

CORRELATES OF FACULTY UNIONIZATION VOTING BEHAVIOR*

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory article presents surveys of faculty conducted after a vote to unionize at two public universities and self-report correlates of voting behavior. Positive attitudes toward unions and peer preferences for a union are the two largest correlates of voting for a union. Once controlling for these two items, sense of community, sense of autonomy, trust in management, work environment, self-efficacy, equity sensitivity, and attitudes toward pay for performance had no effect. Implications and future directions for study are discussed.

There are many reasons that faculty support or oppose unionization. Since the 1980 *Yeshiva* case before the U.S. Supreme Court this issue has been mostly moot, but in recent years more states have authorized state employees the right to collective bargaining. With this change at the state level, more and more faculty at public institutions of higher education have been given that right as well, along with the challenges this can present in organizational changes within a university. With every vote, some faculty see it as a referendum on the university's administration and specific actions taken over the years, while some see it as the

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logical outcome of bad workplace conditions; others, however, see it as a battle of values within the faculty. Predicting the outcome of a union vote is, of course, valuable both to labor organizers as well as to the administration of a university. For the former, this can affect the commitment of resources to an organizing effort; for the latter, it can, at the very least, give the administration a greater lead time in organization planning to anticipate organizational change.

In this exploratory article, I look at two recent faculty unionization votes. First, I will give a short background on the context of these votes. Then, I will present nine common arguments for and against unionization. I will then present data from two public universities that went through a unionization vote in the last two years.

Context

In the spring of 2002, the legislature in the State of Washington extended collective bargaining to university faculty. The three aspects of this law that were most hotly debated were the issue of the scope of the bargaining unit, the right to strike, and the issue of faculty governance. The final law required only one bargaining unit for all faculty (full time and part time, irrespective of college or academic discipline), did not allow the unit to strike (with specific language about process and penalties if the unit did strike), and the allowance for separate faculty governance bodies (such as faculty senates) from the collective bargaining unit. The Public Employees Relations Commission subsequently determined through their interpretation of the law that department chairs were part of the bargaining unit and that all part-time faculty (1/6th time or more within one year) were included in the bargaining unit.

There were six higher education institutions affected by this law. The two largest institutions had a strong research mission; each has great variety in their disciplines covering the humanities, social sciences, physical sciences, and large professional schools. The other four institutions had a strong teaching mission and, while varied in their disciplines, had less variety across major disciplines and smaller professional schools. One of these latter institutions had an agreement between their board of trustees and an informal collective bargaining unit, and a second had a collective bargaining unit that had been seeking recognition concurrent with the change in state law. The remaining two held faculty unionization votes in 2006. The larger research-mission universities did not hold votes on the issue.

Research Questions

Several different arguments exist for why faculty would support or oppose unionization, including the community of the university, a personal preference for autonomy in one's career, trust in management, satisfaction with the working environment, a personal sense of self-efficacy in the current system, equity sensitivity, attitudes toward unions, attitude toward pay for performance, and peer

influence. At the two universities that held unionization votes, all of these issues were discussed in public and private discussions: some in more formal settings or “pro and con” statements issued by their faculty governance system [1], and some in the less formal “hall talk” that takes place in an institution of higher learning.

The culture of a university could impact faculty’s preferences for unions in terms of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with that culture and feelings of being a part of that culture. For example, if one feels a part of the existing organizational community (i.e., “a community of scholars”), there is no need to seek a radical change in the work environment. However if one does not feel a connection with the community, then a faculty member may seek a restructuring of the relationship she or he has with the university through the formation of a faculty union.

Research Question 1: Will a faculty member who feels a part of the organizational community of the university oppose a change to faculty unionization, while a faculty member who does not feel a part of the organizational community support faculty unionization?

An individual’s sense of autonomy could impact a faculty member’s preference for unionization through the loss of personal freedom to collective bargaining. If an individual goes into academia because of personal desire for autonomy in the workplace, it would be odd for that person to surrender autonomy to a union.

Research Question 2: Will a faculty member who has a high preference for autonomy oppose faculty unionization, while a faculty member who has a low preference for autonomy not oppose faculty unionization?

I am not differentiated between personal preference for autonomy in life and workplace autonomy as explored by Langfred and Moye in 2004 [2], since I am only looking at the specific case of faculty in the workplace.

Next, a faculty member’s trust in management (i.e., university administration) could impact preference for a faculty union. If a faculty member trusted management, that member would not desire representation by another entity, whereas if there were no trust, then the faculty member would want union representation.

Research Question 3: Will a faculty member who has low trust in management support faculty unionization, while a faculty member who has high trust in management not support faculty unionization?

The workplace environment could also impact a faculty member’s preference for unionization. If faculty has no say in the important aspects of their working environment, they might feel accountable without the ability to improve their performance.

Research Question 4: Will a faculty member who is dissatisfied with the working environment support faculty unionization, whereas a faculty member who is satisfied with the working environment not support faculty unionization?

A faculty member’s self-efficacy in the current system could also come into play. If he or she feels successful in the current, non-unionized workplace, then he or she will not support unionization. If he or she feels unsuccessful,

however, then he or she would support a collective bargaining agent working on his or her behalf.

Research Question 5: Will a faculty member with high self-efficacy in the current system oppose a change to faculty unionization, while a faculty member who has low self-efficacy in the current system support faculty unionization?

A sense of equity is a recurring theme in unionization discussions. The concept of equity sensitivity [3] could come into play as people interpret whether they perceive self-serving inequity (entitleds), other-serving inequity (benevolents), or equity in their relationships across life.

Research Question 6: Will faculty with a sense of self-serving inequity support a change to faculty unionization, while faculty with a sense of other-serving inequity oppose a change to faculty unionization?

Attitudes toward unions could also guide a faculty member's voting preference. If one *believes* that unions solve organizational ills, then one would support unionization even in the face of facts that undermine this position. Likewise, if one believes that unions are the cause of organizational ills, then one would oppose unionization even in the face of facts that undermine that position.

Research Question 7: Will faculty with positive attitudes toward unions vote for unionization, whereas faculty with negative attitudes toward unions vote against unionization?

As a contrast, a common articulated belief among opponents of unionization is that unions undermine pay for performance, and if a faculty member held that as an important value, then the faculty member could oppose unionization. There is a linkage here made by opponents that unions undermine pay for performance, and pay for performance of faculty benefits the quality of a university, so this may not be as strong an argument as union opponents believe.

Research Question 8: Will faculty who support pay for performance to support the quality of the university oppose unionization?

Finally, the impact of peer and social networks can not be under-rated. If colleagues are all union supporters and the faculty member has no strong inclination either way, that member may support the union as a show of support to his or her network. Likewise, if colleagues are all union opponents and the faculty member has no strong inclination either way, he or she may oppose the union as a show of support to his or her network.

Research Question 9: Will faculty members with social networks of strong union supporters support unionization, whereas faculty members with social networks of strong union opponents oppose unionization?

METHODS

A survey instrument was developed to assess the nine key relationships to voting behavior. A final item for self-reporting voting behavior in the faculty unionization vote was used as the variable of interest. Sample one included all

faculty ($n = 775$) at a regional comprehensive state university that held a vote in the winter of 2006, and sample two included all faculty ($n = 220$) at a regional comprehensive state university that held a vote in the fall of 2006.

Due to concerns that this field survey would bias the actual unionization vote, the survey was distributed seven months after the vote for both samples. This reduces the ability of this study to predict voting behavior and increases the potential for hindsight bias or for intervening issues to cloud attitudes, but hopefully it decreased the amount of organizational culture problems by giving the subjects time to process their thoughts and reflect on their feelings regarding the issue.

Both a physical copy of the survey was distributed as well as an electronic version. All surveys were anonymous and returned to a graduate assistant who entered the data, so as reduce the possibility that anonymity would be revealed through handwriting or electronic communication. In the vote at the first sample site, the faculty unionized by a vote of 300 to 284 (with some additional ballots discarded by the Public Employee Relations Commission) out of 775 eligible members. In the vote at the second sample site, the faculty unionized by a vote of 113 to 91 (with some additional ballots discarded by the Public Employee Relations Commission) out of 220 eligible faculty members.

Sense of community was assessed with Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman, and Chavis' 12-item sense of community index (SCI) [4]. This has four sub-dimensions of needs fulfillment, group membership, influence, and emotional connection.

Sense of autonomy was assessed with Langfred's (2006 personal communication) shortening of Breugh's nine-item work autonomy scale [5]. The six items are:

- I prefer to choose the method(s) to use in carrying out my work,
- I prefer to choose my own way of doing my work,
- I prefer to decide for myself the sequencing of my work activities,
- I prefer to decide for myself when to do particular work activities,
- I prefer to decide for myself when to do particular work activities, and
- I prefer to decide for myself when and how to do my work in a team.

Trust in management was assessed with Dirks' (2000) nine-item trust in leadership scale [6].

Working environment were assessed with six items suggested by Katz and Kochan [7, p. 150] based on Freeman and Rogers [8]. These are:

- I trust the university's administration,
- the administration shows little concern for the faculty (reverse),
- relations between the faculty and administration are bad (reverse),
- I have little influence on the decisions made at this university (reverse),
- I am dissatisfied with faculty influence at this university (reverse), and
- the administration is unwilling to share power with the faculty (reverse).

Career self-efficacy was assessed with three items: I feel *comfortable* negotiating salary and work issues with my department chair, I feel *uncomfortable* negotiating salary and work issues with my dean (reverse), and I feel it would be very easy for me to move to a comparable position at another university.

Equity sensitivity was assessed with King and Miles' five-question split weighting instrument [9].

Attitude toward unions was assessed with six items:

- faculty unions are effective in improving educational quality for students,
- faculty unions are effective in improving faculty scholarly activity,
- faculty unions are effective in improving faculty working conditions,
- outside of academia, unions play an important role in protecting the rights of workers,
- unions reduce efficiency (reverse), and
- unions undermine productivity (reverse).

Attitudes toward pay for performance was assessed with one item: The quality of education services provided by universities is enhanced when faculty salaries are based on scholarly productivity.

Peers in social network attitudes were assessed with two items: The colleagues I am closest with visibly or vocally supported unionization, and the colleagues I am closest with visible or vocally opposed unionization (reverse).

RESULTS

A total of 117 faculty participated in the survey at site one, including 49 union supporters (16 percent of those who voted) and 54 union opponents (19 percent of those who voted). The remaining 14 responses were set aside from these analyses: These subjects did not vote in the February union election. A total of 38 faculty participated in the survey of the second university, including 12 union supporters (11 percent of those who voted) and 20 union opponents (22 percent of those who voted). The remaining six responses were set aside from these analyses: these subjects did not vote in the October union election.

The correlations for all items of interest in sample one are found in Table 1. The only items to have a significant relationship with voting were the influence subdimension of sense of community, trust in management, working environment, attitude toward unions, and peers in the social network.

Combined, these explain 67 percent of the variance in the vote (see Table 2). However, when looking at the unique contribution of each, only attitudes toward unions is highly significant, and peers in the social network is significant (see Table 2). The unique contribution of the other variables becomes insignificant.

Table 1. Correlation of Variables in Sample One

	Voting	SCI_N	SCI_G	SCI_I	SCI_E	SoA	Trust	Enviro.	Efficacy	ESI	Union	Pay	Peers
Voting	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SCI_N	-0.02	(0.54)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SCI_G	-0.05	0.19	(0.44)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SCI_I	-0.21*	0.35**	0.33**	(0.41)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SCI_E	-0.04	0.39**	0.26**	0.27**	(0.45)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SoA	-0.18	0.14	-0.00	0.01	0.10	(0.80)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Trust	-0.46**	0.27**	0.19	0.50**	0.23*	0.11	(0.91)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Enviro.	-0.47**	0.20*	0.20*	0.50**	0.12	0.05	0.87**	(0.90)	—	—	—	—	—
Efficacy	-0.15	-0.03	0.28**	0.25**	0.08	0.12	0.34**	0.30**	(0.34)	—	—	—	—
ESI	0.00	-0.10	-0.04	-0.03	-0.10	-0.05	-0.08	-0.06	-0.12	1	—	—	—
Att. Unions	0.79**	0.01	-0.10	-0.10	-0.00	-0.25*	-0.37**	-0.41**	-0.21*	0.01	(0.91)	—	—
Att. Pay	-0.15	0.01	-0.01	-0.05	-0.13	0.20*	0.13	0.07	0.24*	-0.03	-0.24*	1	—
Peers	0.68**	-0.03	-0.09	-0.18	-0.12	-0.04	-0.31**	-0.34**	-0.14	-0.02	0.71**	-0.16	(0.94)
Mean	0.52	1.92	2.06	2.12	1.50	0.67	2.34	3.13	2.25	26.43	2.27	2.12	2.51
s.d.	0.50	0.63	0.69	0.68	0.65	0.51	0.81	0.90	0.86	11.04	0.93	1.18	1.32

*Indicates significance at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

**Indicates significance at the $p \leq 0.01$ level; $n = 103$.

Voting = vote for union. SCI_N = sense of community, needs fulfillment. SCI_G = sense of community, group membership. SCI_I = sense of community, influence. SCI_E = sense of community, emotional connection. SoA = sense of autonomy. Trust = trust in management. Enviro. = work environment. Efficacy = self-efficacy. ESI = equity sensitivity index. Att. Union = attitudes toward unions. Att. Pay = attitude toward pay for performance. Peers = peers' activities and preferences. Items were 5-point Likert scales with 0 High and 4 Low, except Voting (0 voted for union, 1 voted against union) and ESI (additive scale from 0 to 50 high in beneficence).

Table 2. Regression Residuals on Voting Behavior in Sample One

Items in regression	R^2	Beta	r_s
Step 1: Significant variables of interest	0.67		
Sense of community (Influence)		-0.03	-0.05
Trust in management		-0.18	-0.15
Work environment		0.02	0.02
Attitudes toward unions		0.58**	0.56
Peer activity and preference		0.20*	0.24

*Indicates significance at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

**indicates significance at the $p \leq 0.01$ level.

Combined, attitudes toward unions and peers in the social network explain 65 percent of the variance in the vote.

The correlations for all items of interest in sample two are found in Table 3. The only items to have a significant relationship with voting were attitudes toward unions and peers in the social network. Combined, these explain 55 percent of the variance in the vote (see Table 4).

However, when looking at the unique contribution of each, only attitude toward unions is highly significant (see Table 4). The unique contribution of peers in the social network becomes insignificant.

DISCUSSION

The reasons why faculty members vote for a union are varied, but underlying those reasons to a large extent are the attitudes the faculty members have toward unions, followed by peers in the social network who are vocal and involved with a position. While the results are correlational, they can inform future research and practice in union organizing.

For research, this undermines to some degree the generalizability of Freeman and Rogers' work [8] on why workers unionize, as well as other presented theories regarding why faculty unionize. It may be that faculty as academics are more idealized than the population as a whole (a common popular perception) and have been socialized to desire an identity with the oppressed worker. On the face of it, employees making above the national average with a high degree of education are not representative of the average, nor of the unskilled, laborer.

For the practitioner, this informs the union organizer and the union opponent. Union organizers are effective, for example, by approaching people one by one, especially with colleagues in social networks. In addition, if the favorable attitudes

Table 3. Correlation of Variables in Sample Two

	Voting	SCI_N	SCI_G	SCI_I	SCI_E	SoA	Trust	Enviro.	Efficacy	ESI	Union	Pay	Peers
Voting	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SCI_N	0.08	(0.56)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SCI_G	0.12	0.51**	(0.72)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SCI_I	-0.08	0.61**	0.33	(0.37)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SCI_E	0.03	0.70**	0.60**	0.61**	(0.35)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SoA	-0.12	-0.16	0.14	-0.19	0.04	(0.89)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Trust	-0.05	0.23	-0.02	0.30	0.18	-0.39*	(0.94)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Enviro.	-0.14	0.53**	0.35*	0.63**	0.43*	-0.16	0.64**	(0.91)	—	—	—	—	—
Efficacy	-0.12	0.18	0.13	0.36	0.36*	0.11	-0.15	0.07	(0.24)	—	—	—	—
ESI	0.20	-0.11	-0.12	-0.34	-0.16	-0.02	-0.16	-0.14	-0.11	1	—	—	—
Att. Unions	0.73**	0.05	-0.12	0.00	0.08	-0.13	-0.20	-0.27	0.14	0.09	(0.76)	—	—
Att. Pay	0.24	0.12	0.06	0.04	-0.00	-0.12	-0.16	-0.05	0.17	0.25	-0.22	1	—
Peers	0.62**	-0.03	-0.24	-0.12	0.00	-0.25	-0.11	-0.35*	0.06	-0.02	0.70**	0.12	(0.94)
Mean	0.62	1.94	1.67	2.04	1.55	0.62	2.48	2.86	2.42	25.72	2.19	2.53	2.54
s.d.	0.49	0.73	0.75	0.71	0.60	0.63	1.13	0.95	0.94	7.27	0.79	1.22	1.17

*Indicates significance at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

**Indicates significance at the $p \leq 0.01$ level; $n = 103$.

Voting = vote for union. SCI_N = sense of community, needs fulfillment. SCI_G = sense of community, group membership. SCI_I = sense of community, influence. SCI_E = sense of community, emotional connection. SoA = sense of autonomy. Trust = trust in management. Enviro. = work environment. Efficacy = self-efficacy. ESI = equity sensitivity index. Att. Union = attitudes toward unions. Att. Pay = attitude toward pay for performance. Peers = peers' activities and preferences. Items were 5-point Likert scales with 0 High and 4 Low, except Voting (0 voted for union, 1 voted against union) and ESI (additive scale from 0 to 50 high in beneficence).

Table 4. Regression Residuals on Voting Behavior in Sample Two

Items in regression	R^2	Beta	r_s
Step 1: Significant variables of interest	0.55		
Attitudes toward unions		0.58**	0.53
Peer activity and preference		0.27	0.23

**indicates significance at the $p \leq 0.01$ level.

of faculty toward unions as a whole are as widespread as believed, it would be rare for a faculty unionization vote to fail. For union opposition, however, the peer network is the effective way to influence the outcomes of votes unless the laborious task of changing attitudes is undertaken. Changing those underlying values would be challenging; working on the interpretation of events and the belief systems accompanying these would be the approach to take [10]. This means using rational persuasion and ingratiation [11], with rational persuasion focused on the effectiveness (or lack) of both faculty unions and labor unions in general.

Limitations

One of the largest challenges in this study are the measures involved. All of the sense of community measures had low alphas (see Tables 1 and 3), so individual correlations were run with voting behavior. None of the variables in the other sub-dimensions were related. Long and Perkins [12] have developed a revised measure of the sense of community that may be used, but looking at the suggested items, I do not believe that there would be additional relationships. Likewise the measure of efficacy had a low alpha, but again, none of the individual items were related to voting.

Future Directions

The challenge in any field research is to observe while not interfering. The challenges of avoiding interference in a unionization election make it very difficult to adequately measure predictors of unionization voting behavior. One method may be open-ended questions (Will you vote for unionization? Why?) that can be content coded, so there is no potential for pushing a particular agenda when the vote is taken.

A second issue is the question of generalizability. Would the findings of faculty unionization correlations apply to other professions and industries? The answer to that question may be the most practical, and important, direction for future research in this area.

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