmeriSpeak probability-based online research panel:

Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, AmeriSpeak is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US household population. Randomly selected US households are sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Frame and address-based sample, and then contacted by US mail, telephone interviewers, overnight express mailers, and field interviewers (face to face). AmeriSpeak panelists participate in NORC studies or studies conducted by NORC on behalf of NORC's clients.

In 2017, the AmeriSpeak Panel expanded to 27,000 households and will expand to 30,000 households in 2018. The AmeriSpeak Panel includes sample support for surveys of various segments through AmeriSpeak Latino, AmeriSpeak Teen, and AmeriSpeak Young Adult (which includes an oversample of African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians age 18-34). AmeriSpeak also supports large-sample size surveys and surveys of low-incidence populations through AmeriSpeak Calibration, which combines probability-based AmeriSpeak and non-probability online samples using calibrating statistical weights derived from AmeriSpeak.

A general population sample was selected from NORC's AmeriSpeak Panel for this study. Survey respondents who indicated they are not an owner or part of upper-level management meet the screening criteria and we able to participate in the full survey.

For the first re-ask effort, NORC sampled all those who initially selected temporary help employee, contract employee, independent contractor, or on-call worker.

The sample for a specific study is selected from the AmeriSpeak Panel using sampling strata based on age, race/Hispanic ethnicity, education, and gender (48 sampling strata in total). The size of the selected sample per sampling stratum is determined by the population distribution for each stratum. In addition, sample selection takes into account expected differential survey completion rates by demographic groups so that the set of panel members with a completed interview for a study is a representative sample of the target population. If panel household has one more than one active adult panel member, only one adult in the household is eligible for selection (random within-household sampling). Panelists selected for an AmeriSpeak study earlier in the business week are not eligible for sample selection until the following business week.

## Appendix 2: Complete survey instrument

For a copy of the complete survey instrument, please review the following URL:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/78t5z1zdtuszs4t/Survey%20Instrument.pdf>

See below for an example of a task presented to respondents.

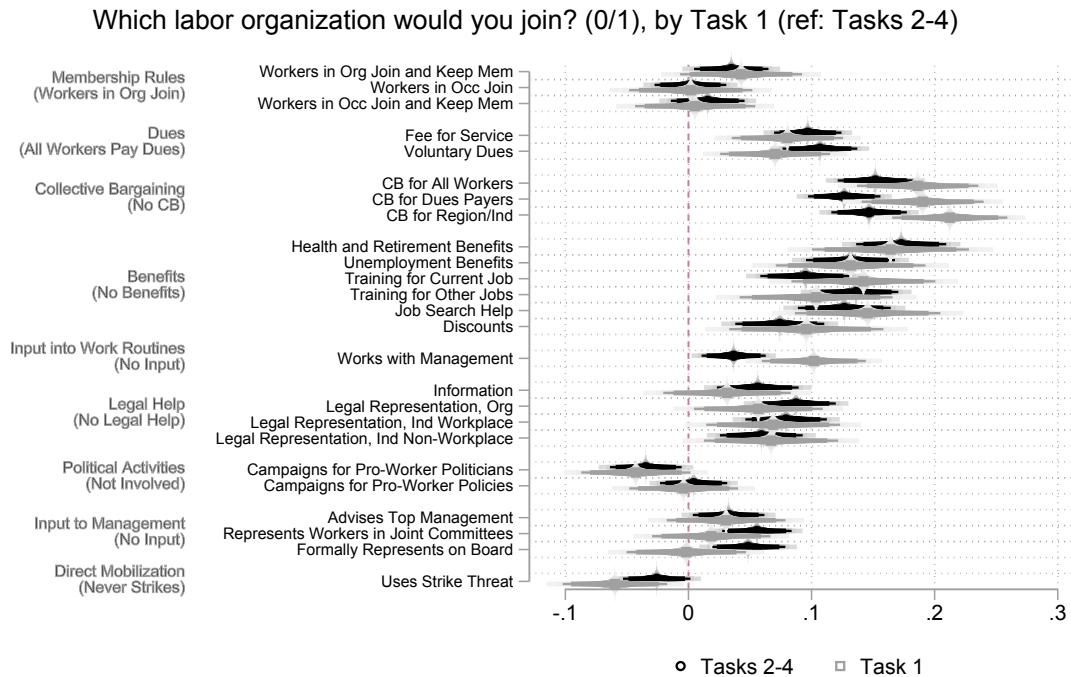
<b>Labor organization 1</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Labor organization 2</b>
Workers in your business or organization can join	<b>Who can join</b>	Workers in your occupation can join and you can keep receiving membership services and benefits if you change employers
All workers required to pay dues	<b>Dues</b>	Dues are voluntary
Does not negotiate with employer over compensation, hours, or working conditions	<b>Negotiation with your employer</b>	Negotiates with employer over compensation, hours, and working conditions for all workers
Does not offer any extra benefits	<b>Extra services/benefits</b>	Provides extra unemployment insurance benefits to workers who lose their jobs
Does not get involved in how you and your coworkers do your work or in organizational improvement efforts	<b>How you do your work</b>	Offers you and your coworkers opportunities to work with management to recommend improvements in how you work and in organizational practices
Does not deal with legal issues governing worker rights	<b>Legal help and representation</b>	Offers legal representation to ensure that the company upholds all workers' rights
Not involved in elections or lobbying	<b>Political activities</b>	Not involved in elections or lobbying
Formally represents workers on your organization's board of directors to have a voice in how the organization should operate, including how to use technology or opening and closing plants, stores, or facilities	<b>Input to management</b>	Does not consult with management on how the company should operate, including how to use technology or opening and closing plants, stores, or facilities
Never uses the threat of a strike or direct mobilization by workers	<b>Use of Strikes</b>	Uses the threat of a strike or direct mobilization by workers if needed

### Appendix 3: Robustness of conjoint instrument

Below, we follow best practices in the implementation of conjoint analysis (Hainmueller et al. 2014) and check for *carryover effects* (in which earlier tasks might have affected later tasks), *profile order effects* (in which the order of the profiles within a particular comparison might have affected the estimates), and *attribute order effects* (in which the order of the attributes presented to the respondents might have affected respondents' answers).

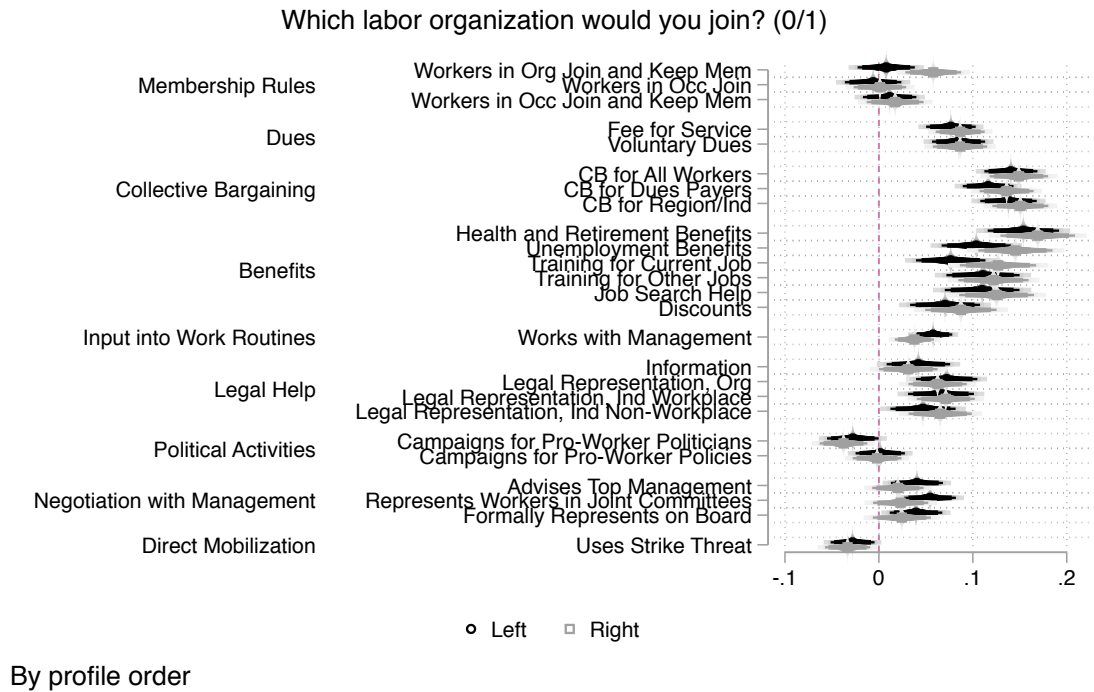
To address the concern of carryover effects, we subsetting our analysis to only the first task completed by respondents. Our results are very similar to those presented pooling all tasks together, reassuring us that there were not large differences in estimates across tasks. See Figure 1 for the “join” outcome. In results not shown we also reached similar conclusions interacting each attribute with dummies for each task number.

**Figure 1: Average Marginal Causal Effects of Labor Organizations on Likelihood of Joining, First Task versus Others**



We perform a similar robustness check for the profile order (left or right), examining whether our results in the overall sample hold if we subset our data only to organizations shown on the left or the right. We generally recover similar results regardless of profile order, which we demonstrate in Figure 2. In results not shown we also reached similar conclusions interacting each attribute with dummies for profile ordering.

**Figure 2: Average Marginal Causal Effects of Labor Organizations on Likelihood of Joining, By Profile Ordering**

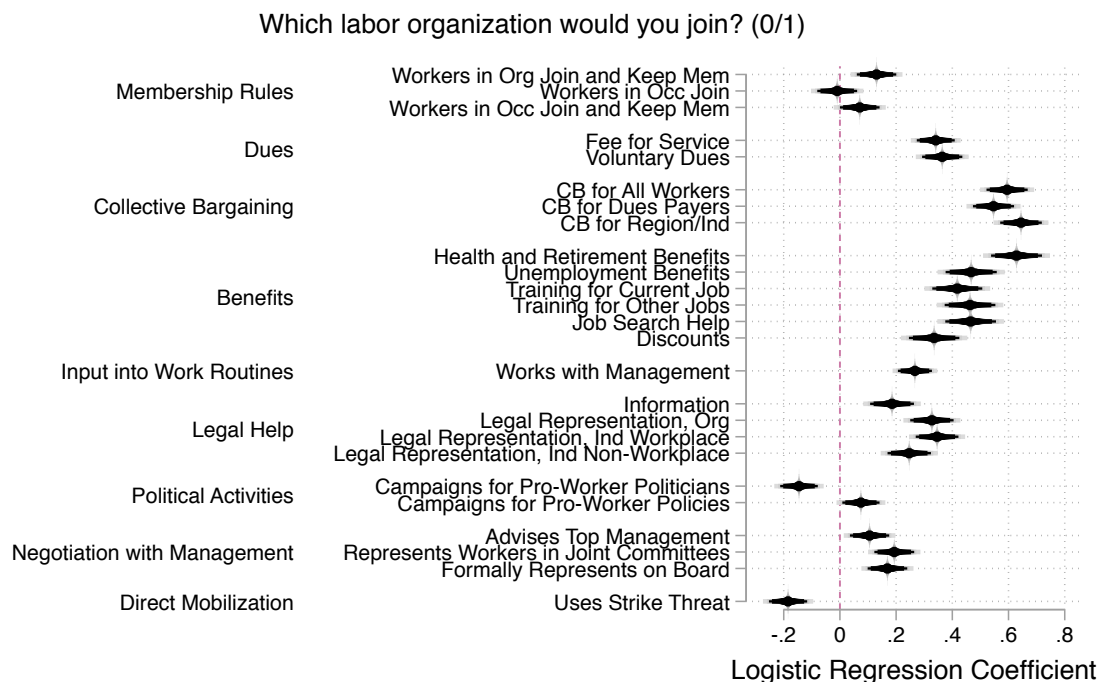


Because of the relative cognitive complexity of the conjoint tasks we were presenting to respondents (both in terms of the amount of information in the conjoint as well as the fact that many workers have not given much thought to workplace representation), we opted not to randomize the attribute ordering on the advice of the NORC survey methodologists. We therefore do not address the issue of attribute ordering.

## Appendix 4: Use of logistic regression instead of OLS

Below in Figure 3, we report our main results using the “join” outcome using a logistic regression instead of a binary OLS model. The substantive results are very similar to those using the binary OLS models reported in the main text.

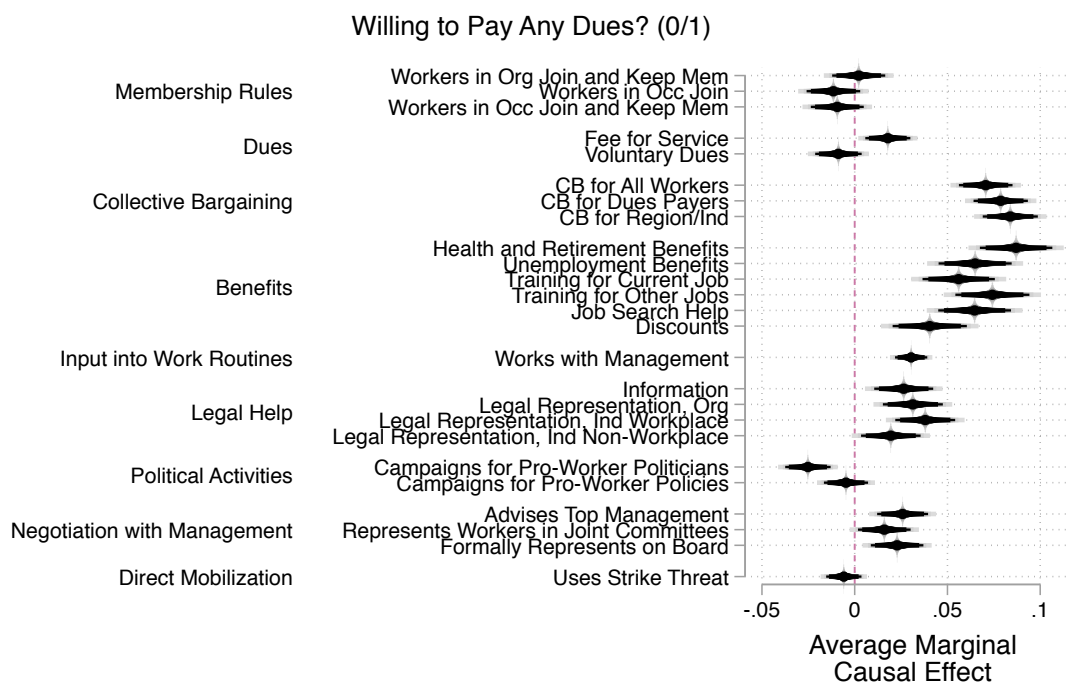
**Figure 3: Average Marginal Causal Effects of Labor Organizations on Likelihood of Joining, Logistic Regression**



## Appendix 5: Alternative specification of dues outcome

Below in Figure 4, we report an alternative specification of the dues outcome that recodes the variable to 0 (does not want to pay any dues) or 1 (reports wanting to pay at least some dues). In all 36% of respondents said that they did not want to pay any dues. Again, the results are very similar to those reported in the main text.

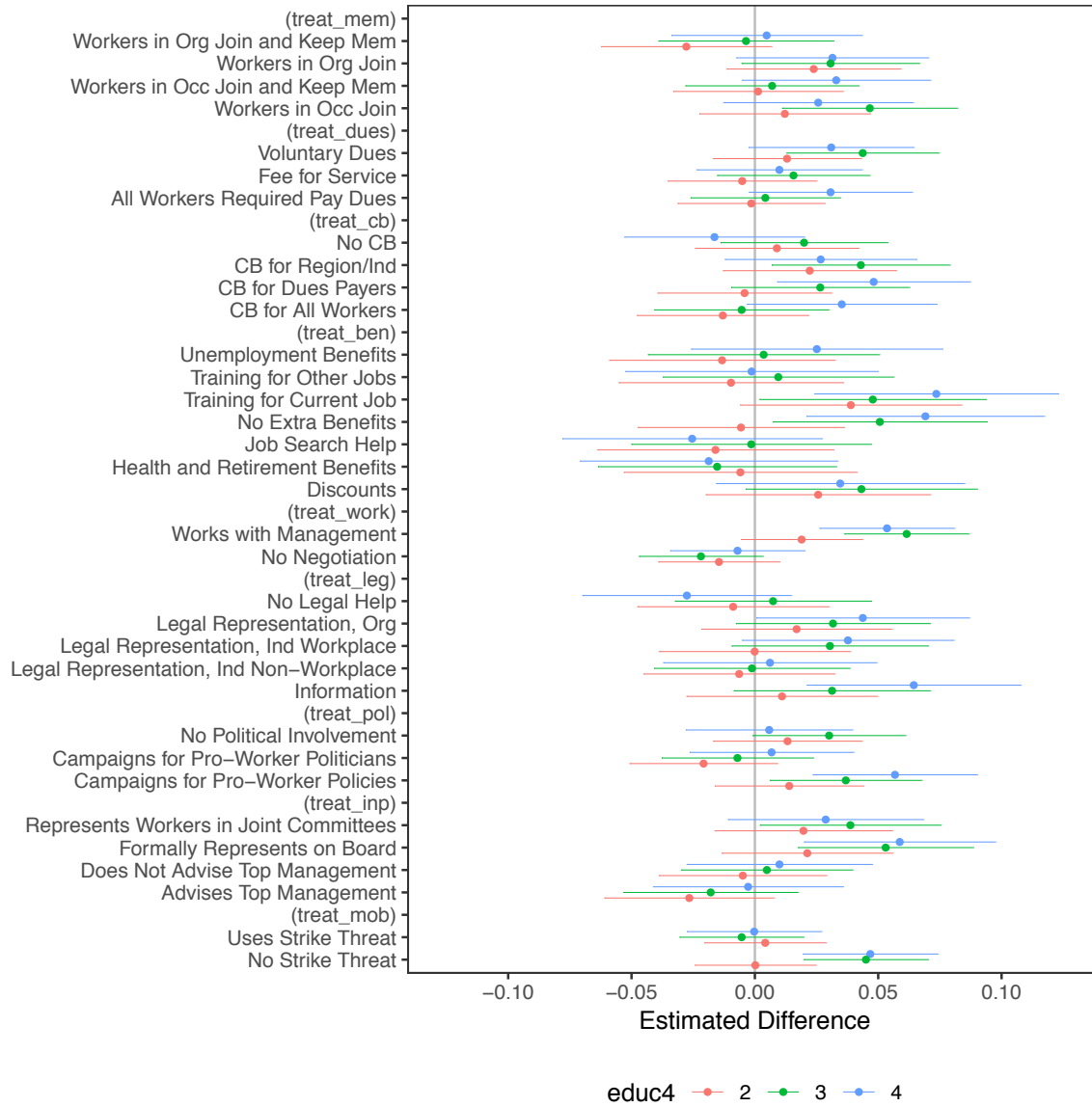
**Figure 4: Average Marginal Causal Effects of Labor Organizations on Willingness to Pay Any Dues**



## **Appendix 6: Subgroup analyses**

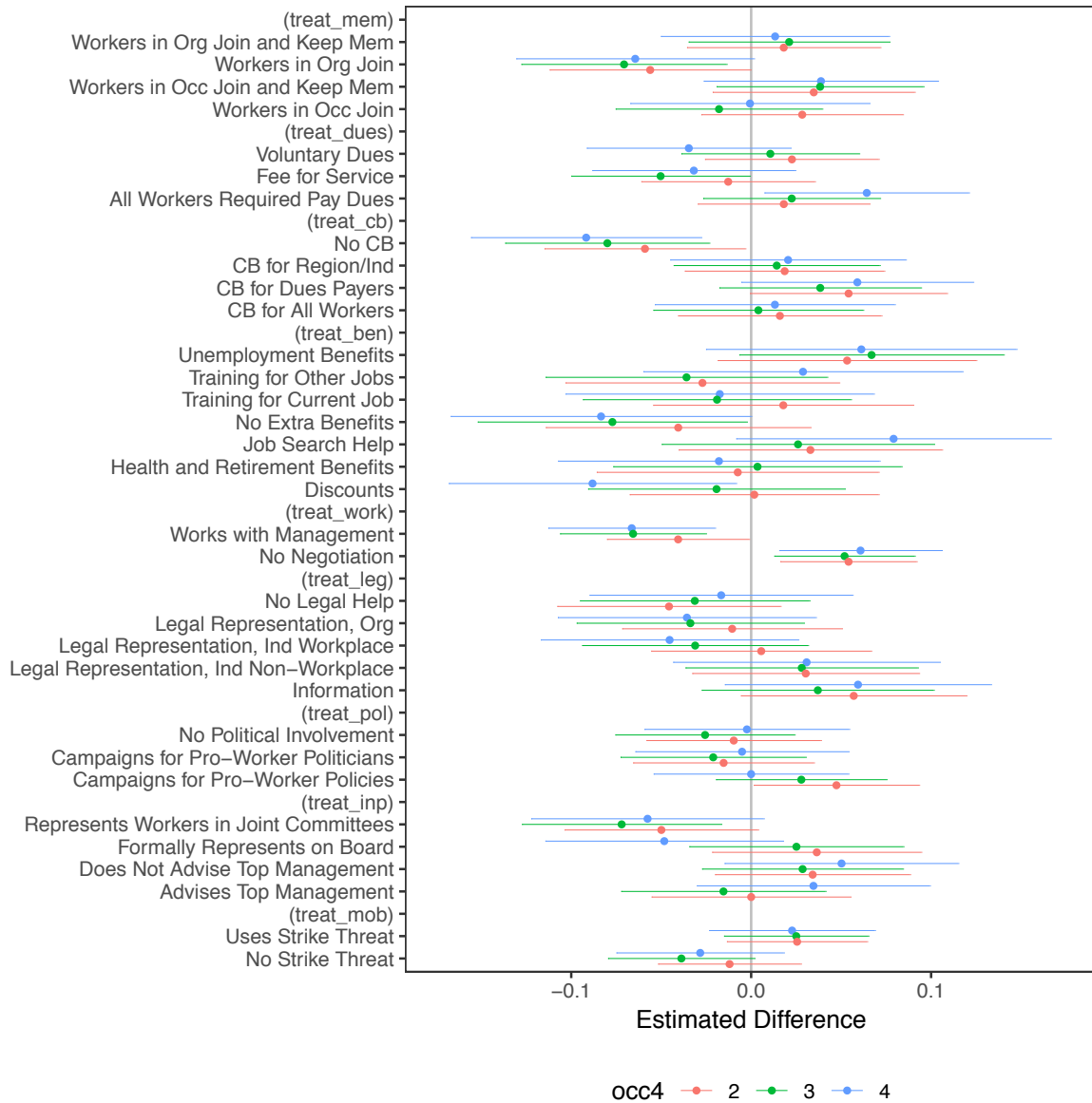
Below, following the advice of Leeper 2018 we estimate differences in marginal means for each of the subgroup analyses we report in the main text. For the education subgroup analysis, the estimates reflect the differences between some college (2), college (3), or more than college relative to high school or less. For the occupation subgroup analysis, the differences reflect the difference between professionals (2), service workers (3), and manual workers (4) relative to managers or similar level occupations. For the partisanship subgroup analysis, the differences reflect Independents (2) and Republicans (3) relative to Democrats (1). For the union vote subgroup analysis, the differences reflect a union vote relative to not a union vote and for the influence subgroup analysis the differences reflect workers with above-average influence relative to workers reporting below-average influence.

**Figure 4: Differences in the Marginal Means for Joining Labor Organization, by Education**



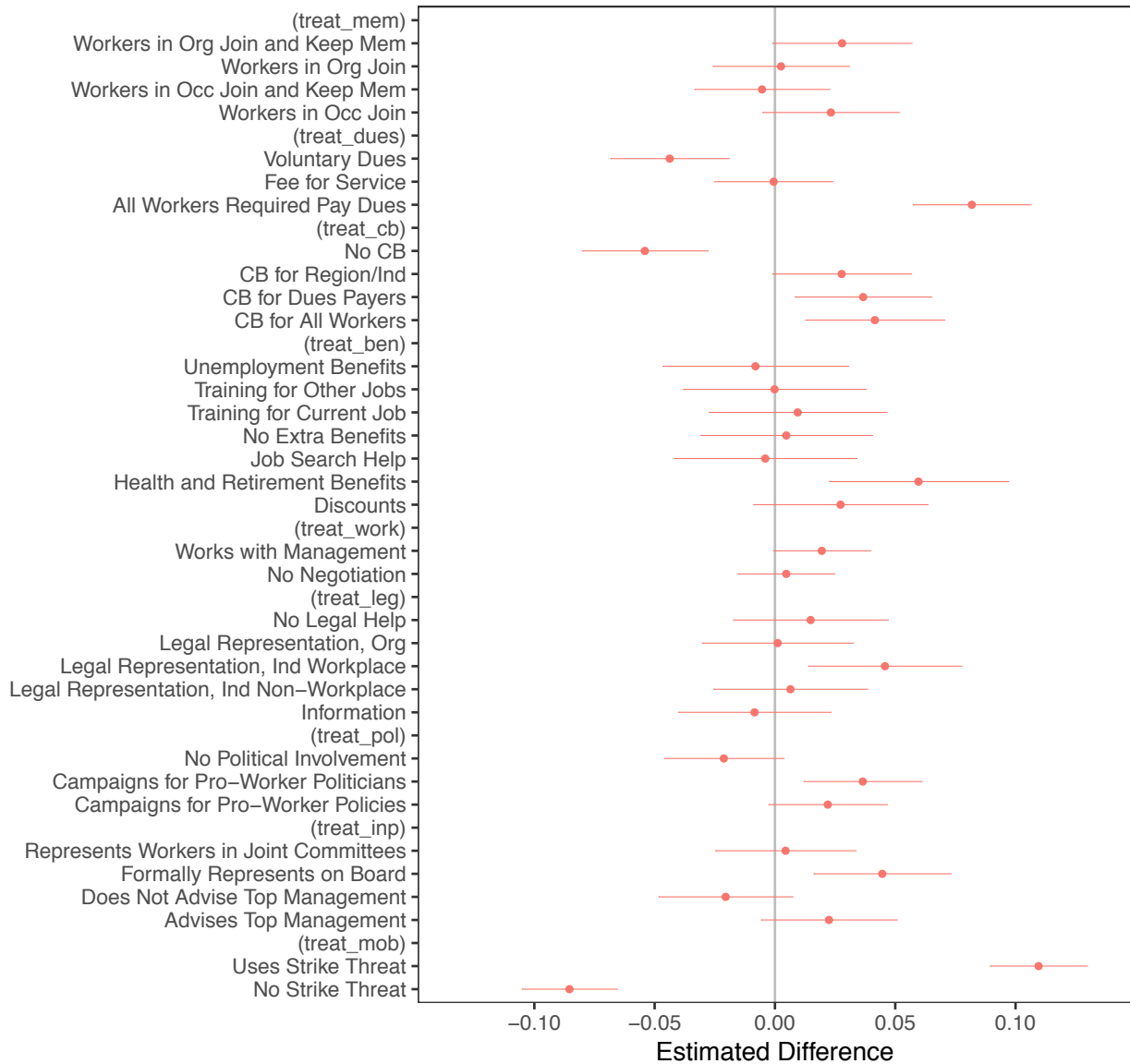
*Education 2 is some college; Education 3 is college; Education 4 is graduate or professional training. Excluded category is high school or less.*

**Figure 5: Differences in the Marginal Means for Joining Labor Organization, by Occupation**

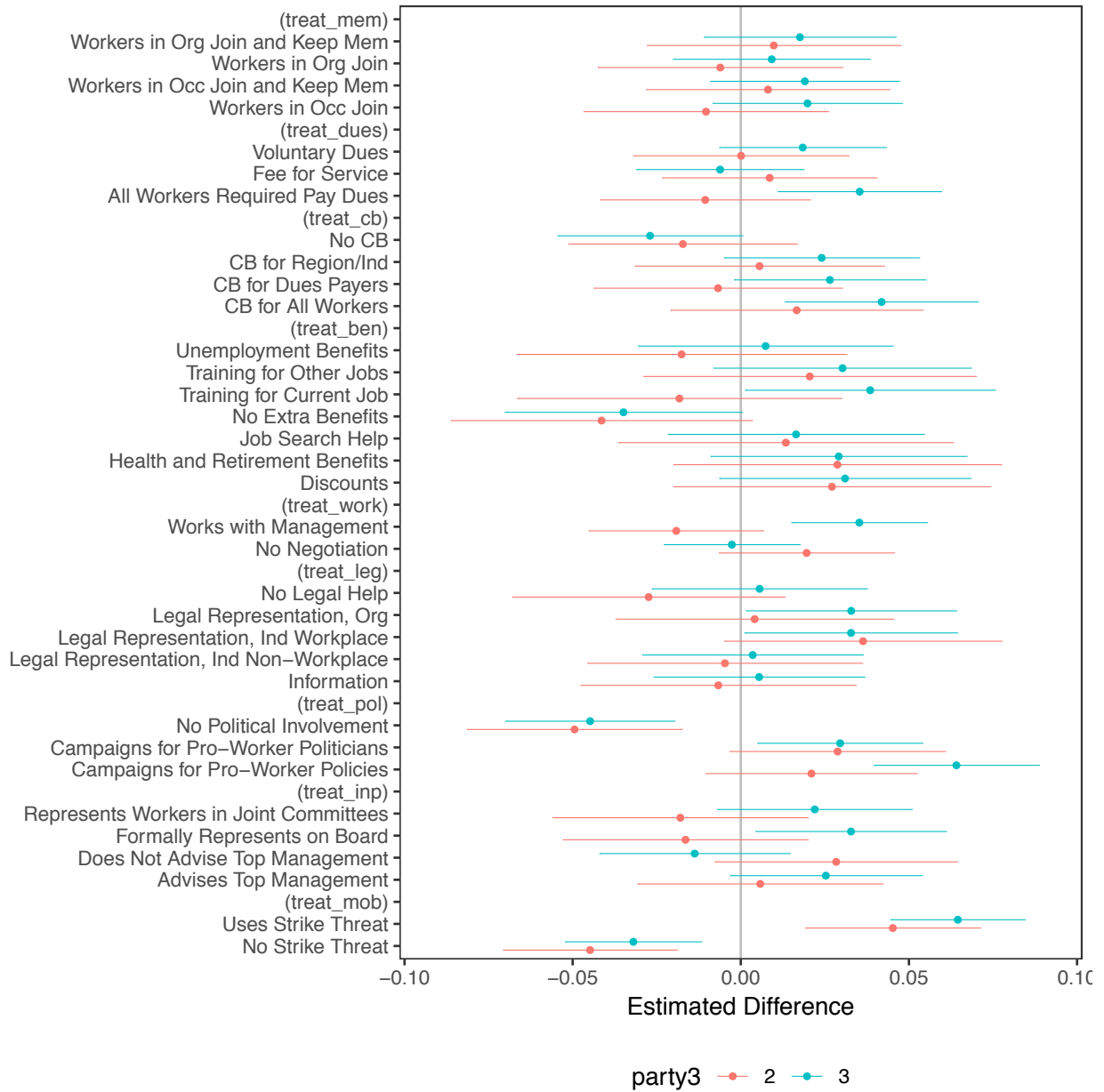


*Occupation 2 is professionals; Occupation 3 is service workers; Occupation 4 is manual workers. Excluded category is managers.*

**Figure 6: Differences in the Marginal Means for Joining Labor Organization, by Union Vote (Among Non-Unionized Workers)**

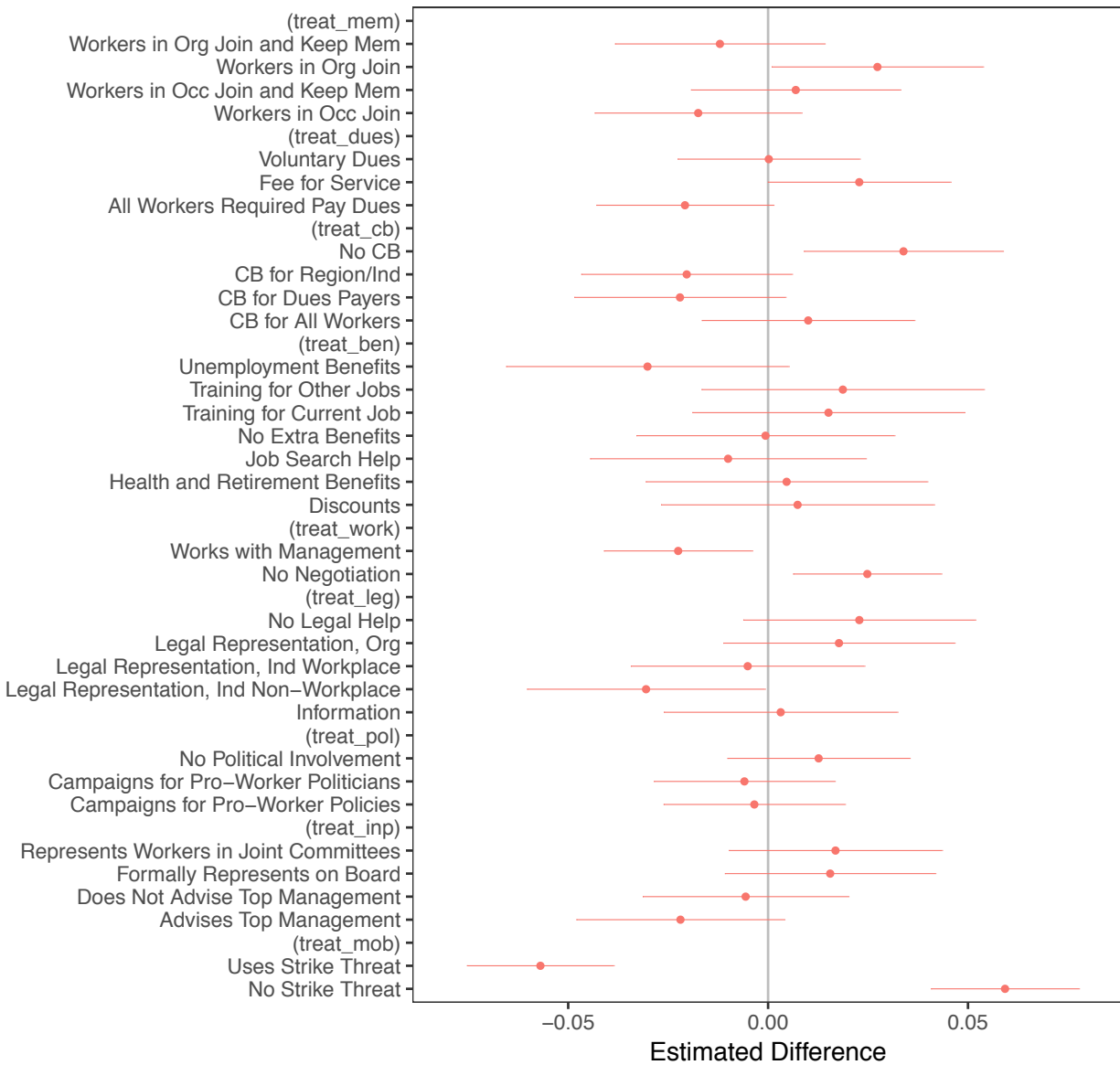


**Figure 7: Differences in the Marginal Means for Joining Labor Organization, by Partisanship**



*Party 2 is Independent; Party 3 is Republican. Excluded category is Democrat.*

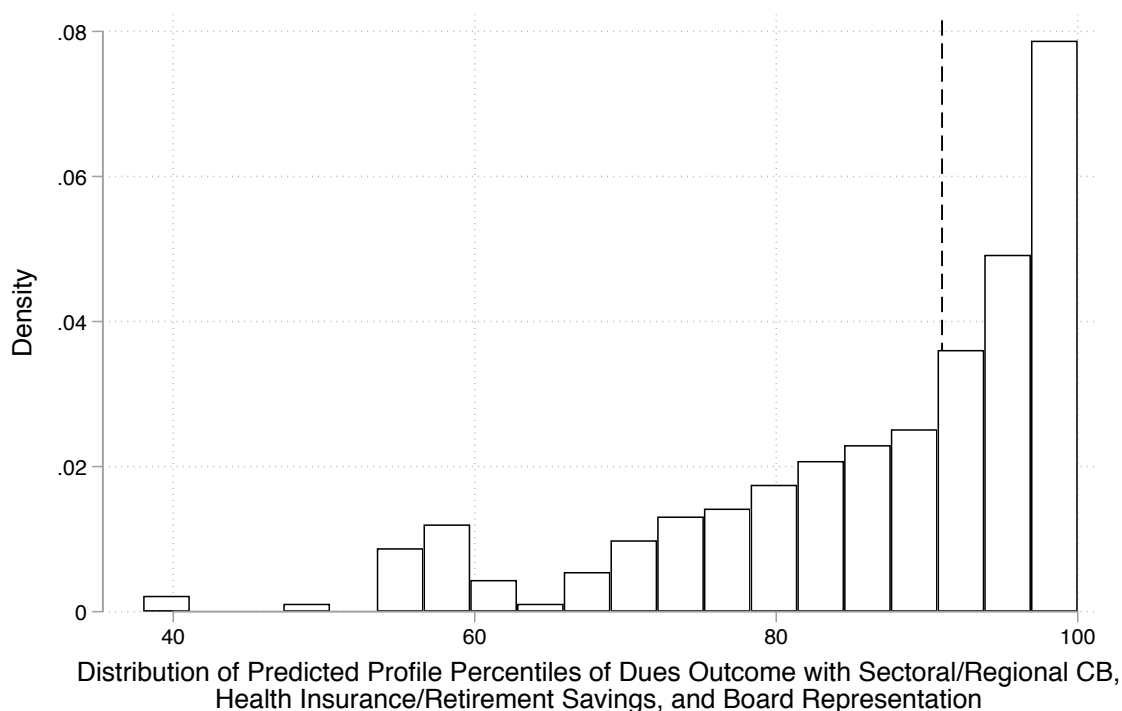
**Figure 8: Differences in the Marginal Means for Joining Labor Organization, by Reported Workplace Influence**



## Appendix 7: Distribution of profiles with regional or sectoral bargaining, health insurance and retirement savings, and joint representation on boards of directors

Below in Figure 9 we plot the distribution of profiles on the dues outcome that have three characteristics: regional or sectoral bargaining, health insurance and retirement savings benefits, and joint representation on organization boards of directors. As is clear, these profiles were consistently rated very highly by respondents, with the median profile falling at the 91<sup>st</sup> percentile of all profiles (see dashed line).

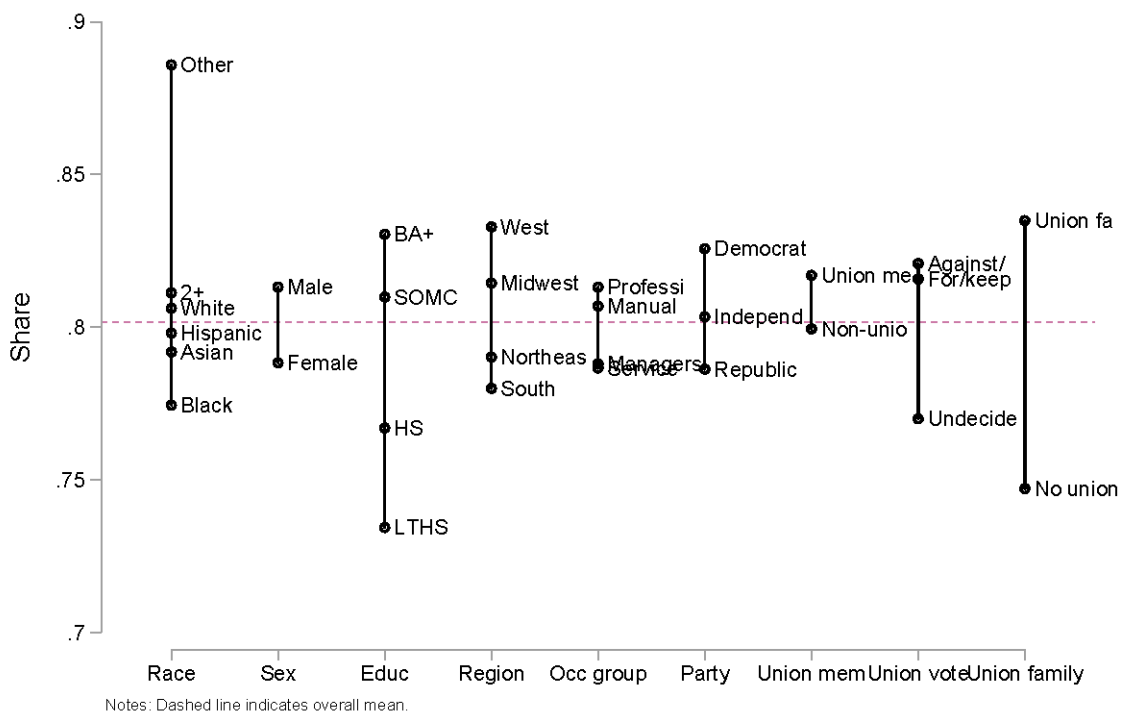
**Figure 9: Distribution of Dues Ratings for Organizations with Regional or Sectoral Collective Bargaining, Health Insurance and Retirement Savings, and Joint Board Representation**



## Appendix 8: Text analysis of free-response items

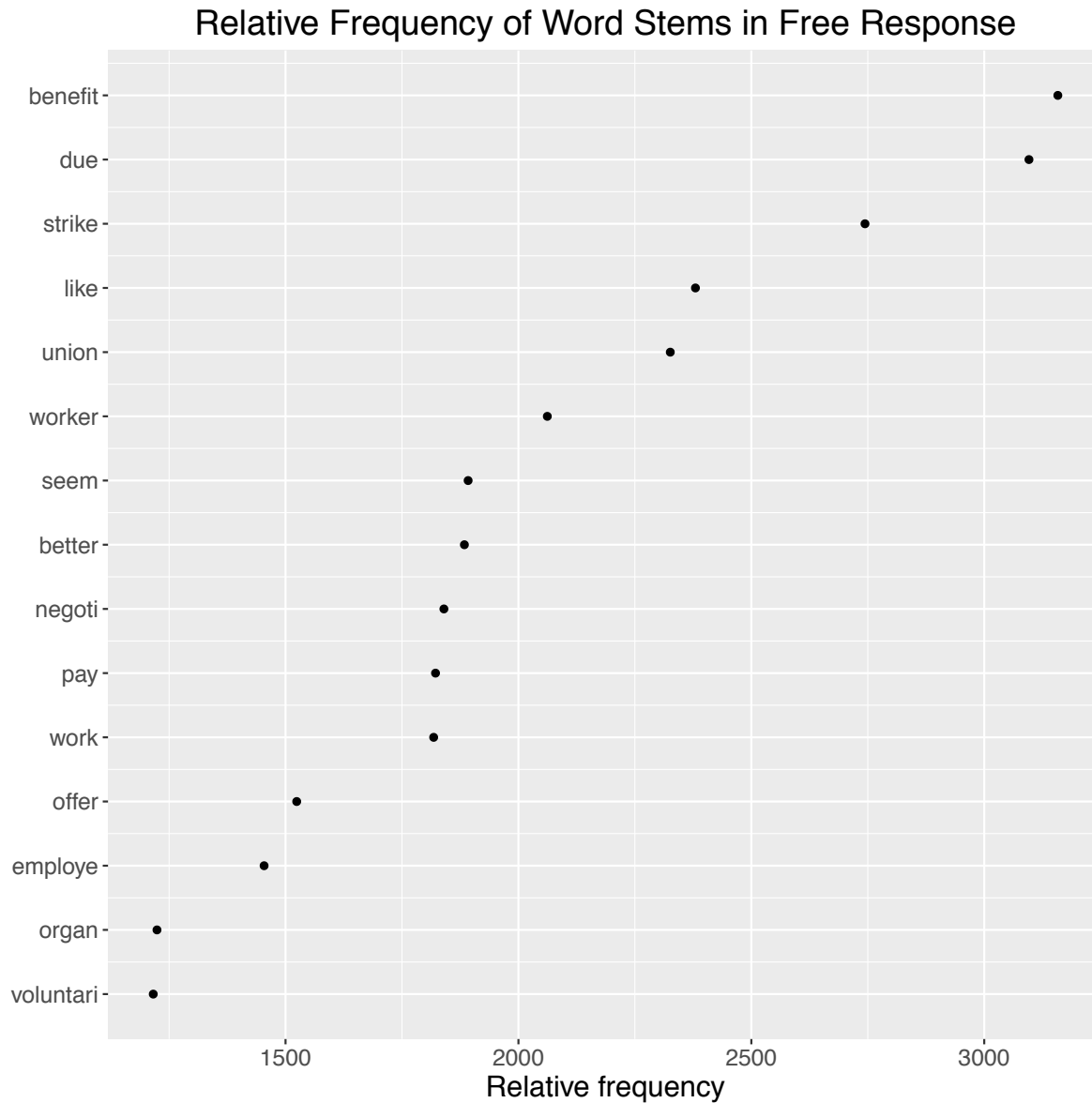
As reported in the main text, we analyzed a free response item following the completion of each task that asked respondents “In a few words, please explain why you selected Labor Organization [1 or 2] as the one you'd be most likely to join.” Of the 14,941 potential responses, 12,092 (81 percent) written responses were reported. While those who are more educated or are not undecided about how they would vote on a union (i.e. would vote for a union or vote against a union) respond at higher rates, variation in response rates is quite modest across several relevant characteristics of individuals (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Share of Eligible Responses That Provided Open-Ended Response, By Worker Demographics**



First, we analyze this data quantitatively. We pooled all these responses together, removed punctuation, removed common stop words (using the tm R package), and then stemmed the remaining words. We then examined the most frequent uni-grams, bi-grams, and tri-grams. We plot the results for uni-grams in Figure 11, which indicate that respondents most frequently referred to the benefits offered by labor organizations when making their decisions, affirming the results from the conjoint analysis.

**Figure 11: Uni-grams in Free Response Item – “Why Did You Select Labor Organization?”**



Next, we conduct a more qualitative review of the open-ended responses. Respondents most often used this space to list out the specific characteristics they preferred, offer a broad characterization or feeling they got from either organization, or comment on the survey instrument. In reading through these open-response items, we pull out a few specific themes that we see as are elucidating the thought processes of respondents as they approached the conjoint tasks and how some of these comments reflect the respondents’ concerns or understanding of specific characteristics of the conjoint experiment. We quote some of these responses that capture some of these general responses.

Consistent with the results in Figure 11, many respondents explicitly called out the characteristics of benefits, strikes, or dues as the primary determinants of their choice of which

organization they would join. Many simply cited their selected organization's additional or more preferred benefits. On the negative side, we found respondents writing that they wanted to avoid any threat of strike or imposition of dues, reflecting the negative effect of strikes and positive effects of optional or pay-for-service policies seen in Figure 1. For some, these components of the organizations were coercive, extractive, and therefore seen in a negative light. For others, strikes were undesirable because of their industry or the nature of their work. Many respondents from the health care industry, for instance, reported being uncomfortable or against striking when it could negatively affect patients.

*I find strikes to be an abuse of power. If you're unhappy at work, negotiate or quit.*

*No one should be forced to pay unions who take those dues and give them to left wing nut job politicians*

Other respondents actually expressed vocal support for the use of strikes and dues, mostly citing their ability to generate leverage and power for labor organizations:

*Union power is strike power. How can you enforce an [sic] collective bargaining without the threat of action? The threat of boredom? I don't want my orgs to strike but I want them to be ready to*

*Requiring all members to pay dues makes the organization stronger.*

Political activity by labor organizations, another characteristic with overall negative effects on one's likelihood to join unions, had similar divide on responses to the overall proposition that the labor organizations engaged in any kind of political activity. Those against it saw it as corruptive, coercive, and partisan to liberal policies or politicians:

*I don't like that if you're in a labor union your union tries to tell you how to vote.*

Among those for political activity by their labor organizations spoke of their power to be a force for change but many also appeared wary of supporting politicians instead of lobbying for specific policies because politicians couldn't necessarily be held accountable to their platforms.

*I just want unions to be tough and political.*

*Family leave and minimum wage being advocated for already by the union would mean more to me than a "pro-worker" politician, who may or may not keep his/her word.*

Respondents offered more general statements that spoke to their overall feelings toward standard union practices. The potential for pay standardization, perhaps embodied by the various

collective bargaining characteristics, raised concerns to individuals about hurting any sense of meritocracy:

*I believe in right to work, meritocracy over supporting a complacent seniority based system.*

*More options to be determine by the worker less over-arching one size fits all rules*

Relatedly, workers did appear to recognize and support those labor organizations that cared about their members and help out individuals, often through providing voice/representation options or expanding their exit options (i.e. training, job search assistance):

*This organization seems better and in the long run and more focused on helping the individual throughout their life, not just the job.*

*The workers/employee have more hands on and say so of what is going on within the organization*

*Offers training to keep your skills up to date as technologies change*

Many respondents, including those who were in favor of unions or undecided on unions, appeared to favor more cooperative organizations compared to confrontational tactics.

*I like that it works for the union member, without putting pressure on them to go against their company*

*Union shares goal as executives to develop a profitable company with a positive culture where employees are appreciated/compensated fairly (within reason).*

Yet, still some respondents expressed a desire for their labor organizations to act as counterweights to employers' power and abuse:

*Because 90% of today's organization don't care about the work that the employees do on a day to day as long as the employee makes the sale. They fell that they can pay nickles and dimes and everything is okay, not caring about the employee has*

*I believe a union should act as a watchdog, setting rules and making sure the employer is following the rules. Labor union #2 fit that criteria better than #1.*

Finally, we did observe a handful of respondents expressing frustration in the open responses of their final task or otherwise indicate their unwillingness to genuinely weigh their choices. Considering our results are fairly congruent with the comments made by different groupings of

individuals (e.g. pro- versus anti-union), we are believe these cases of random choosing are limited.

*Sick of picking, don't care either way*

*I'm anti union, so I picked a random one*