

**[Alex Bryson](#), Rafael Gomez, Tobias Kretschmer and Paul Willman**

## Workplace voice and civic engagement: what theory and data tell us about unions and their relationship to the democratic process

**Article (Published version)  
(Refereed)**

**Original citation:**

Bryson, Alex, Gomez, Rafael, Kretschmer, Tobias and Willman, Paul (2013) Workplace voice and civic engagement: what theory and data tell us about unions and their relationship to the democratic process. [Osgoode Hall Law Journal](#), 50 (4). pp. 965-998. ISSN 0030-6185

© 2013 [Osgoode Hall Law School](#)

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/56970/>

Available in LSE Research Online: September 2014

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

## Workplace Voice and Civic Engagement: What Theory and Data Tell Us About Unions and Their Relationship to the Democratic Process

ALEX BRYSON, RAFAEL GOMEZ, TOBIAS KRETSCHMER &  
PAUL WILLMAN \*

We offer an explanation for the phenomenon of declining democratic engagement by assuming that what happens at work is the primary driver of what occurs outside of the workplace. If workers are exposed to the formalities of collective bargaining and union representation, they also perhaps increase their attachment to, and willingness to participate in, structures of democratic governance outside of the workplace as well. In order for this argument to hold, one first needs to test whether individual union members are more prone to vote and participate in civil society than non-members: Other research refers to this as the union voting premium. We find that the voice effect of unionism on democratic participation is significant and is larger for groups that are significantly under-represented when it comes to voting, namely those with fewer years of education, immigrants, and younger workers. We also discuss the legal implications of these findings.

Nous cherchons à expliquer le déclin de l'engagement démocratique en supposant que ce qui se produit au travail est le moteur principal de ce qui arrive hors du lieu de travail. Lorsque

\* Respectively Senior Research Fellow, NIESR and CEP; Associate Professor at the Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, University of Toronto; Full Professor, Munich School of Management and Research Associate Centre for Economic Performance; and Full Professor, Department of Management, London School of Economics. The authors are grateful to Harry Boyte, John Budd, J Ryan Lamare, Roland Zullo, Marick F Masters, Aaron Sojourner, Ian Sakinofsky, Benjamin Stafford, Jake Rosenfeld, and two anonymous referees for insightful commentary. Special thanks to Ana Gomes for helpful input on related research, and to Bertrand Valery and Umar Boodoo for outstanding research assistance. An earlier version of this article was originally presented at the Voices At Work North American Workshop (16-17 March 2012), hosted at Osgoode Hall Law School, York University, Toronto and funded by the Leverhulme Trust, the Centre for Labour Management Relations at Ryerson University, and Osgoode Hall Law School.

les travailleurs sont exposés aux formalités de la négociation collective et de la représentation syndicale, ils risquent également de s'attacher plus étroitement, et de vouloir davantage participer, aux structures de la gouvernance démocratique hors de leur lieu de travail. Afin de valider cet argument, il importe de vérifier d'abord si les syndiqués ont davantage que les non-syndiqués tendance à voter et à participer à la société civile, ce que d'autres recherches qualifient de prime du vote syndical. Nous constatons que le droit d'expression que confère le syndicalisme possède sur la participation démocratique d'importantes retombées, qui se remarquent davantage dans le cas des groupes considérablement sous-représentés lors d'un scrutin, notamment les personnes sous-scolarisées, les immigrants et les jeunes travailleurs. Nous abordons également les répercussions juridiques de ces conclusions.

---

I.	UNION MEMBERSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT .....	969
	A. Existing Literature.....	969
	B. Mechanisms Linking Unions and Voting Behaviour .....	972
	C. Causal Possibilities .....	973
II.	MEASURING VOTING BEHAVIOUR AND BROADER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT .....	977
	A. Measures of Voting and Civic Engagement.....	978
	B. Estimating Strategy Linking Unions to Voting Behaviour and Civic Engagement .....	979
III.	RESULTS.....	981
	A. The Probability of Voting: The Effect of Controls .....	981
	B. The Effect of Unions on Voting .....	984
	C. The Effect of Unions on Unlikely Voters.....	987
	D. The Effect of Unions on Broader Civic Engagement.....	991
IV.	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS.....	994

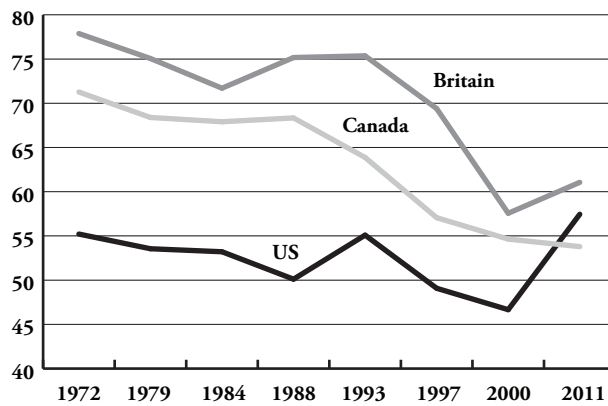
---

**THE DECLINE IN DEMOCRATIC** participation across many Western democracies has been the subject of both popular and academic discussion for some time. The most obvious form of weakening attachment to democratic and civic engagement has occurred in the simple act of voting, which in Canada, Britain, and the United States—three countries sharing broadly similar legal systems and representative liberal democratic structures—has declined over the past forty years (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

---

1. In the 2008 and 2012 US presidential elections, there was an upturn in voter turnout associated with the Obama voter organizing efforts, which not coincidentally used many of the same resources and organizational techniques of the trade union movement. The other common law notable exception of course is Australia (not included in Figure 1) where, since 1924, voting in federal- and state-level elections has been mandatory. See *Voter Turnout*, online: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance < <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=231>>.

FIGURE 1: VOTER TURNOUT IN FEDERAL/NATIONAL ELECTIONS, CANADA, BRITAIN, AND THE UNITED STATES, 1972–2011 (% OF VOTING AGE POPULATION)



SOURCE: IDEAS 2011. Figures based on authors' calculations.

Many theories have been proffered for these remarkable falls in voter participation. Most notable perhaps is Robert Putnam's "bowling-alone" phenomenon, which argues that a general decline in most forms of social participation has been occurring since the late 1960s.<sup>2</sup> Few studies, however, have sought to locate the demise of democratic participation in the decline of union voice and its particular set of workplace representative structures.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as noted by Richard B. Freeman,<sup>4</sup> research on "what unions do to voting" has been limited until very recently, despite the importance that unions attach to political activity and the potential effect this activity has on election results. Economists have continued to focus on the impact of unions on wages and other labour market outcomes while studies of voter turnout by political scientists have focussed on socio-economic determinants of voting that rarely include union effects.<sup>5</sup>

2. The two of Putnam's works most commonly associated with this argument are "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" (1995) 6:1 *J Democracy* 65; Robert D Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000) [Putnam, *Collapse and Revival*].

3. See Jake Rosenfeld, "Economic Determinants of Voting in an Era of Union Decline" (2010) 91:2 *Soc Sci Q* 379; Richard B Freeman, "What Do Unions Do ... To Voting?" (NBER Working Paper No w9992, 2003) online: <<http://ssrn.com/abstract=450893>> [Freeman, "What Do Unions Do"].

4. *Ibid* at 12.

5. The few political science studies that have addressed this issue have found contrasting results. Radcliff finds a positive union effect on electoral participation of persons in union

We aim to redress this gap by building upon the small but growing literature showing that what happens at work is intimately related to what occurs outside of the workplace.<sup>6</sup> Put another way, if workplace voice and civic voice are complements—in the sense that they foster a shared understanding of democracy’s value and common cause—then we would expect the decline of union representation to affect the civic attitudes and democratic behaviour of individuals outside of the workplace as well.

For this argument to hold we first need to examine whether, at the individual level, union members are more likely to vote and participate in civil society than non-members. This tendency for union members, other things equal, to be more inclined to vote than otherwise comparable non-members has been confirmed in US voting data and is sometimes referred to as the union voting premium.<sup>7</sup>

However, several things that unions do can confound the relationship between unionization and civic participation, as articulated above. We know, for example, that unions are associated with a wage premium and are disproportionately located in sectors such as education and public service, which are themselves factors that are positively associated with voting and participating in civil society. So, if one is seeking to isolate the true spillover effect of union voice on democratic participation, one must control for wages and sector, among other factors. The residual voting premium after accounting for these other union covariates then becomes the pure civic or voice-related effect of unionization, or what we term the “voice face” of the union voting premium (adapting the “face” nomenclature developed first by Freeman and James L. Medoff<sup>8</sup> to describe union effects that are not related to wages or benefits).<sup>9</sup>

Though this is intuitively appealing, there is also a contrasting possibility. What if exercising voice at work is not complementary to democratic participation,

---

households in the United States from 1952 to 1992, whereas Delaney et al, concluded that union members turned out more than non-members but that persons in union households did not. See Benjamin Radcliff, “Organized Labor and Electoral Participation in American National Elections” (2001) 22:2 J Lab Research 405; John Thomas Delaney, Jack Fiorito & Marick F Masters, “The effects of organizational and environmental characteristics on union political action” (1988) 32:3 AJPS 616.

6. John Godard, “Is Good Work Good for Democracy? Work, Change at Work and Political Participation in Canada and England” (2007) 45:4 BJIR 760.
7. Freeman, “What Do Unions Do,” *supra* note 3.
8. Richard B Freeman & James L Medoff, *What Do Unions Do?* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).
9. The term “voice” here refers to meaningful two-way communication between employees and employers, either through the institutional structures of trade union collective bargaining, or non-union representative structures.

but substitutable? That is, if one form of social engagement triggers a decline in other forms of participation, then union voice might reduce the demand for civic voice. The channel could be as simple as people having finite resources (*e.g.*, time, energy) or that the desire for democratic voice is satiated once it has been attained in an alternative domain of life such as the workplace.<sup>10</sup>

We offer an original analytical treatment of these contrasting theories and an empirical examination of a nationally representative Canadian survey especially designed to measure social and civic engagement (including voting behaviour), which crucially contains a question on union status. This allows us to compare union and non-union members. We focus on Canada and draw conclusions that bear upon countries sharing broadly similar (though not identical) common law systems, workplace governance models, and democratic forms of government, such as Britain and the United States.<sup>11</sup>

The paper is structured as follows. In Part 1, the existing literature is surveyed as well as mechanisms linking unionization to increased democratic participation are described. In Part 2, the empirical measures and data used to test whether union voice and civic engagement are related are presented. In Part 3, the results of our study are presented. Finally in Part 4, the implications of our findings and concluding comments are drawn.

## I. UNION MEMBERSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

### A. EXISTING LITERATURE

We offer an explanation for the phenomenon of declining democratic engagement by noting the similar declines in union membership and extending the logic that an organizational affiliation in what might otherwise be a private sphere (*e.g.*, the trade union, the chess club, or the residents' association) can promote greater social awareness and foster norms of collective responsibility. This as some authors suggest, can lead to greater political engagement.<sup>12</sup> A similar argument was advanced

---

10. There is actually a historically rich tradition emphasizing that the relationship between paid work and civic action is intimately linked, and not confined to alternate domains such as off-hours voluntarism. See Harry Boyte "The Work of Citizenship" (9 September 2012), online: Huffington Post <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/harry-boyte/the-work-of-citizenship\\_b\\_1872395.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/harry-boyte/the-work-of-citizenship_b_1872395.html)>.

11. Data for the United States, Canada, and Britain will be examined in future work in an effort to link cross-nationally the demise of workplace voice (union and non-union forms) to an increased/decreased likelihood of civic engagement and participation.

12. Godard, *supra* note 6.

over two hundred years ago by Alexis de Tocqueville<sup>13</sup> and extended in the twentieth century by political scientists such as Putnam<sup>14</sup> and Almond Verba.<sup>15</sup> Putnam's groundbreaking work began in northern Italy, where he studied participatory democracy and its connection to economic vibrancy and positive social outcomes.<sup>16</sup> His work focussed academic attention on how it is that places with otherwise low levels of income but high social capital can work to improve society-wide outcomes as well as benefit individuals in a material sense. Most of these benefits, according to Putnam, are linked to associational membership in everything from business societies to local soccer clubs, the idea being that the more immersed individuals are in their social surroundings and connected with their neighbours, the greater the trust (and consequent lowering of transaction costs) in society as a whole.<sup>17</sup>

Verba's work bears slightly more directly on our article since he extended the concept of shared interest to trade unions, which he argued act like any other interest group in society by increasing democratic participation through their capacity to organize and mobilize voters (working class members of society) who would otherwise not be inclined to vote.<sup>18</sup>

Unions, however, remain distinct from other actors that operate between the state and citizen because of their connection to the workplace (*i.e.*, where—at least in Canada—workers are obliged to be *de facto* members), their solidaristic character, and their resulting effects on civic participation. Trade unions, along with their labour political parties, comprise what Seymour Martin Lipset et al termed “the two principal paths by which members of the working classes [are] accepted into the fabric of societies as political and economic citizens.”<sup>19</sup> This idea, which seems anecdotally plausible,<sup>20</sup> was recently tested by Aaron

---

13. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Harper Perennial Books, 1969).

14. See Robert D Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) [Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*]; Robert D Putnam, “The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life,” *The American Prospect* 4:13 (March 1993) 35 [Putnam, “Prosperous Community”].

15. Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman & Henry E Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

16. Putnam, *Collapse and Revival*, *supra* note 2.

17. See Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, *supra* note 14; Putnam, “Prosperous Community,” *supra* note 14.

18. Verba, *supra* note 15.

19. Seymour Martin Lipset, “Radicalism or Reformism: The Sources of Working-Class Politics” (1983) 77: 1 *Am Pol Sci Rev* 1 at 6.

20. See Michael Wasser, “Case Study: How Does a Waitress Get Into Office?” (2010), online: American Rights at Work <<http://www.americanrightsatwork.org/dmdocuments/>

J. Sojourner<sup>21</sup> using US data. The results supported Lipset's argument. They revealed that unions do seem to offer non-elites and otherwise marginalized sub-groups of the population a greater chance of playing a major role in fostering the institutions of political democracy. But, as union presence in the private sector dwindles, this otherwise positive influence on democracy is having a reduced effect.

We know from recent literature that union membership is associated with an increased propensity to vote. Freeman has estimated that for the United States this increased likelihood averages 12 percentage points in non-adjusted terms and about 4 percentage points when socio-economic characteristics that differentiate union members from non-members are taken into account:

[T]he voting rate of union members averages some 12 points above that of non-union members; and that the voting rate of non-union persons in union households averages 3 points above that of persons in non-union households. Most of the higher rate of turnout of unionists is due to socioeconomic factors that differentiate union members from others, but there remains a union voting premium for both members and other persons in union households. The difference in turnout between members and non-members with *comparable characteristics* is about 4 percentage points.<sup>22</sup>

In a follow-up study, Jake Rosenfeld estimated that unions do not necessarily provide any added positive effect on voting behaviour amongst highly educated workers or those working in the public sector.<sup>23</sup> The direct or true influence of unions on voting behaviour lies with less educated private-sector workers. Rosenfeld argues that "the continuing disappearance of private-sector unions from the U.S. economic landscape severs an important bridge connecting average workers to politics."<sup>24</sup> Their demise from the US industrial relations landscape has caused, according to Rosenfeld, these less-advantaged groups to be further marginalized from the political process.<sup>25</sup>

---

ARAWReports/everydayamericansrunningforoffice.pdf>.

21. Aaron J Sojourner, "Do Unions Promote Members' Electoral Office Holding? Evidence from Correlates of State Legislatures' Occupational Shares" (IZA Discussion Paper No 6479, 2012), online: <<http://ssrn.com/abstract=2039665>>.
22. Freeman, "What Do Unions Do," *supra* note 3 at 36 [emphasis in original].
23. Rosenfeld, *supra* note 3 at 394.
24. *Ibid* at 394.
25. *Ibid*. A number of studies have explored ancillary connections between organized labour and the democratic process. For example, the question of whether union organizing can increase non-union voter turnout has been addressed. See J Ryan Lamare, "Union Influence on Voter Turnout: Results From Three Los Angeles County Elections" (2010) 63:3 *Indus Lab Relations Rev* 454; Roland Zullo, "Union Membership and Political Inclusion" (2008) 62:1 *Indus Lab Relations Rev* 22; Paul Clark & Marick F Masters, "Competing Interest Groups



Despite the handful of studies showing positive union impacts on voting, we still lack a set of studies looking at the overall relationship between union membership and other civic behaviours such as mobilizing for a cause or being an active part of a political party. Certainly, no study has looked at Canadian voting behaviour in this way.

## B. MECHANISMS LINKING UNIONS AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Several mechanisms might explain why union membership is linked to greater voter participation. First, as noted by the political theories surrounding mobilization, the institutional capacity to organize and assemble persons for a singular purpose can be translated into voter turnout. Unionization therefore serves to bring voters out to the polls, either through awareness and facilitation (offering rides to the polls and reminders) or through pressure (subtle or overt).

Second, unionization may also be associated with certain characteristics of persons who are inclined to join and participate in forms of democratic culture. This is not limited to civic or workplace arenas, but extends to all aspects of life. Union membership then is a mere by-product of underlying preferences.

Third, unionization serves to increase wages even after controlling for productivity differences between union and non-union workers—the so-called union wage premium—and greater earnings are linked to greater political participation. This wage-setting effect of unionization has been termed the “monopoly face” of unions as contrasted with the non-wage voice face of unions.<sup>26</sup> Recent work on voter participation shows that declines in voter turnout have been far greater for earners at the lower end of the income distribution.<sup>27</sup>

If, after accounting for all the variables associated with these three voting channels, we are still left with a union advantage when it comes to voting, then we would be left with a fourth channel: the voice face of unionism. Unions, through their provision of voice inside the workplace, can serve to educate otherwise non-interested individuals on the value of participation and representative voting. Whether this occurs at union election time or when ratifying a collective agreement, the transmission mechanisms are social as opposed to pecuniary or directly instrumental. Contact with more politically active co-workers drawn to unionized jobs and settings can activate or reinforce latent democratic instincts in persons who would otherwise eschew civic engagement. The lack of an institutional

---

and Union Members Voting” (2001) 82:1 Soc Sci Q 105.

26. See Freeman & Medoff, *supra* note 8.

27. Richard B Freeman, “What, Me Vote?” (NBER Working Paper No w9896, 2003), online: <<http://www.nber.org/papers/w9896>>.

voice (union or non-union) in a workplace serves to undermine social information about the value of voting and civic participation. Generally, non-union members in non-union workplaces will therefore have limited access to the daily practice of democracy and be less inclined, other things constant, to vote come election day.

Two final notes of caution should be added to our discussion of union channels of influence. The first is that, given the nature of the data used, we are unable to distinguish between memberships in different unions. All we have is a single union coverage variable and as such we are unable to capture the extent to which representation structure and hence, degrees of democratic engagement and practice of members, differ across unions. To the extent that we may be missing a control for democratic union structure, our results would likely be biased downwards (given that we are mixing less democratic and more democratic union structures into one variable) and hence any positive effect should be seen as a low estimate of the union effect. On the other hand, we also have no direct way of capturing whether our self-identified union members are also union representatives or shop stewards. Not only do these individuals act as a springboard for the union engagement of others, their presence in the data may likely skew our results positively, generally inducing an upward bias in our estimates of union membership and civic behaviour. Given these offsetting effects, we are likely seeing a mid-range estimate of union propensity to vote and engage in civic activity, bounded between the upward union-democratic and shop-steward effects and the lower less-democratic union and non-shop steward sample. Knowing which way these biases likely play out will help in the interpretation of our results, should they prove surprisingly low or high as compared to previous estimates of the union voting premium in the United States.

### C. CAUSAL POSSIBILITIES

All four mechanisms outlined in Part I(B), above, still leave open the question of reverse causality. That is, none of our empirical techniques fully settles which way the causal arrow is pointing, either in the direction of greater civic participation leading to more unionization or vice versa. Despite this, we can sketch out the possible ways in which theory may guide us in interpreting our empirical results. We identify five causal possibilities that would be consistent with a union voting premium for Canada.

First, in the original exit-voice model proposed by Albert O. Hirschman,<sup>28</sup> collective action was dealt with by assumptions about utility functions. Some

28. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

individuals are assumed to have utility functions such that the benefits of collective action are not net of the costs of association. Rather, they are the sum of the costs of association since associational action is itself experienced as a benefit. So, collective action in general and involvement in voice in particular is sustained by a self-selection mechanism that draws such utility functions into the relevant domain. This may be because individuals experience the performance of altruism as a return, or because they make broader calculative decisions about the benefits of social capital. With panel data this could be easily captured by fixed-effect estimation, where individual tendencies to be civic-minded are accounted for by the very fact that we are observing a stable trait in a person's character. However, lacking such panel data we can still partially approximate this fixed effect with estimates that distinguish the highly engaged (as evidenced by many other active memberships in civil society) from the least engaged (as measured by individuals without a single associational membership outside of their union coverage). This model is presented simply in Figure 2, Panel A.

Second, in mobilization theory (which has its origins in the works of Karl Marx and in more modern times in the works of Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly<sup>29</sup> and John Kelly<sup>30</sup>) unionization definitely precedes political action because it is fomented by the perceived injustice of employer action. As described by Kelly, social movements and "collective activity ultimately stem from employer actions that generate amongst employees a sense of injustice or illegitimacy."<sup>31</sup> The analysis follows a clear Marxist trajectory and the basic category of interests is determined by a sense of injustice engendered by location in the process of production and class position, not by ethnic or religious grouping. As Kelly further states, "perceived injustice is the origin of workers [*sic*] collective definition of interests."<sup>32</sup> A question relating to perceived injustice by an employer would be ideal in detecting this second causal pathway. Unfortunately, our data lack such a variable, but we do control for the sector in which an individual is employed. To the extent that working conditions differ across private and public employers, this would pick up some of this latent discontent. This model is depicted in Figure 2, Panel B.

---

29. *Strikes in France 1830-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

30. *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilisation, Collectivism and Long Waves: Mobilization, Collectivism and Long Waves* (London: Routledge, 1998).

31. *Ibid.*

32. For an excellent review of mobilization theory, see Roderick Martin, "Mobilization Theory: A New Paradigm for Industrial Relations?" (1999) 52:9 *Human Relations* 1205.

A third approach is to say that civic skills are generated in all forms of association and deployed across all relevant domains. This is essentially the de Tocqueville and Putnam civil society argument and is an assertion that civic behaviour has large spillover effects into most areas of life. Individuals acquire the habit of association and involvement, whether or not some form of self-selection initiates it (as in Figure 2, Panel A), and crucially, this habit is not localized to one centre of social activity such as the workplace (as in Figure 2, Panel B). In our empirical model, we include measures of prior exposure to union membership and civic behaviour in the form of parental membership in a voluntary organization and early exposure to associational membership as a youth. This is presented in Figure 2, Panel C.

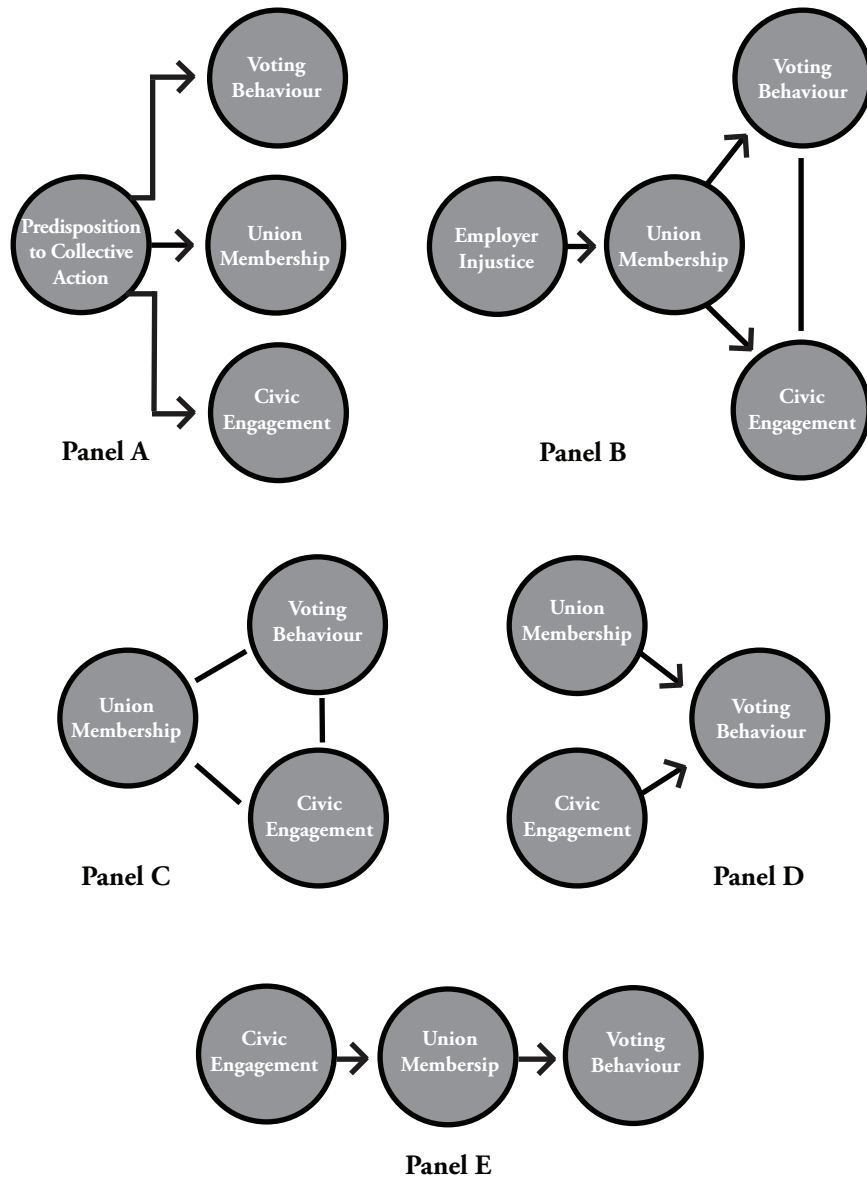
A fourth model offers perhaps a better explanation of voting behaviour than mere civic activity. In this approach, association allows mobilization. Specifically, to use our example, once people are members of a union they can be identified and influenced to vote. This is distinct from the previous approaches since it is not a model of individual decision making. It is essentially a model about social visibility or network connectedness. We can account for this in our estimates by looking at any positive union effect as a composite of this channel and others. What we cannot do—short of having a question regarding how someone got to the voting booth—is to apportion how much of any positive union effect on civic engagement is linked to this channel. This is depicted in Figure 2, Panel D.

Finally, consider the causal chain in Figure 2, Panel E. This depicts socio-religious civic engagement prior to union involvement. Historically, it has substantial empirical support. Alan Gerber, Jonathan Gruber, and Daniel M. Hungerman show that in the United States, engagement in formalized social behaviour such as religious church activity is a predictor of voting behaviour.<sup>33</sup> They come to this causal conclusion by analyzing changes in religious attendance in some states that revoked Sunday store closing laws. They showed that religious attendance fell after these laws were revoked and that this was in turn followed by falls in voting. More distantly, there is substantial qualitative evidence to indicate that union activity in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain emerged from prior experience of religious, particularly Protestant, non-conformist community engagement. We control directly for this tendency by including measures of whether an individual attends religious ceremonies actively, occasionally, or never.

---

33. Alan Gerber, Jonathan Gruber & Daniel M Hungerman, "Does Church Attendance Cause People to Vote? Using Blue Laws' Repeal to Estimate the Effect of Religiosity on Voter Turnout" (September 2008) NBER working paper 14303, online: <<http://www.nber.org/papers/w14303>>.

FIGURE 2: POSSIBLE CAUSAL PATHWAYS LINKING UNION MEMBERSHIP AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



## II. MEASURING VOTING BEHAVIOUR AND BROADER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Much of the political research on voting behaviour uses exit-polling data. But a richer array of data exists in annual social attitude surveys such as those in Britain (the British Social Attitudes Surveys, BSAS) and in general social surveys (GSS) found in Canada and the United States. We exploit the social-engagement wave of the GSS-cycle 17, conducted in 2003 by Statistics Canada on a nationally representative sample of 24,952 individuals. The GSS contains information on the union membership of the respondent and whether he or she voted in the previous municipal, provincial, or federal election. From this information, one can construct two additional voting behaviour variables: whether the respondent voted in any or all of the elections prior to the survey.

The GSS also contains questions on attitudes towards political and economic issues and other political activities, such as volunteering with a political party or going to rallies. These broader civic engagement variables follow immediately after the basic question, “Did you vote in the last election?”<sup>34</sup> And they are all based on a question series asking respondents:

In the past 12 months, have you done any of the following activities: searched for information on a political issue; volunteered for a political party; expressed your views on an issue by contacting a newspaper or a politician; signed a petition; boycotted a product or chose a product for ethical reasons; attended a public meeting; participated in a demonstration or march.

This provides seven non-mutually exclusive categories of political involvement and civic engagement.

The GSS-cycle 17 asks only one question about union status: Whether the person is a union member. However, the union membership variable in the GSS is an accurate identifier of who is actually being represented for bargaining purposes. Given Canada’s agency rules and the lack of right-to-work legislation in any province or at the federal level, most workers with coverage would respond as de facto members. The GSS union identifier variable therefore relates to union membership only.

---

34. General Social Survey – Cycle 17: Social Engagement, 2003, online: Statistics Canada <<http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/olc-cel/olc-cel?catno=89-598-X&clang=eng>>.

## A. MEASURES OF VOTING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

We view voting as one of the least costly forms of civic engagement. The demands on time are negligible and, in Canada at least, election officials for the most part automatically determine registration. Therefore, it should be the most prevalent form of civic activity. Table 1, panel A records the probability of voting across five differing measures (*i.e.*, voted in any election, voted in the last federal election, voted in the last provincial election, voted in the last municipal election, and voted in all of the above elections). The ordering reflects the decreasing voting propensity moving from federal to local elections and from any (the highest) to all elections (the lowest). The five voting measures are split by those who say they are union members and those who are not. Table 1 shows the overall union voting advantage (ranging from 10 to 12 percentage points) experienced by union members. This is consistent with Freeman's findings in the United States.<sup>35</sup>

TABLE 1: VOTING BEHAVIOUR AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AMONGST UNION AND NON-UNION RESPONDENTS<sup>36</sup>

	By Union Membership Status		
	Overall	Non-Union	Union
	Union Gap	Member	Member
	%	%	%
	[1]	[2]	[3]
<b>A. Measures of Voting Behaviour</b>			
1. Voted in any election	12.0	69.4	81.3
2. Voted in last federal election	12.8	64.1	76.7
3. Voted in last provincial election	11.9	63.2	75.2
4. Voted in last municipal election	9.5	50.6	60.2
5. Voted in all elections	10.1	45.9	56.1

35. "What Do Unions Do," *supra* note 3.

36. The overall sample in Table 1, column 1 is of all survey respondents, which includes those in and out of the workforce. Columns 2 and 3 are sub-samples of only those respondents who were working at the time of the survey.

	By Union Membership Status		
	Overall	Non-Union	Union
	Union Gap	Member	Member
	%	%	%
	[1]	[2]	[3]
<b>B. Measures of Broader Civic Engagement</b>			
6. Signed a public petition	17.0	25.0	42.1
7. Searched for information on a political issue	11.7	22.9	34.7
8. Attended a public meeting	15.5	18.1	33.7
9. Boycotted/chose a product for ethical reasons	16.3	17.1	33.4
10. Contacted a newspaper or a politician	8.9	10.5	19.5
11. Participated in a demonstration or march	5.3	5.3	10.7
12. Volunteered for a political party	1.6	2.5	4.1
13. Overall probability of civic engagement (unweighted)	11.0	32.5	43.5
<b>N</b>	18,786	13,126	5,660

SOURCE: Canadian General Social Survey – Cycle 17 (2003). Estimates based on authors' calculations.

NOTE: Column [1] excludes all those ineligible to vote. Columns [2] and [3] exclude all retirees and those out of the labour market.

The next seven rows of Table 1, panel B record the percentage of respondents who display a wide array of civic engagement behaviours. These are behaviours, which, unlike voting, require a modicum of proactive effort. Once again, we have ranked the measures in descending order from the most prevalent (*i.e.*, signing a petition) to the least prevalent (*i.e.*, volunteering to help a political party). In all instances, union members enjoy an overall advantage over their non-union counterparts.

## B. ESTIMATING STRATEGY LINKING UNIONS TO VOTING BEHAVIOUR AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Though these data suggest that union membership is positively related to the propensity to vote and to engage more broadly in civically responsible behaviours, we have not adjusted for differences in the characteristics of union and non-union persons that may lead them to vote and participate in greater numbers, as opposed to the impact of unionism *per se*.

The ideal way to capture this singular union effect would be to observe the same person from one election to another as they moved from a non-union to a union job.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, the GSS data are cross-sectional and do not follow

37. The reason for only following non-union members into union status is that, as noted by Freeman, "What Do Unions Do," *supra* note 3 at 19. "If unions induced someone to vote, persistence of voting would bias downward the estimates of the union impact on voting



persons from one election to the next. As a simple approximation of the unique union effect, we can estimate the extent to which the union voting advantages shown in Table 1 are attributable to differences in measurable socio-economic characteristics between union members and non-members. Accordingly, we estimate a linear probability model that relates dichotomous voting and civic-participating variables (1=voted/civically participated; 0=did not vote/civically participate) to socio-economic covariates and dummy variables for the union status of a person or her household.

This creates two initial measures of the union effect as found by Freeman.<sup>38</sup> The first is the union voting gap, defined as the observed (mean) difference in the proportion of those voting or engaging in broader civic behaviours between union and non-union members. The second measure is the union voting premium, defined as the difference in voting and civic participation rates among persons with and without union attachment who have observationally similar socio-economic characteristics. The union voting gap is analogous to the gross or overall difference in wages between union and non-union workers without any controls for worker characteristics. The union voting premium provides a closer estimate of the actual causal impact of unionization on turnout analogous to labour economists' estimates of the union wage premium.

Having estimated this more accurate measure of union impact on voting and civic participation, there is still value in distinguishing between two possible union mechanisms: the monopoly face and the voice face. The monopoly face serves to increase the material gains to members in the form of better pay and working conditions. The voice face serves to offer (and elicit from) workers a chance to shape the nature of their working environment and to participate to a greater degree than would a non-union worker in determining the terms and conditions of work.

The former effect creates a mechanism that in and of itself has a directly positive effect on voting and democratic participation; income is a strong correlate of voting propensity, so controlling for this empirically could account for the union monopoly face and reveal the net union voice effect.

We are still left with the issue of whether we have captured the real causal impact of unionization or simply an unobservable feature of union members that also affects politicization. Fortunately, the GSS includes a number of familial and

---

behaviour when a person went from union to non-union status. In this case, a better test of the union effect would be to compare the change in voting among persons who switched from a non-union job to a union job."

38. *Ibid.*

retrospective questions that, as discussed in our modelling section, approximate these intrinsic motivators. They include: whether the respondents' parents volunteered when the respondent was young; whether the respondent was a member of a youth organization; a measure of how long the respondent has resided in his or her present dwelling; and whether the respondent works in one of the industries that make up the broader public sector (*i.e.*, health, education, and public administration).<sup>39</sup>

Adjusting for these variables would net out the monopoly face channel and the intrinsic civic-mindedness effect from our final impact estimate, which we term the "union voice face premium."

### III. RESULTS

#### A. THE PROBABILITY OF VOTING: THE EFFECT OF CONTROLS

Table 2 presents the full results of our estimation model of union voting which includes controls for everything from gender to religious attendance. The results are consistent with prior research on the significance of certain socio-economic predictors of voting, such as: the positive association with age (voters aged twenty-five or above are roughly 20 percentage points more likely to vote than eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds); the negative association with time-constrained families (persons with no children living at home were roughly 7 to 10 percentage points more likely to vote than observably similar adults); the significantly positive effects of higher education (university graduates have double the voter turnout rate of high-school graduates); the negative association with immigrant status (immigrants are 20 to 27 percentage points less likely to vote than native-born individuals); the significantly positive effects of religiosity (persons who self-identify as religious and attend religious services regularly have substantially greater voting propensities, being between 9 and 12 percentage points more likely to vote than self-described non-religious never attenders).

---

39. As noted by Rosenfeld, *supra* note 3, if there are characteristics intrinsic to public sector work that raise political knowledge and feelings of civic responsibility, then public sector employment may increase the likelihood of voting for reasons similar to those that increase union members' voting rates, and union membership in the public sector may not increase voting probability above and beyond the effects of public sector employment.

TABLE 2: ESTIMATES OF THE IMPACT OF UNION MEMBERSHIP ON VOTING BEHAVIOUR, NON-RETIRED PERSONS ONLY, CANADIAN GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY - CYCLE 17 (2003)

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable					
	Voted in Any Election			Voted in All Elections		
	Overall Voting Gap (No Controls)	Union Voting Premium	Union Voice Premium	Overall Voting Gap (No Controls)	Union Voting Premium	Union Voice Premium
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]
<b>Mean Dependent Variable</b>		0.73			0.49	
<b>a. Union Membership</b>						
(Non-union member)						
Union member	0.119*	0.066*	0.031*	0.106*	0.065*	0.029*
<b>b. Socio-demographic Controls</b>	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
(Female)						
Male		0.016	0.000		-0.027*	-0.036*
(Age 18–24)						
Age 25+		0.255*	0.213*		0.252*	0.212*
(Single, never married)						
Married or common law		0.108*	0.098*		0.125*	0.112*
Widowed, separated, divorced		0.078*	0.075*		0.126*	0.086*
(Children in household)						
No children in household		0.098*	0.076*		0.098*	0.058*
(Immigrant)						
Non-immigrant		0.275*	0.245*		0.217*	0.186*
(Less than high school)						
High school graduate		0.062*	0.045*		0.026**	0.015
Some post-secondary		0.073*	0.059*		0.024**	0.016
Community college/voc. ed		0.102*	0.084*		0.047*	0.039*
University graduate		0.121*	0.097*		0.049*	0.036*
(Health very poor or fair)						
Health very good		0.016	0.011		0.008	0.002
Health excellent		0.012	0.005		0.009	0.006
(Non-religious, never attend)						
Religious, but never attend		0.068*	0.059*		0.103*	0.090*
Religious and attend		0.099*	0.083*		0.122*	0.102*
(Ontario)						
Atlantic provinces		0.022**	0.045*		0.005	-0.001*
Quebec		0.115*	0.117*		0.081*	0.081*
Prairies/Alberta		0.003	0.015		-0.025**	-0.024**
British Columbia		-0.004	0.007		-0.076*	-0.066*

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable					
	Voted in Any Election			Voted in All Elections		
	Overall Voting Gap (No Controls)	Union Voting Premium	Union Voice Premium	Overall Voting Gap (No Controls)	Union Voting Premium	Union Voice Premium
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]
<b>c. Civic-Mindedness Controls</b>	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
(Lived in same dwelling < 3 yrs)						
Lived in same dwelling 3–5 yrs			0.027**			0.020**
Lived in same dwelling 5–10 yrs			0.071*			0.099*
Lived in same dwelling 10 yrs+			0.140*			0.166*
(No group/club member as youth)						
Club/group member as youth			0.025*			0.028*
(Non-volunteering parents)						
Parents volunteered as youth			0.032*			0.037*
(Non-broader public sector)						
Education			0.037*			0.044*
Health and social work			0.015			0.027**
Public administration			0.075*			0.060*
<b>d. Monopoly Face Union Control</b>						
(Income < 20k)						
Income 20–29k			0.049*			0.026**
Income 30–39k			0.058*			0.039*
Income 40–49k			0.055*			0.036*
Income 50–59k			0.078*			0.055*
Income 60–79k			0.105*			0.096*
Income 80–99k			0.096*			0.079*
Income 100k+			0.080*			0.049*
<b>n</b>	18,347	18,347	18,347	18,347	18,347	18,347
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.015	0.175	0.202	0.008	0.140	0.185

SOURCE: Canadian General Social Survey – Cycle 17 (2003). Estimates based on authors' calculations.

NOTES: Cells represent coefficients expressed in percentage terms conditioned on a linear probability regression specified with all relevant observable characteristics including gender, age, marital status, immigrant status, self-reported health, educational attainment, province, and religious attendance. Estimates in [3] control for monopoly face effect of union membership via greater income (which increases probability of voting) and typically unobserved intrinsic civic-mindedness motivations for civic participation. Monopoly face union control variable includes wages. Intrinsic civic-mindedness/motivational control variables include whether the respondent volunteered or participated in social groups as youth, whether parents volunteered when respondent was a youth, length of time in current dwelling, and broader public sector workers, all of which are associated with unionization but which carry their independent effects.

\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01

But perhaps the most interesting of the non-union-related effects are the civic-mindedness controls at the bottom of Table 2. These include measures of “rootedness in community,” which Putnam found to be positively related to civic

participation and social capital.<sup>40</sup> We capture this idea with a variable that controls for length of stay in the same dwelling. We find that for each increase in community rootedness, propensity to vote also increases, peaking at 16.6 percentage points more likely to vote if one has lived in the same dwelling for more than ten years, as compared to living fewer than three years in the same dwelling.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, having early exposure to civic behaviour in the form of having been a member of a club or group as a youth increased likelihood of voting as an adult by 3 percentage points, as compared to those with no early exposure. Finally, parental transmission was equally strong, with individuals whose parents volunteered when they were young having a near 4 percentage point advantage in voting in all elections in a given election cycle.

The summary statistics for each of the variables used in our estimates are presented in Table 6.

## B. THE EFFECT OF UNIONS ON VOTING

Table 3, panel A and Figure 3 show the effect of unions on voting across all five measures of voting behaviour. Each cell entry and figure marker is based on a regression coefficient for the union membership variable. The first (top) line in Figure 3 and first column of Table 3, panel A shows the overall union gap (the union dummy with no controls), which ranges from a high of 12.8 percentage points for voting in the last federal election to 9.5 percentage points for voting in the last municipal election. Since voter turnout in municipal elections is much lower overall, the relative union effect is actually greater here, accounting for a 20 per cent greater chance of voting for union members than non-members.

---

40. Putnam, "Prosperous Community," *supra* note 14.

41. As noted, this technically does not capture community rootedness perfectly since someone can move dwellings but remain in the same neighbourhood. However, it does capture a close proxy, which is length of time at a specific address and hence connection with immediate neighbours, local schools, churches, et cetera.

**TABLE 3: ESTIMATES OF THE UNION VOTING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PREMIUM FOR OBSERVABLY COMPARABLE UNION AND NON-UNION RESPONDENTS**

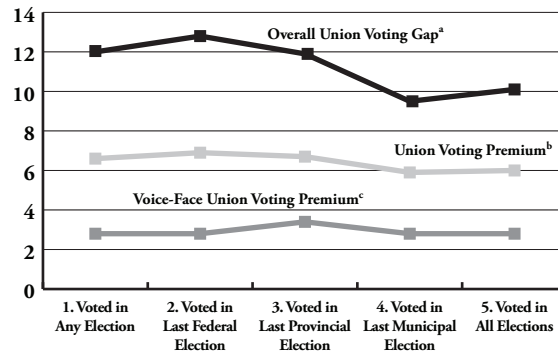
	Union vs. Non-Union Voting Differential		
	Overall Union Gap [1]	Union Voting Premium [2]	Union-Voice Premium [3]
<b>A. Measures of Voting Behaviour</b>			
1. Voted in any election	12.0**	6.6**	3.1**
2. Voted in last federal election	12.8**	6.9**	2.8**
3. Voted in last provincial election	11.9**	6.7**	3.4**
4. Voted in last municipal election	9.5**	5.9**	2.8**
5. Voted in all elections	10.1**	6.5**	2.9**
<b>B. Measures of Broader Civic Engagement</b>			
6. Signed a public petition	17.0**	12.2**	9.7**
7. Searched for information on a political issue	11.7**	7.2**	4.2**
8. Attended a public meeting	15.5**	12.3**	8.6**
9. Boycotted/chose a product for ethical reasons	16.3**	11.9**	8.7**
10. Contacted a newspaper or a politician	8.9**	6.5**	4.2**
11. Participated in a demonstration or march	5.3**	4.7**	3.8**
12. Volunteered for a political party	1.6**	1.4**	1.1*
13. Overall voting/civic engagement premium (unweighted)	11.0	7.0	4.3
<b>C. Controls</b>			
a. Socio-demographic	No	Yes	Yes
b. Wage (monopoly face), sector, and civic-mindedness	No	No	Yes

SOURCE: Canadian General Social Survey – Cycle 17 (2003). Estimates based on authors' calculations.

NOTES: Cells represent coefficients expressed in percentage terms conditioned on a linear probability regression specified with all relevant observable characteristics including: gender, age, marital status, immigrant status, self-reported health, educational attainment, province, and religious attendance. Estimates in [3] control for monopoly face effect of union membership via greater income (which increases probability of voting) and typically unobserved intrinsic civic-mindedness motivations for civic participation. Monopoly face union control variable includes wages. Intrinsic civic-mindedness/motivational control variables include whether the respondent volunteered or participated in social groups as youth, whether parents volunteered when respondent was a youth, length of time in current dwelling and broader public sector workers which are associated with unionisation but which carry their independent effects.

\*p<.05    \*\*p<.01

FIGURE 3: ESTIMATED UNION VOTING GAP/PREMIUM BETWEEN OBSERVABLY COMPARABLE UNION AND NON-UNION RESPONDENTS (%)



SOURCE: Canadian General Social Survey – Cycle 17 (2003). Estimates based on authors' calculations found in Table 2, panel A.

NOTES: The top line is the raw differential between union and non-union voters, not adjusting for socio-economic factors that differentiate union members from non-union workers. The middle line adjusts for these differing sets of characteristics between groups of workers. The bottom line controls for all observed characteristics found in line two that make union and non-union workers otherwise comparable plus wages and sector of respondent. These latter variables pick up the monopoly face of unions which serves to indirectly increase voting participation by making voters richer and drawn to sectors where civic engagement is already naturally higher (*i.e.*, the broader public sector). This leaves the voice face effect of union membership on voting.

<sup>a</sup>No controls

<sup>b</sup>Overall gap adjusted for socio-demographic characteristics

<sup>c</sup>Adjusted for characteristics plus civic-mindedness and Union Monopoly-face

The second line (middle) in Figure 3 and the middle column in Panel A of Table 3 show the union voting premium (*i.e.*, the union/non-union differential that remains after controlling for observed socio-demographic characteristics). Table 2, column 2 shows the full specification of the model that generated these results for our union dummy variable for two voting equations: the vote in any election and vote in all elections outcomes. The union voting premium is about half the size of the overall voting gap, indicating that much of the effect of union status was actually driven by differential characteristics of union members that simultaneously made them more likely to vote as compared to non-union members. Still, the percentage differences are all above 6 percentage points for every measure of voting.

Finally, the bottom line, in Figure 3 and Table 3, column 3, shows the union voice face premium (*i.e.*, the union differential in voting that remains after socio-

demographics, sector, income, and intrinsic civic-mindedness variables have been accounted for). The voice face premium is once again half the size of the previous estimate (3 percentage points), but is still significantly positive across all measures of voting.

On the basis of these data and estimates, we conclude that union members are more likely to vote than non-members in all forms of measured voting behaviour. There is an average 10-12 percentage point union-voting gap for members, a 6-7 percentage point union-voting premium for otherwise observably comparable union members, and a 3 percentage point union voice face premium after having controlled for monopoly-face union effects and differences in intrinsic civic-mindedness.

In sum, there is a union voting premium among persons with observationally equivalent characteristics of roughly 7 percentage points. This falls to about 3 percentage points when including income, characteristics of the parents, and evidence of civic activity as a youth, which is about one-third the size of the overall raw union versus non-union voting gap.

### C. THE EFFECT OF UNIONS ON UNLIKELY VOTERS

Unions may affect the voting behaviour of members who would otherwise be unlikely candidates for civic participation, namely workers with less education, immigrants, and younger workers. It is among these worker sub-groups that exposure to the mechanisms of workplace collective voice could have their greatest positive effect, for these are workers that otherwise do not engage with politics. What is convenient about the Wagner Act model,<sup>42</sup> as practiced in Canada at least, from a democratic voting effect perspective, is that union members cannot opt out of paying union dues. As such, even if they resent being part of a collective group, they are forced to remain due-paying members. This should show up as an increased voting likelihood between a subset of union and non-union members that would otherwise not join or participate in any form of civic association. In short, these unionized “unlikely voters” should out-vote their comparable non-union unlikely voters even though both display lower-than-average voting inclinations. In fact, as argued by Rosenfeld,<sup>43</sup> the unlikely voter may be the more important sub-group than regular members since many of the other positive

---

42. The *Wagner Act* model is short-form for any labour relations system rooted in workplace majority union rule, as distinct from statutory workplace representation or systems of sectoral or national-level bargaining.

43. Rosenfeld, *supra* note 3.



associations with unionization (*e.g.*, age, public sector) are themselves attributes which serve to increase the probability of voting.

The unlikely voter is an important category of respondent in our case because of how union membership works in Canada. There are no right-to-work laws that allow workers to opt out of union membership due payments. Even if they do not wish to be members, they still are represented by and pay dues to their union. Thus, it is plausible that the voting behaviour of some union members with little or no desire for collective or civic action differs very little from that of similar persons in non-union situations.

To examine the impact of being a union member who would otherwise not wish to be civically inclined we exploit another variable in the GSS, which asks respondents if they are members of any group or social club (other than a union). The question can be recoded to identify respondents without a single non-union affiliation or just one. We refer to these individuals with none or just a single affiliation as non-participatory workers. The probability of voting can therefore be estimated for three groups not inclined to participate using this new variable: (i) the non-union respondent with no group or club affiliation; (ii) the non-union respondent with only a single group or club affiliation; and (iii) the union respondent with no group or club affiliation. In Table 4, we do just this using the specification that gave us the union voting premium results in Table 2, column 2. In each case, we ran regressions and used a dummy variable to capture each of the three groups above, the excluded reference category in each case being individuals that were members in more than a single group or social club.

**TABLE 4: ESTIMATES OF THE UNION VOTING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PREMIUM ACROSS INDIVIDUALS WITH LITTLE OR NO ATTACHMENT TO SOCIAL GROUPS OR CIVIC ASSOCIATIONS (I.E., UNLIKELY VOTER)**

	Individuals with Only Single or No Attachment to Social Groups or Civic Associations			Union Voting/Civic Engagement Gap	
	Non-Union Member		Union Member	Difference	
	Not a member of any group/club [1]	Member of only one group/club [2]	Not a member of any group/club [3]	Union member - non-union member [3]-[1]	[3]-[2]
<b>A. Measures of Voting Behaviour</b>					
1. Voted in any election	-7.4**	0.0	1.4*	8.8	1.4
2. Voted in last federal election	-7.3**	-0.0	1.7*	9.0	1.7
3. Voted in last provincial election	-7.6**	0.0	1.4*	9.0	1.4
4. Voted in last municipal election	-6.8**	-0.7	0.7	7.5	1.4
5. Voted in all elections	-6.5**	-1.0	0.5	7.0	1.5

	Individuals with Only Single or No Attachment to Social Groups or Civic Associations			Union Voting/ Civic Engagement Gap	
	Non-Union Member		Union Member	Difference	
	Not a member of any group/club [1]	Member of only one group/club [2]	Not a member of any group/club [3]	Union member - non-union member [3]-[1]	[3]-[2]
<b>B. Measures of Broader Civic Engagement</b>					
6. Signed a public petition	-17.1**	-2.4**	0.6	17.7	3.0
7. Searched for information on a political issue	-10.7**	-3.9**	-3.7**	7.0	0.2
8. Attended a public meeting	-18.5**	-5.1**	-5.2**	13.3	-0.1
9. Boycotted/chose a product for ethical reasons	-11.3**	-2.4**	0.5	11.8	2.9
10. Contacted a newspaper or a politician	-9.3**	-3.7**	-3.3**	6.0	0.4
11. Participated in a demonstration or march	-3.4**	-0.7*	0.5	3.9	1.2
12. Volunteered for a political party	-5.1**	-1.1**	-1.5**	3.6	-0.4
a. Socio-demographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	n/a

SOURCE: Canadian General Social Survey – Cycle 17 (2003). Estimates based on authors' calculations.

NOTES: Cells represent coefficients expressed in percentage terms conditioned on a linear probability regression specified with all relevant observable characteristics including: gender, age, marital status, immigrant status, self-reported health, educational attainment, province, and religious attendance. Each regression includes entire sample and uses individual dummies for each regression. The excluded reference category in each case was "Member of more than one group/club."

\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01

The first five rows and first column in Table 4 show the effect of being a non-member of any group (including a union) on voting relative to individuals who are members of more than one other group. The voting discount is almost exactly the opposite of the union voting premium. Non-union members who are also not members of any group are on average 7 percentage points less likely to vote across all measures of voting than those who are members of at least one group or organization. The second non-union group of unlikely voters can be found in Table 4, column 2: the non-union respondents who are members of only a single group or organization. This membership status conveys no voting premium effect as compared to those who have multiple membership affiliations or who have union status as their only membership affiliation. The results show no significant difference. The final group of unlikely voters contains the union members who are otherwise not engaged in any other civil society groups of any kind. Here the union voting-premium magnitudes are still positive as compared to non-union members with more than a single membership of any kind, but are one-fifth as large as the union-voice face premium and are not statistically significant, for the most part.

It appears that the (non-union) group membership variable is picking up some unobserved proclivity for democratic participation and civic engagement. However, even here it seems that union membership does have some role (however minor) in raising participation in what would otherwise be a segment of politically disengaged individuals. This effect can be seen more clearly in the final column of Table 4, which takes the difference in voting propensity between non-union and union members who either are not part of any group or organization or have only a single affiliation. That is, compared to non-union, non-members of any group or club, otherwise civically inactive union members display a difference in voting propensity that ranges from 9 percentage points greater in federal elections to 7 percentage points greater in all elections. A positive differential (though smaller) also exists for non-union members who are otherwise non-civically active in any group or club and the non-union member who is a member of at least a single group or club.

As a final way to examine the potential effect of unions on unlikely voters, we identify two categories of respondents who displayed some of the lowest probabilities of voting in our empirical specifications (see Table 2). We ran separate regressions for union and non-union sub-samples and compared the results across groups with significantly lower than average civic engagement. These estimates are presented in Table 5. Specifically, in panel A, column 1, we see that for youth aged eighteen to twenty-four, unionization is associated with an 8.8 percentage point increased probability of voting in any election as compared to youth who are non-union, despite the nearly 40 percentage point voting disadvantage youth have as compared to older respondents. This is the largest of the effects observed. For the other category of workers with negative voting propensities (*i.e.*, immigrants) we find less of a clear-cut picture in our voting data. However, some of the union premium effect seemingly is occurring along a different participatory dimension—namely, along broader social engagement measures that are higher among unionized immigrants than their non-union counterparts (see Table 5, panel B). It is to these broader civic engagement results that we now turn.

TABLE 5: ESTIMATES OF THE UNION/NON-UNION VOTING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DIFFERENTIAL ACROSS GROUPS WITH LOW CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

	Union/Non-Union Differential for					
	Youth Aged 18–24			Recent Immigrants		
	Union [1]	Non- Union [2]	Diff [1]-[2]	Union [3]	Non- Union [4]	Diff [3]-[4]
<b>A. Measures of Voting Behaviour</b>						
1. Voted in any election	-0.359**	-0.447**	0.088	-0.238**	-0.258**	0.020
2. Voted in last federal election	-0.459**	-0.499**	0.040	-0.237**	-0.245**	0.008
3. Voted in last provincial election	-0.397**	-0.480**	-0.083	-0.228**	-0.254**	0.026
4. Voted in last municipal election	-0.085**	-0.442**	0.057	-0.210**	-0.187**	-0.023
5. Voted in all elections	-0.454**	-0.476**	0.022	-0.212**	-0.185**	-0.027
<b>B. Measures of Broader Civic Engagement</b>						
6. Signed a public petition	-0.022*	-0.010	-0.012	-0.078**	-0.118**	0.040
7. Searched for information on a political issue	-0.042*	-0.074	0.032	0.018	-0.015	0.033
8. Attended a public meeting	-0.196**	-0.103	-0.093	0.020*	-0.045*	0.065
9. Boycotted/chose product for ethical reasons	0.003	0.003	0.000	-0.060*	-0.072*	0.012
10. Contacted newspaper or politician	-0.1428*	-0.080	-0.062	-0.011	-0.026	0.015
11. Participated in a demonstration or march	-0.025	0.002	-0.027	0.040*	0.012	0.028
12. Volunteered for a political party	-0.058*	-0.013	-0.045	0.019	-0.001	0.020
a. Socio-demographic controls		Yes			Yes	
b. Wage, sector, and civic-mindedness controls		Yes			Yes	

SOURCE: Canadian General Social Survey – Cycle 17 (2003). Estimates based on author's calculations.

NOTES: expressed in percentage terms conditioned on a linear probability regression specified with all relevant observable characteristics including: gender, age, marital status, immigrant status, self-reported health, educational attainment, province, and religious attendance. Union (U)/Non-Union (NU) differential (Diff) is the difference in the estimated coefficient between union and non-union respondents obtained for each group (in the case of youth 18–24 it is the differential relative to the omitted reference category Age 25+ and for recent immigrants it is the difference relative to the native-born) in separate union and non-union regressions. A positive (negative) differential suggests by how much union status increases (decreases) the probability of voting and/or broader civic engagement.

\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 Cells represent coefficients.

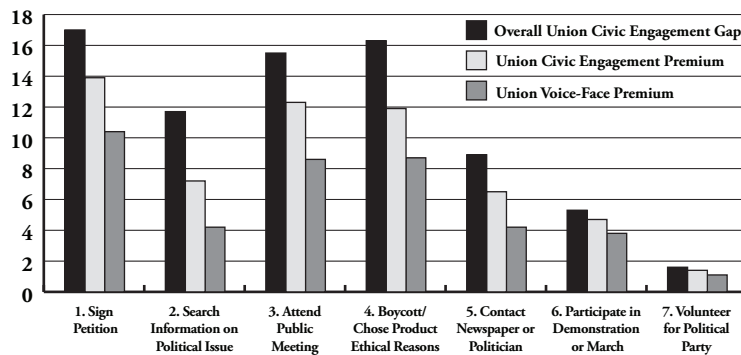
#### D. THE EFFECT OF UNIONS ON BROADER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

As noted in Part II above, there were a series of follow-up questions in the GSS-cycle 17 asking respondents whether in the past twelve months they engaged in a range of civic behaviours beyond voting. The civic behaviours ranged from low-effort (*e.g.*, signing a petition) to the most involved in terms of time and effort (*e.g.*, participating in a demonstration or public march). As seen in Table 3, panel B, column 1, the overall union gap is positive across all seven measures of civic engagement. The largest gaps in absolute terms relate to signing a petition (0.17 points), boycotting or choosing a product for ethical reasons (0.16 points), and attending a public meeting (0.15 points). But the largest union gaps in relative

terms occur for those civic behaviours that are the most onerous in terms of effort and time (*e.g.*, participation in a demonstration or public march and volunteering for a political party). In both cases, given the low frequencies at which these behaviours occurred in the GSS, the union gap represented an 80 per cent (0.05 points out of an overall mean of 0.06) and 50 per cent (0.016 points out of an overall mean of 0.032 points) share of the total observed propensities for demonstrating and political volunteering respectively. Union membership, it seems, has a greater effect on civic engagement than those studies limited to voting have suggested.

To see if controlling for socio-demographic characteristics, monopoly voice, and intrinsic civic-mindedness wipes out the overall union gap for civic engagement, we turn to Figure 4 and turn back to Table 3, panel B, columns 2 and 3. We see that like the voting behaviour measures, when we compare observationally equivalent union and non-union respondents the union gap declines. However, unlike the voting result, the declines are only about one-third (as opposed to half) each time we apply more controls to the basic regression. So for example, looking at row 10 in Table 3, panel B, we see that the overall union gap in terms of contacting a newspaper or politician to express views is 0.089 points. When we control for observable correlates of voting behaviour we see this gap fall by 0.024 points to 0.065 (or a 6.5 per cent union premium). Applying our final set of monopoly face and intrinsic civic-mindedness controls, we see that the union differential now falls to 0.042 points, which is just slightly under 50 per cent of the original propensity of 0.089 points. This pattern is repeated across all seven measures of broader civic engagement (see Figure 4).

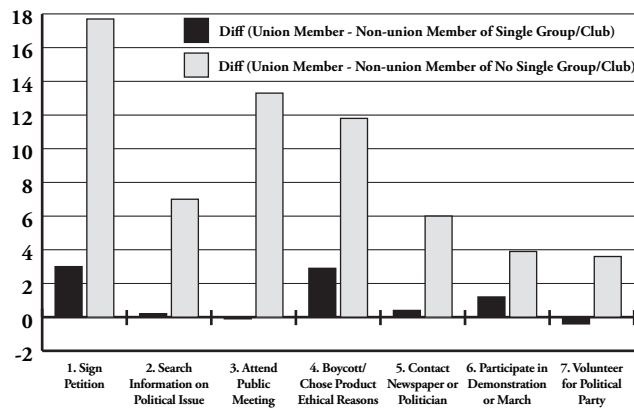
FIGURE 4: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PREMIUM BETWEEN OBSERVABLY COMPARABLE UNION AND NON-UNION RESPONDENTS (% ESTIMATED UNION MEMBERSHIP VOTING PREMIUM)



SOURCE: Canadian General Social Survey – Cycle 17 (2003). Estimates based on authors' calculations found in Table 2, panel B.

Finally, as shown in Figure 5, for our sub-group of voters with none or a single membership outside the union, the union/non-union differentials follow the pattern set in the voting estimates. Union members out-participate non-union members with no membership in outside groups or clubs and have some advantage over non-union members with just a single non-union affiliation. The largest relative union advantages appear in political party volunteering and boycotting a product on ethical grounds.

FIGURE 5: PROBABILITY ESTIMATES OF UNION/NON-UNION BROADER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DIFFERENTIALS FOR RESPONDENTS WITH LOW LEVELS OF ATTACHMENT TO SOCIAL GROUPS OR CIVIC ASSOCIATIONS (%)



SOURCE: Canadian General Social Survey – Cycle 17 (2003). Estimates based on authors' calculations found in Table 3, panel B.

Among sub-groups with the lowest likelihood of engaging in civic behaviours, union status seems to increase immigrant participation the most (see Table 5, panel B, column 4). For the rest (youth, non-home owners, and high school graduates), there are no significant effects worth noting. This lack of a clear result may be due, however, to the small sample sizes in the GSS once we estimate on so many sub-samples of the population.

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Access to union voice at the workplace increases the voting propensity of otherwise comparable respondents. We have broadened the finding beyond the United States, and have extended the scope of civic engagement to include a wider set of democratic participation measures. We have also tried to isolate the proportion of the union voting and civic engagement premium that is due solely to union voice.

There are five substantive empirical findings:

1. Union members are 10 to 12 percentage points more likely to vote than non-union members across all three levels (federal, provincial, and municipal) of electoral activity. This overall union voting gap is replicated when broader measures of civic engagement—such as signing a public petition or volunteering to help in a political party—are employed.

2. The union voting premium—defined as the difference in turnout between members and non-members with comparable characteristics—is smaller: about 6 to 7 percentage points for voting (or half the size of the overall union voting gap) and one-third the size for civic engagement.
3. About half of the union voting premium (or 3 percentage points) is actually due to the voice face properties of union membership as opposed to the monopoly face properties. Controlling for the higher income of union members and the intrinsic civic-mindedness of respondents leaves a significant but reduced union voice face premium of about 3 percentage points. Civic engagement is less affected by the introduction of observed correlates and is reduced by only one-third of its overall gap when comparing union and non-union workers with similar characteristics.
4. Union members who are not members of any other group or club are less inclined to vote than union members with other group affiliations. Nevertheless, they out-vote and out-participate non-union members with no group or club membership. Union non-members of any group or club are 7 to 9 percentage points more likely to vote than are demographically comparable non-union, non-member voters. For non-union respondents who are members of a single group or club, the difference with union members not part of any club or group is much smaller, just over 1.5 percentage points.
5. Among sub-groups that are least likely to vote, youth (aged eighteen to twenty-four) seem most affected by union membership in terms of voting, on average being 8.8 percentage points more likely than non-union youth to vote in any election. In terms of broader civic engagement, the union effect seems most pronounced for immigrants.

If we take law to mean not just the rules of a legal system, but also the institutions and processes by which law is promulgated and enforced,<sup>44</sup> then this research has several legal implications. First, if the process by which union membership, voting, and broader civic engagement are largely endogenous as depicted in Figure 3 (that is, each has a positive feedback effect that perpetuates) then some Australian-style legal structure that forces people to vote could actually have a positive spillover effect on unionism.

---

44. See Harry W Arthurs & Robert Kreklewich, “Law, Legal Institutions, and the Legal Profession in the New Economy” (1996) 34 *Osgoode Hall LJ* 1.



Second, our results show definitively that unionism, voting, and civic behaviours are not substitutes, regardless of the causal story. They are in fact complementary to each other at the individual level. Participation in one area of life (*i.e.*, the workplace) begets greater voting and greater participation in another (*i.e.*, the neighbourhood).

Third, our research leaves open the question of whether these positive results are solely a function of Canada's Wagner-style union voice, which enshrines workplace democracy in labour relations legislation, or whether these results are in fact generalizable to any system of enterprise-level voice provision. If it is the former, and it is in fact the strong workplace-level presence of shop-floor unionism in North America that gives these positive civic and voting results such power, then weakening legal protection for collective bargaining to foster a culture of civic-mindedness seems counterproductive. If it is the latter, then recent Supreme Court decisions in Canada (*e.g.*, the *Fraser* decision)<sup>45</sup> that would appear to constitutionally protect collective representation but not union bargaining representation would still have positive effects on broader civic participation. This question could perhaps be solved by a closer look at data from countries that allow for other voice channels at work such as statutory works councils.

This research therefore has both academic and policy relevance. On the academic side, it reinforces old theories of the complementarity of democratic participation in all spheres of life. There are spillover effects that come from encouraging representative voice at work in the form of greater participation in democratic processes. This finding is consistent with several theoretical conjectures and can perhaps best be considered in terms of the causality of relationship between union membership and civic engagement that were presented in the article. Though our study cannot determine which causal channel is at work, it at least sheds light on the possibilities and pulls the plug on the idea that workplace democracy in the form of unionization lowers participation outside through a substitution channel.

---

45. *Ontario (Attorney General) v Fraser*, 2011 SCC 20, 2 SCR 3.

TABLE 6: SAMPLE STATISTICS FOR VARIABLES USED IN THE ESTIMATING EQUATIONS, CANADIAN GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY - CYCLE 17 (2003)

	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
<b>I. Dependent Variables</b>				
Voted in any election	0.73	0.44	0	1
Voted in all elections	0.54	0.37	0	1
<b>II. Independent Variables</b>				
<b>A. Union Membership</b>				
(Non-union member)	0.70			
Union member	0.30	0.45	0	1
<b>B. Socio-demographic Controls</b>				
(Female)	0.55			
Male	0.45	0.49	0	1
(Age 18–24)	0.13			
Age 25+	0.77	0.32	0	1
(Single, never married)	0.20			
Married or common law	0.56	0.49	0	1
Widowed, separated, divorced	0.24	0.17	0	1
(Children in household)	0.34			
No children in household	0.66	0.45	0	1
(Immigrant)	0.18			
Non-immigrant	0.82	0.81	0	1
(Less than high school)	0.16			
High school graduate	0.14	0.35	0	1
Some post-secondary	0.18	0.38	0	1
Community college/voc. ed	0.28	0.44	0	1
University graduate	0.24	0.42	0	1
(Health very poor or fair)	0.60			
Health very good	0.19	0.38	0	1
Health excellent	0.21	0.40	0	1
(Non-religious, never attend)	0.54			
Religious but never attend	0.26	0.43	0	1
Religious and attend	0.19	0.39	0	1
(Ontario)	0.32			
Atlantic provinces	0.17	0.22	0	1
Quebec	0.21	0.40	0	1
Prairies/Alberta	0.18	0.41	0	1
British Columbia	0.12	0.32	0	1

	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
<b>C. Civic-mindedness Controls</b>				
(Lived in same dwelling < 3 yrs)	0.50		0	1
Lived in same dwelling 3–5 yrs	0.19	0.39	0	1
Lived in same dwelling 5–10 yrs	0.13	0.33	0	1
Lived in same dwelling 10+ yrs	0.18	0.38	0	1
(No group/club member as youth)	0.41			
Group/club member as youth	0.59	0.49	0	1
(Non-volunteering parents)	0.49			
Parents volunteered as youth	0.51	0.49	0	1
(Non-broader public sector)	0.77			
Education	0.07	0.24	0	1
Health and social work	0.10	0.29	0	1
Public administration	0.06	0.22	0	1
<b>D. Monopoly Face Union Control</b>				
(Earned income < 20k)	0.27			
Income 20–29k	0.12	0.33	0	1
Income 30–39k	0.13	0.33	0	1
Income 40–49k	0.09	0.29	0	1
Income 50–59k	0.07	0.26	0	1
Income 60–79k	0.08	0.27	0	1
Income 80–99k	0.03	0.16	0	1
Income 100k+	0.04	0.18	0	1
Income unknown/not specified	0.17	0.27	0	1
<b>n</b>	18,303			

SOURCE: Canadian General Social Survey – Cycle 17 (2003). Estimates based on authors' calculations.