

# AN ANALYSIS OF LABOR UNION PARTICIPATION IN CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS, 1972-2008

A Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis uses a new dataset of labor union appearances in congressional hearings and archival data on union organizational resources to analyze the factors that determine whether a union will participate in congressional hearings in a given year. Organizational resources, including the size of a union's membership base and the number of lobbyists employed in a union's national office, and environmental factors, such as economic conditions and the salience of particular policy topics in a given year, influence whether a union will give testimony. However, some of the benefits of having a large membership base for representation may be diminishing over time. Additionally, as unions face an increasingly hostile political environment, there is substantial evidence of a shift away from advocacy for broad social causes in favor of testimony on topics directly related to labor relations. Implications for the study of interest group politics and labor union political strategies are discussed.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Kyle William Albert is a graduate student in the Sociology Field at Cornell University, where he holds a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship. Kyle earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Political Science from the University of Washington in 2009, where he was awarded the Department of Sociology's Howard B. Woolston Award for Academic Excellence, two Mary Gates Research Scholarships, and a Center for American Politics and Public Policy Undergraduate Research Fellowship. He also earned scholarships to participate in an exchange program with the University of Aarhus, Denmark and completed an internship at the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development of the United States Department of Education.

For Mr. Lafond

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## Introduction

Most observers agree that there are significant signs of decay in the American labor movement today. Unions have lost much of their ability to achieve gains for workers through collective bargaining over the last half-century, as evidenced by the declining role of strikes in American industrial relations (Rosenfeld 2006, Rhomberg 2010), effectively blocking one of the primary channels for class conflict in the United States (Rubin 1986). Indeed, when strikes do occur the results are often disastrous for workers, resulting in layoffs, reduced wages, and diminished public opinion of labor (Rosenfeld 2006, Schmidt 1993). Whereas some view the decline in strike activity as a positive development for the smooth functioning of the American economy (Wachter 2007), it is generally considered to be a telling sign of weakness in unions' collective bargaining function. However, collective bargaining is only one of labor's roles in society: unions are also political interest groups, acting on local, state, national, and international levels to advocate for a wide range of public policy objectives. The extent to which the decline of unions' economic strength has affected their ability to influence the process of writing and implementing new legislation is a topic largely neglected by social scientists. This thesis adds a fresh contribution to a rapidly aging body of literature the political strength of American labor unions in the face of membership decline.

Unions have several avenues at their disposal to attempt to influence public policy. Like corporate interest groups, unions have political departments that make direct financial contributions to favored candidates. Additionally, union political departments have traditionally been able to contribute "ground troops" in political campaigns, staffing

phone banks and ringing doorbells in support of their political allies. After Election Day, most unions' efforts to shape policy are handed off to another unit: the legislative department. Legislative directors and their staffers are responsible for persuading members of Congress to support labor's legislative goals, whether these are broad efforts to strengthen occupational safety regulations or specialized niche issues like six-day mail delivery. But the most visible product of legislative departments' activities is testimony at congressional hearings. By providing testimony at congressional hearings, labor unions attempt to advance their interests by informing and educating lawmakers about issues of importance to their members, among other functions.

Although data on congressional hearings have been used by scholars of other substantive policy topics (e.g., Sheingate 2006) and social movements (Brustein and Hirsh 2007), hearing participation has not yet been used to study American labor unions' political activities. Indeed, most scholars studying interest groups tend to gravitate towards campaign contributions and lobbying expenditures as their primary units of analysis (Smith 1995). While these studies effectively measure the effect of money on legislative outcomes, there is no guarantee that a dollar spent on campaign contributions will yield access to legislators. No other published public sources chronicle interest groups' access to legislative institutions as well as congressional hearing abstracts and testimony. Participation in congressional hearings thus represents an important tool for shaping national policy in unions' toolkit. Curiously, though, hearing participation has not been systematically studied to date as an indicator of unions' political strength or agendas, in contrast to less direct measures of policy-setting influence such as campaign contributions (e.g., Gely and Chandler 1995, Francia 2006). I argue that congressional hearings are an

ideal indicator of the political activities of the labor movement as a whole as well as the agendas of individual unions. While unions often distribute campaign contributions along party lines, congressional hearing testimony is presented in response to specific policy goals. Additionally, the process of researching and writing testimony requires a tangible infrastructure for legislative advocacy beyond just a checkbook. Invitations to congressional hearings require both networking by full-time lobbyists and legitimacy as a political constituency and as an authoritative source of information in the eyes of congressional committee staffers. These characteristics contribute to the richness of congressional hearings as an archival data source for understanding the quantity, quality, and content of legislative advocacy efforts.

This study examines union participation in congressional hearings, with the goal of identifying the sources of cross-union differences in legislative strategies. Given the unprecedented growth in lobbying activities in recent years, this is a topic of significant interest to social scientists and practitioners (Brinbaum 2005). It also offers insight into how legislative advocacy strategies and their corresponding predictors have changed over time. Do organizational resources, such as membership and lobbying staffs, matter more than macro-level economic and political factors that unions lack direct influence over in determining union participation in congressional hearings? The result of these analyses is a unique portrait of labor unions' use of one of the primary channels for legislative advocacy as well as a clearer understanding of the determinants of interest group representation. In order to gain further information about the nature of congressional hearings and their validity as an indicator of unions' political power and agendas, I conducted a series of interviews with labor union legislative directors and policy officials.

These interviews revealed significant changes in the nature of congressional hearings over the period covered in my dataset, which I explain in a separate section of this thesis that follows the presentation of my quantitative analysis.

## **Theoretical Expectations**

If participation in congressional hearings is a viable strategy for affecting national policy, the key question is, “why don’t all unions participate in hearings?” One possible answer is offered by resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978), which argues that organizations’ ability to influence their environment and compete for resources is directly constrained by their structural position. In this context, visible environmental threats to the viability of the organization prompt political activism (see also Katz, Batt, and Keefe 2003). This leads me to analyze flows of resources into labor unions to the extent that longitudinal data are available. I am particularly interested in testing the hypothesis that visible environmental threats prompt organizational political activism. However, where appropriate, I consider the predictions of other schools of thought in organizational theory, including institutional theory and organizational learning. I also attempt to integrate theoretical predictions on organizational activism with the existing literature on labor union political advocacy.

Despite the challenges inherent in disentangling the sometimes interdependent effects of a union’s environmental context and its flows of resources, this thesis presents an exceptionally comprehensive array of variables that could impact legislative advocacy. Unlike studies that focus on one particular independent variable, this study enables a nuanced analysis of the relative effects of different variables. By identifying those variables

that have the most impact on congressional hearing testimony, this thesis may help labor unions to identify those factors that are most important to achieving their goals for legislative advocacy, which in turn may lead to public policies that benefit workers.

## **Organizational Resources**

Several predictors of congressional testimony for labor unions are directly related to the resources at an organization's disposal. Organizational resources provide labor unions with the capacity to draft and deliver testimony. However, resources also represent legitimacy and power, which in turn force legislators to pay attention to the demands of unions and their members. While the legitimacy benefit of having a large number of members is difficult to disentangle from the effect of additional volunteers and union dues on organizational capacity, identifying organizational predictors of testimony is nonetheless an important step in identifying the factors that determine who gets represented on Capitol Hill. Though there are certainly environmental factors that affect a union's ability to organize, affiliate, and allocate resources, in this study I will focus on membership size, lobbying and political consulting resources, and labor federation affiliation to be representative of a union's organizational resources.

One key organizational resource is, of course, the size of the membership base. Size directly impacts the number of potential votes that can be mobilized on behalf of (or in opposition to) a politician or proposition, giving large unions more political leverage. There are also indirect benefits to size, including the financial resources that come with a healthy base of dues-paying members. Moreover, size tends to be related to diversity. Several of the nation's largest unions, such as the United Steelworkers, United Auto

Workers, and United Food and Commercial Workers, organize across multiple industries. These large, multi-occupation unions tend to be among the unions some sociologists (e.g., Voss and Sherman 2000, Milkman 2006) argue have been “revitalized” in recent years. (Some large unions, such as the National Education Association, remain more or less dedicated to a single or small set of closely related occupations.) Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to assume that - in addition to the influence that comes from size in and of itself - larger unions might have broader legislative portfolios, given the range of interests that their diverse membership bases hold.

Unions with a large number of dues-paying members and activists likely achieve some economies of scale in their collective bargaining and member service functions, leading to “organizational slack” that can be invested in forward-looking activities (Cyert and March 1963, Perrow 1986, Greve 2003). Larger unions should have more staff and activists with otherwise idle hands, which can be tapped for activities without immediate relevance to the union’s core functions, such as lobbying Congress on broad social issues. While studies of organizational slack in the organizational behavior literature suggest that slack is most useful for research and development activities in for-profit firms, for labor unions political advocacy is a comparable outlet for excess capacity that enhances their long-run viability.

There may, however, be limits to the benefits of size: for example, at some point unions may simply run out of hearings relevant to their areas of expertise in which to testify. Consequently, the positive effect of size will attenuate for the largest unions.

If a large membership base is important, so too is the size of the cadre of professionals who represent unions’ interests. Information about the number of lobbyists

and consultants representing each union is particularly valuable in that it provides a direct measure of the level of resources invested by unions in legislative advocacy. While the number of lobbyists hired by a union may be related to financial resources, it can also be influenced by the size of competing unions' legislative departments (however a union might define its competition), the depth of a union's legislative agenda, and the union's preferences for legislative advocacy relative to other tools in their policy toolkit, among other factors. A strong relationship between the number of lobbyists and/or consultants and congressional representation would confirm that – regardless of the socioeconomic and political environment – union investment in legislative advocacy does translate into representation. On the other hand, a weak relationship or no relationship between this proxy for effort and representation would imply that unions are victims of their environment, unable to exert influence on the congressional agenda without allies on the Hill.

Another important resource for unions is whether they are part of a larger support structure to draw upon for support in their legislative battles. Like business associations that benefit from the support that comes from the infrastructure of the US Chamber of Commerce and charities that benefit from the fundraising and coordination services of the United Way, labor unions should benefit from being part of an overarching structure. For many unions, the AFL-CIO provides a wide variety of support services that should increase the effectiveness of legislative advocacy, such as weekly coordinating meetings and manpower in lobbying drives. Through its research and coordination functions, the AFL-CIO should free up its constituent unions to pursue a broader program of legislative advocacy. Consequently, I expect unions that are members of the AFL-CIO federation to be

more effective in legislative advocacy. However, it must also be acknowledged that there could be a “substitution effect” in which the AFL-CIO national organization testifies on topics that its member unions would otherwise provide testimony on. This could attenuate some of the benefit of AFL-CIO affiliation for participation in hearings, or potentially result in AFL-CIO members being less active in congressional hearings.

## **Political Environment**

While resources affect whether the labor union is able to send someone to appear before Congress and whether the union will be perceived as a powerful interest group, someone on Capitol Hill has to be interested in hearing testimony from a union before an invitation is sent. The likelihood that the invitation will be sent is affected both by whether topics that lend themselves to union messages are being considered by Congress and by how receptive legislators and their committee staffs are to organized labor. Thus, who is in power and what they are talking about form another set of factors that might influence rates of union participation in congressional hearings.

Favorable interorganizational linkages are a key strategy for the survival and success of organizations in achieving their goals (see, for example, Perrow 1986, Mizruchi 1996, Uzzi 1996). Organizations should benefit when entities that they are linked to accrue power (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978, Perrow 1986, Powell 1990, Stuart 1998). For labor unions’ legislative departments, perhaps the most important linkages are those with the executive and legislative branches of government. In particular, American labor unions have traditionally been allied with the political left (Dark 1999, Francia 2006). While there is a risk that labor unions may be so attached to liberal politicians that their support is

taken for granted, Dark and Francia agree that the alliance with Democrats has paid substantial political dividends to unions. It is also notable that some of my interview subjects (see below) mentioned that they were more likely to receive invitations to participate in hearings during periods of Democratic congressional control. (I provide a more detailed discussion of how congressional committees select witnesses later in this thesis.)

If labor unions' success and effectiveness in the policy arena is dictated by environmental constraints, the nature of the actors controlling policymaking institutions likely has a profound effect on unions' ability to be heard on policy matters. Given the strength and persistence of the labor-left alliance in the US and considerable empirical support for the proposition that unions benefit from powerful Democratic allies, I anticipate a positive relationship between democratic control of political institutions – namely, Congress and the White House - and labor union participation in congressional hearings.

Existing scholarship on the U.S. Congress notes that the congressional agenda is generally stable, but subject to punctuations at times as external events bring intense attention to certain policy topics (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Jones and Baumgartner 2005). In short, the docket of congressional hearings is often driven by whatever happens to be dominating the news headlines , whether it be nuclear safety in the aftermath of Three Mile Island or homeland security after the 9/11 attacks. While interest groups, including labor unions, are capable of drawing congressional attention to particular niche issues through their own work, most of the agenda is driven by factors outside of any one organization's direct control – thus, sometimes there will naturally be more opportunities

to be represented in Congress than others simply because the agenda will permit more or less time to traditional “union” issues. Consequently, I predict that unions will be better represented when Congress devotes a larger share of its attention to labor and employment issues like funding for the NLRB and less time to issues on which unions have less direct expertise or interest (e.g., foreign policy and national defense).

## **Economic Environment**

While organizations take proactive steps to actively manage environmental threats and uncertainty, ranking high on the list of factors that are largely out of unions’ control are the economic conditions that affect their members. Even though lobbyists can be employed and resources can be spent to attempt to alter the congressional agenda, individual labor unions cannot have any meaningful impact on the national unemployment rate or the trade deficit with China. Therefore, I consider economic factors separately from direct indicators of organizational resources and the political environment. Macro-level indicators that affect the majority of unions as well as factors that can be calculated on an industry-by-industry basis, such as wages and union density rates, constitute my independent variables measuring the economic environment.

Unions differ in their local environments, in that some operate in industries with secure, reliable resources and others do not (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). These industry-level factors may create different sets of constraints on, need for, and capacities for legislative advocacy by unions. In low union density industries, for example, unions may feel that legislative advocacy may be an unnecessary function at the expense of organizing; conversely, unions in high density industries may find little wrong with their environments

that merits investment in legislative action. Additionally, there is empirical evidence to suggest that occupational and industry-level factors affect the engagement of union members, which legitimizes and supports national unions' political objectives (Fields, Masters, and Thacker 1987). A vivid example of this comes from Hurd (2000), who notes that a performing arts union was nearly paralyzed by conflict resulting from too much member involvement, which he attributes to the occupation's tendency to attract liberal, highly educated and outspoken practitioners. This hypothesis is anecdotally supported by one of my interview subjects, who said that as a representative of a working-class, single-occupation union, his constituency is less interested in an active legislative agenda than some unions representing professional and technical workers. Social capital aside, some sectors of the economy – such as low wage service work - may have fewer sources of institutional capacity simply because members may have fewer economic resources that can be tapped for the all-important dues revenue that is the primary source of income for most unions.

If one takes the view that unions are primarily economic institutions that exist to serve their members, resource dependency theory predicts they should be more active politically when their members' economic security is most at risk. Lost revenue, whether through loss of membership from corporate downsizing or lower dues on account of reduced pay, should motivate unions to directly address such environmental challenges and become more active organizations. While scholars have not considered the direct effects of economic conditions on union political activities, Freeman (1988) argues that economic challenges facing private sector unions have been one of the reasons for the redoubling of organizing efforts targeting public sector workers over the last thirty years.

While organizations tend to struggle with “scanning” the environment for potential threats (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978), economic downturns are relatively easy to detect – at least when compared with some of the more normative and cultural obstacles to union organizing and maintain a membership base. Therefore, a poor economy (as measured by, for example, higher unemployment and lower productivity) will increase union participation in congressional hearings.

Unions that represent public sector workers are in an especially favorable position to attract attention from legislators and motivate members to influence government policies. Many aspects of public sector employment, such as wages, benefits, and hiring, are influenced by politicians, making legislative advocacy even more important for public sector unions than for those unions that organize in the private sector. Federal-sector unions have a particularly strong interest in influencing public policy at the national level, given the direct relationship between government policy and working conditions for their workers. Likewise, prior research suggests that federal unions have large and aggressive legislative departments that work to influence government policy occur regardless of which party controls Congress, and that their lobbying efforts are often not be accompanied by significant campaign contributions (Masters 1985, 2004). Studies of the state and local level reach similar conclusions about public sector unions’ interest in political activism; police and fire departments with politically active unions tend to have larger budgets than departments whose unions maintain political neutrality (O’Brien 1992, Gely and Chandler 1995).

In addition to the power of Congress to directly affect the fate of public sector unions, public sector unions might be more likely to have large membership bases in the

Washington, DC, area. This might facilitate congressional advocacy because of the ease with which local union members can be tapped for in-person advocacy efforts and the increased opportunities for frequent interaction between local and international union officials that come with geographic proximity.

## Data

In evaluating these hypotheses about the correlates of union legislative participation, I heed the call of Southworth and Stefan-Norris (2009) for more quantitative, multi-year, multi-union datasets in the field of labor studies. My data, which combine data obtained from Congressional Information Service annual index books with newly collected indicators on non-participating unions, contains information on 204 international unions and labor federations over 36 years. This study's unit of analysis is the individual international (i.e., national-level) union in a given year. The pool of unions "at risk" for participating in hearings in a given year is defined by the listing of national labor organizations in the *Encyclopedia of Associations* corresponding to each year. Using the *Encyclopedia* allows me to account for the numerous union mergers, name changes, incorporations, and dissolutions over the years and ensures that I only collect data on the population of unions in existence in each year. While some data in the *Encyclopedia* seem to be estimated or rounded, Martin, Baumgartner, and McCarthy find that the *Encyclopedia* "appears to be nearly universal in its coverage of unions above even quite modest thresholds of organizational size and resources" (2005, p. 772). We can be relatively confident, therefore, that the dataset does not unduly select unions that are more likely to participate in congressional hearings. The result is a repeated cross-sectional dataset in

which unions typically, but not always, appear in each cross-section, as some unions are born, die, and/or go through periods of political dormancy over the span of the dataset.

## Dependent Variable

In order to measure the extent of union participation in hearings, I constructed a dataset of over 2,000 congressional hearings between 1972 and 2008. This dataset includes each hearing recorded by the Congressional Information Service (CIS) in every third year's published Index of Subjects and Names (e.g., 1972, 1975, etc...), providing 13 snapshots of labor's presence on Capitol Hill in the "post-Accord" period of union decline. (Three-year intervals were selected to ensure equal sampling of election and non-election years.)

This time series of data on union participation in congressional hearings was then linked to the time series of data on unions and their organizational resources, by matching on union names. I consulted external reference sources (e.g., the archive of LM-2 disclosures on the U.S. Department of Labor's website) where appropriate to determine the union status of organizations with ambiguous names. I recorded unions appearing in the *Encyclopedia of Associations* in a given year without a record in the corresponding CIS Index book as having zero appearances. The number of congressional hearings participated in by a particular union in a particular year ranges from zero to a maximum of 28. Additionally, I conducted a series of interviews with labor union lobbyists and legislative directors to learn about how congressional hearings fit into the overall picture of union political activism and about longitudinal changes in the nature of congressional hearings. When coupled with data on organizational resources and the socioeconomic

environment, these data enable a systematic analysis of the factors affecting labor's representation before Congress and how those factors have changed over time.

## Independent Variables

The design of my study takes inspiration from Masters and Delaney (1985) and Masters, Fiorito, and Delaney (1988), who study the role of various conceptions of organizational resources on union contributions to political action committees by matching up PAC contributions with several of the organizational resource variables I collected. However, the repeated cross-sectional nature of my dataset allows me to incorporate variables on the broader political and economic context in which unions operate.

To measure international union membership, I collect membership figures from the *Encyclopedia of Associations*, which I also consult to determine affiliation with the AFL-CIO labor federation. Membership in international unions varies widely, from 20 to 3,200,000, making this one of my most widely dispersed variables. Data on the number of registered lobbyists and consultants for each union comes from the *Washington Representatives* series of directories, starting with their second annual directory published in 1979.<sup>1</sup>

Data on the weekly wages for union members and union density in unions' principal industries comes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Employment and Earnings* publication, which started providing data on weekly wages for union members by industry and industry-level union density in 1983. These data allow me to control for the economic conditions in a particular union's core industry. Unfortunately, no systematic data are

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<sup>1</sup> Data collection from the *Encyclopedia of Associations* and *Washington Representatives* leads my data on congressional hearings by one year, as data in these volumes are collected in the year before publication.

available on the composition of unions that span multiple industries, and comparable data are not available for 1978 or 1981.

To incorporate measures of environmental context, I use data from the Policy Agendas Project to construct a variable for the percentage of all congressional hearings each year on foreign and defense policy topics, as well as a variable for the percentage of hearings on labor and commerce topics. This variable was computed by using the online data analysis tool on the Policy Agendas Project website (University of Texas 2011), which is available for all years except 2008, and combining total hearings in the foreign policy and defense major topic codes. Data on unemployment rates comes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics website, while historical GDP growth rates come from the Bureau of Economic Analysis. I measure Democratic control of Congress and the White House through a count of the number of chambers controlled by Democrats (0-2) and a binary dummy variable, respectively.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Number of Cases
Membership (in thousands)	158.51	335.20	1,603
AFL-CIO Member (1=Yes)?	.64	.48	1,603
Number of Consultants	.42	.87	1,603
Number of Staff Lobbyists	1.96	3.08	1,603
Inflation-Adjusted Union Weekly Wages by Industry	849.27	130.29	1,287
Industry-Level Union Density	21.33	11.82	1,287
Presidency (1=Democrat)	.37	.48	1,603
N of Congressional Chambers Democratic-Controlled	1.21	.82	1,603
Average Annual U.S. Unemployment Rate	6.08	.98	1,603
Average Annual U.S. GDP Growth Rate	3.47	1.82	1,603
Proportion of All Hearings on Labor/Employment Topics	.03	.01	1,487
Proportion of All Hearings on Foreign/Defense Topics	.15	.02	1,487
Number of Hearings in Annual CIS Index	1,944.45	298.84	11

Missing data on the number of lobbyists and consultants hired by each union (1979), industry-level wage data in the unionized sector (1982), and percentage of hearings on particular policy topics (2008) limit the total number of union-year units available for regression analysis. However, with 1,171 valid cases representing over 100 individual international unions in each selected year from 1984 to 2005 across all

variables, my sample covers more of the recent period of union decline than extant studies of union organizational resources (e.g., Masters and Delaney 1985).

## **Quantitative Analysis**

My analysis of the effects of organizational resource and environmental factors on hearing participation is divided into three sections. First, I contrast factors predicting the extent of representation with a binary logistic model that predicts whether a union appears in congressional testimony at all in a given year. I then consider the effects of organizational resource and environmental context variables on the extent of participation in congressional hearings. Here, I test three models of hearing participation: one that focuses on organizational resource factors, one that combines organizational resources with factors related to the political environment, and one that includes all independent variables. Because the effect of some of these factors, such as membership and congressional control, may vary by time, another set of models tests for interaction effects between time and the core predictors of interest.

### **Predicting Union Participation: A Binary Model**

By implementing a binary logistic regression model, it is possible to analyze the factors that might lead a union to pursue congressional hearings as a means of political activism separately from the factors that affect the extent of a union's participation. Several theoretical reasons exist for contrasting these approaches. For example, some unions may view congressional testimony as an essential part of the portfolio of activities they use to justify their value to members, but not see value in participating in more

hearings than necessary to fill a few pages of their quarterly newsletter. Alternately, some factors may be useful for helping a union to attain some baseline level of representation but not sufficient to help a union become a powerful interest group. In this analysis, I test three models: one that focuses on those resources which a union has direct control over, one that combines organizational resources with factors related to the political environment, and a model that combines all possible factors affecting union legislative advocacy for which I have data. However, a substantial number of variables, including the total volume of congressional testimony in each year, the GDP growth rate, unemployment, and indicators of the congressional agenda are dropped from these models due to collinearity, making models one and two effectively identical.

Table 2. Predictors of Congressional Hearing Appearance: Binary Logistic Regression, Fixed Effects of Year With Clustering

	Model 1 (Resources)	Model 2 (Resources and Political Env.)	Model 3 (Combined)
Membership (x 1,000)	.005** (.001)	.005** (.001)	.007** (.001)
Membership Squared (x 1,000,000,000)	-.002** (.000)	-.002** (.000)	-.003** (.000)
Number of Staff Lobbyists	.406** (.065)	.406** (.064)	.344** (.069)
Number of Consultants	.384** (.137)	.384** (.137)	.422** (.148)
AFL-CIO Member? (1=Yes)	-.001 (.265)	-.006 (.265)	.253 (.294)
Public Sector Constituency (1=Yes)			.478 (.496)
Union Weekly Wages (by Industry)			-.003+ (.001)
Union Density (by Industry)			.048* (.020)
Constant	-1.512** (.244)	-1.512** (.244)	-.893 (1.027)
N	1,171	1,171	1,171
R-Squared	.349	.349	.377

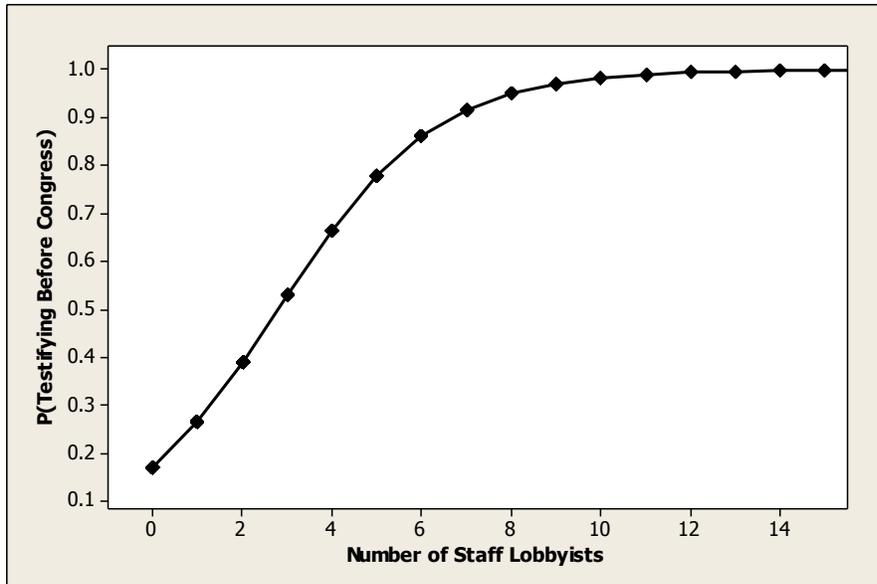
Standard errors in parentheses. \*\* indicates p<.01; \* indicates p<.05; + indicates p<.10

Note: Total volume of congressional hearings, GDP growth rate, unemployment rate, number of labor/commerce hearings, number of foreign and defense hearings, congressional control, and presidential party affiliation were dropped from my analyses due to collinearity.

It does not come as a great surprise that having more lobbyists on staff to press a union's case on Capitol Hill dramatically improves the probability of representation. The probability of being represented without any staff lobbyists is slight – around 15% - but nearly doubles with just one representative. According to this model, controlling for other factors, unions with more than 10 staff lobbyists in a given year are almost certain to be represented in congressional testimony (see Figure 1). While the nature of my quantitative data does not permit any firm conclusions on the direction of causality, my interviews (see

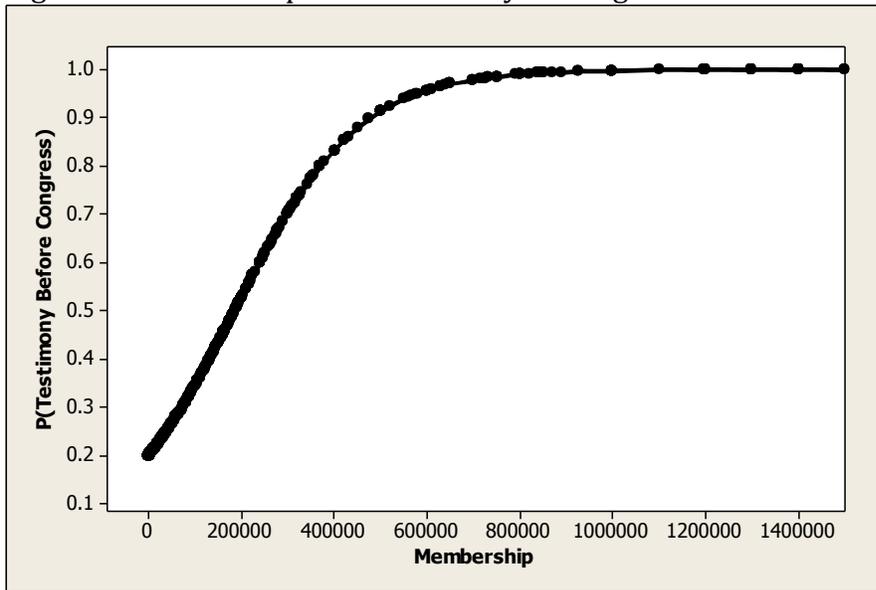
“A Changing Institution”) with union legislative directors lead me to believe that this relationship between lobbying manpower and representation tends to be the result of the proactive efforts of lobbyists to win representation.

Figure 1. Lobbying Staff and Probability of Congressional Testimony



Likewise, there is a clear relationship between the probability of testifying before Congress and union membership. Each additional union member increases the probability of testifying by a very slight amount, but the squared term is negative. Simply being an incorporated international union recognized by the *Encyclopedia of Associations* is associated with a 20% chance of being represented in a given Congressional Index year, and almost unions with more than 500,000 members have some degree of representation.

Figure 2. Membership and Probability of Congressional Testimony



Interestingly, being an AFL-CIO member union makes representation less likely in the first two models but more likely in the combined model – albeit not at a conventional level of statistical significance. If the combined model is indeed a valid predictor of legislative advocacy, it suggests that AFL-CIO membership may the effect of increasing representation on Capitol Hill. Based on my interviews with legislative directors, I suspect that the coordination aspect of AFL-CIO membership may lead to this finding: the networking between AFL-CIO unions and referrals to member unions in responses to requests received from congressional aides at AFL-CIO headquarters may help ensure that most AFL-CIO unions are able to participate in hearings. The weak but significant negative relationship between weekly wages for union members in a union’s core industry and hearing participation is consistent with the findings of subsequent models, as is the positive relationship between union density in a union’s core industry and hearing participation.

## Predicting the Extent of Union Participation

I test my theoretical expectations on the predictors of the *extent* of union congressional testimony using fixed effects linear regression models that control for the effects of time (i.e., the number of years from the beginning of my dataset). This controls for all year-specific variations in the political environment, not just those captured by the available measures. Under this specification, the parameter estimates for the remaining organizational resource variables will be purged of confounding effects of environmental characteristics. To adjust for the lack of independence in the observations across years, standard errors are clustered by union (188 total clusters). Each model is limited to the years in which a comprehensive data set could be assembled (1984 – 2005).

Table 3. Predictors of Congressional Hearing Appearance: Fixed Effects With Clustering

	Model 1 (Resources)	Model 2 (Resources and Political Env.)	Model 3 (Combined)
Membership (x 1,000)	.003+ (.002)	.003+ (.002)	.003* (.002)
Membership Squared (x 1,000,000,000)	-.001 (.000)	-.001 (.000)	-.001* (.000)
Number of Staff Lobbyists	.405** (.099)	.405** (.099)	.348** (.091)
Number of Consultants	.124 (.137)	.124 (.137)	.129 (.136)
AFL-CIO Member? (1=Yes)	-.385* (.189)	-.385* (.189)	-.254 (.245)
Number of Foreign and Defense Hearings		-.003* (.001)	-.002 (.002)
Number of Labor and Commerce Hearings		.070** (.015)	.010 (.006)
Party of President (1=Democrat)		-.599** (.183)	-.071 (.129)
N of Congressional Chambers Under Democratic Control		.751** (.137)	
Public Sector Constituency (1=Yes)			.492* (.593)
Union Weekly Wages (by Industry)			-.002* (.001)
Union Density (by Industry)			.031* (.015)
Unemployment Rate			.322** (.063)
GDP Growth Rate			-.004 (.038)
Total Volume of Congressional Hearings	.003** (.001)	-.004** (.001)	.001 (.001)
Constant	-3.923** (.857)	2.709** (.629)	-1.697+ (.861)
N	1,171	1,171	1,171
R-Squared	.396	.396	.415

Standard errors in parentheses. \*\* indicates p<.01; \* indicates p<.05; + indicates p<.10

Note: Congressional control was dropped from my analyses due to collinearity in Model 3.

The models in Table 3 demonstrate the significant impact of organizational resources on unions' participation in legislative hearings. Unions with larger membership appear in more Congressional hearings. However, membership squared is negatively and significantly related to hearing appearances, meaning there are diminishing returns to membership size. It is possible that this reflects "ceiling effects": there are only so many hearings per year, and even the largest unions with the most diverse membership base will simply run out of hearings in which to appear, given that there are only about 2,000 congressional hearings per year - of which only a small proportion will be on topics that fall within a union's portfolio of policy issues.

It also comes as little surprise that the number of people that a union has at its disposal in the Washington, DC area for policy advocacy activities is a major determinant of appearances in congressional hearings. However, a significant distinction can be drawn between the effectiveness of in-house staff and hired consultants. The number of consultants hired by a given union is a substantially weaker predictor of congressional testimony than the number staff lobbyists, lacking statistical significance in both models. Of course, the role of consultants differs from union to union. While some unions may use consultants for specific tasks for which they lack in-house expertise for, such as planning advertising campaigns or analyzing data, others may be substituting consultants for staff lobbyists, which could negate the positive effect of consultants on legislative representation.

Table 3 also shows the expected negative relationship between membership in the AFL-CIO federation and representation in congressional hearings. Given that the AFL-CIO itself is a major participant in the political process, it is possible that member unions feel

less of an obligation to maintain a presence on Capitol Hill, preferring to instead rely on the umbrella organization and its resources. Likewise, the AFL-CIO may act as a coordinator between unions on policy initiatives, allowing its members to pursue more focused policy objectives and present higher quality testimony on fewer topics. Indeed, a source with one of the larger public sector AFL-CIO member unions noted that he often turns down invitations to hearings. The Change to Win federation split off from the AFL-CIO in late 2005; consequently, no longitudinal analysis can be performed to test Change to Win's effect on its members' political strategies. I provide additional insight on the role of the AFL-CIO in the section of this thesis devoted to topical changes in labor's agenda.

The observed measures of environmental context, in contrast to those of organizational resources, do not seem to have a strong impact on union participation in congressional testimony, as evidenced by nearly identical R-squared values in Models 1 and 2 (see Table 3). Although as a set the environmental context measures are only weak predictors of participation, specific environmental features are significant. While there is a negative relationship between union participation and the proportion of the congressional agenda devoted to foreign and defense policy issues, attention to "labor" issues has a significant effect on union participation at hearings. And, while the finding that unions are more likely to be represented when Congress is devoting more time to labor-related topics may sound intuitive, it confirms the hypothesis that unions are not equally likely to appear at all types of hearings. There is a significant, negative relationship between Democratic control of both the White House and Congress and representation, implying that unions are less likely to be represented in years of Democratic political power. This counterintuitive relationship can likely be accounted for by the Republican presidencies of Ronald Reagan

and George H.W. Bush in the years of my dataset in which unions enjoyed high levels of representation.

Finally, I considered the effect of all of my study's independent variables simultaneously in a single model (Model 3). This model is characterized by a higher R-squared value than my models focusing on organizational resources and the legislative environment, suggesting that some of the added variables are useful in predicting hearing participation. Although this model finds significant effects of several of the organizational resource and political environment variables already considered, several powerful variables in my other models (party of presidency, indicators of the topical agenda, and AFL-CIO membership) do not meet traditional cutoffs for statistical significance in Model 3.

The negative net relationship between weekly wages for union members in a given industry and representation in hearings is unexpected and intriguing, given the models include a measure of membership size. The estimated coefficients imply that a large union with low-paid members will be better represented than a union with a comparably sized membership base but whose members are less well paid. This finding is difficult to explain; one possibility is that unions in well-compensated sectors feel that aggressive policy advocacy is less necessary than those toward the bottom of the wage distribution, though this hypothesis is not well supported in the academic literature on union political advocacy or by my interview sources. Another interpretation of this finding is as a sign that some of the low-wage service sector unions (e.g., the SEIU and CWA) known for revitalizing their organizing efforts may also be gaining representation in congressional hearings. Alternately, it could be an indicator that workers in highly skilled professional fields have alternate routes to influence policy at their disposal beyond the institution of congressional

hearings. Possible interpretations of this finding are further discussed in the conclusion to this thesis.

The positive relationship between industry-level union density and congressional representation is, by contrast, consistent with expectations. Regardless of membership or lobbying resources, unions in high density industries tend to participate more than those in low-density sectors. One possible explanation is that unions experience less competition for their members' loyalty in low density industries because there are fewer alternatives, and, consequently, there is less pressure for national offices to be seen as visibly fighting for their members' interests. Alternately, there could be a bias towards high union density industries when setting the congressional agenda. Industries characterized by higher union density, such as transportation and the public sector, may be more likely to attract attention from legislators, whether because their activities are more directly visible to political constituents (the "no airline strike at Christmas" effect) or because the legislative aides who arrange hearings may have a richer set of union contacts in these sectors.

Unemployment rates are positively related to union congressional appearances; when people are out of work, unions may be in a better position to deliver their messages on employment policy to Congress, or congressional agenda-setters may be more receptive to their messages. GDP growth, on the other hand, does not seem to have much of an impact on labor's representation on Capitol Hill.

Finally, I test a measure of whether the union's primary constituency lies in the public sector. Consistent with the literature's predictions, I find a positive relationship between a union's emphasis on organizing public sector workers and congressional representation. Combined, these findings suggest that representation before Congress

depends on a wide variety of factors, relating to both organizational resources and the external environment.

### **Do the Correlates of Participation Change Over Time?**

While the strong overall relationship between organizational resources and representation in congressional hearings is clear, there is good reason to believe that the relationship may not be identical across time periods. The political environment is certainly not static. Moreover, the data cover a period of substantial union decline, and it is reasonable to assume that union decline may have affected the impact of the observed covariates on participation. For example, if large, multi-occupation unions have lost legislative representation more quickly than smaller, more professionally-oriented single-occupation unions, the effect of membership size and industry-level union density on the frequency of congressional testimony may have tapered over time. Alternately, membership could be increasingly related to representation if the smallest unions find themselves unable to afford expensive lobbying operations as they have to fight existential threats to their collective bargaining functions. If, as some of my interview sources indicated, congressional hearings are becoming more of a formality than an opportunity to influence legislators' opinions, the unions under the most strain may be first to cut hearings from their legislative advocacy budgets.

Likewise, both political scientists (e.g., Leyden 1995, Smith 1995) and political commentators have suggested that monetary resources and campaign contributions have become more strongly tied to legislative outcomes over the last several decades. Consistent with this, the *Washington Representatives* directories have grown substantially over time, indicating that the cadre of lobbyists is skyrocketing. Additionally, the union

leaders I interviewed for the project believe that the American political landscape has become more polarized over the years, with members of both parties far less interested in consensus-building and considering alternate viewpoints (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). Consequently, the rewards of Democratic congressional control and the penalties of Republican control may have increased over time.

To explore longitudinal changes in the effect of the observed covariates of participation, I fit interactions of a linear effect of time with membership, the number of consultants employed by each union, industry-level union density and party control of Congress. The main effect of time is absorbed in the year-specific fixed effects. Although the interaction effects may not be perfectly linear, they nonetheless offer a general idea of trend in the effect of the independent variables.

Table 4. Predictors of Congressional Hearing Appearance: Fixed Effects of Year with Interaction Variables

	Model 1 (Resources)	Model 2 (Resources and Political Env.)	Model 3 (Combined)
Membership (x 1,000)	.005* (.002)	.005* (.002)	.005* (.002)
Membership Squared (x 10,000,000,000)	.006 (.006)	.006 (.006)	.003 (.006)
Number of Staff Lobbyists	.989** (.013)	.989** (.013)	.924** (.124)
Number of Consultants	.059 (.104)	.059 (.104)	.074 (.102)
AFL-CIO Member? (1=Yes)	-.244 (.171)	-.244 (.171)	-.106 (.225)
Number of Foreign and Defense Hearings		.001 (.002)	.017** (.003)
Number of Labor and Commerce Hearings		.012* (.005)	.017 (.006)
Party of President (1=Democrat)		-.629** (.215)	-.619** (.183)
N of Congressional Chambers Under Democratic Control		-.443+ (.247)	
Public Sector Constituency (1=Yes)			.426 (.585) (.018)
Unemployment Rate			-.523** (.128)
GDP Growth Rate			.319** (.093)
Union Weekly Wages (by Industry)			-.003** (.001)
Union Density (by Industry)			.066** (.018)
Interaction: Year*Union Density			-.002** (.001)
Interaction: Year*Membership	-.000+ (.000)	-.000+ (.000)	-.000* (.000)
Interaction: Membership*Lobbyists	-.000 (.000)	-.000 (.000)	-.000 (.000)
Interaction: Year*Lobbyists	-.031** (.005)	-.031** (.005)	.030** (.005)
Interaction: Year*Congressional Control		.014+ (.008)	.058** (.013)

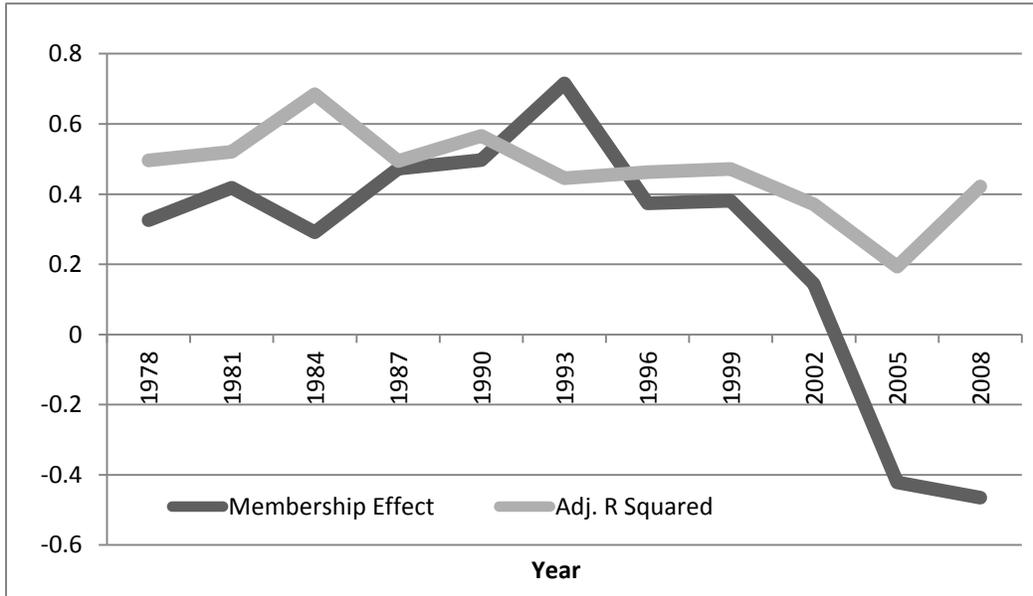
Total Volume of Congressional Hearings	.001** (.000)	.000 (.001)	-.003** (.001)
Constant	-1.834** (.577)	-.150 (.412)	4.218** (1.175)
N	1,171	1,171	1,171
R-Squared	.504	.504	.529

Standard errors in parentheses. \*\* indicates p<.01; \* indicates p<.05; + indicates p<.10  
Note: Congressional control dropped due to collinearity in Model 3.

Adding these interaction effects improves the fit of my models, with R-squared values for all three models above .500. The coefficient for the interaction between year and union density is negative and significant in the combined model, suggesting that union density is a stronger predictor of testimony in the early years of my dataset. However, there is a significant and positive relationship between the interaction of year and congressional control and appearances in hearings in the political environment and combined models suggesting that Democratic control of Congress became a more important predictor of testimony over time. My test for an interaction between the size of a union’s membership base and the number of lobbyists it hires did not yield significant results. Perhaps most notably, the estimated coefficient of the interaction of time and membership is negative and significant, suggesting that membership becomes a less powerful predictor of representation in hearings over the period of this study.

Given the strong assumptions of linearity in the model specifications in Table 4, I replicated the regression of participation on organizational resources to data stratified by year.

Figure 3. Longitudinal Changes in Estimated Membership Effects



*Note: all coefficients significant at  $p < .05$ .*

Breaking out the regression analysis corresponding to Model 1 in Table 3 by year reveals a striking pattern in the relationship between membership and appearances in congressional hearings. Figure 3 shows the decline in the value of a strong membership base in influencing congressional testimony over time. While this is an imperfect measure due to the trend towards consolidation in the labor movement (resulting in a decline in the total number of unions in existence over time, complicating a direct comparison between years), it does illustrate the diminishing effect of size illustrated in Table 4. The estimated effects of membership in 2005 and 2008 are negative, indicating a significant change in the labor's participation in hearings. Consistent with the suggestion that larger unions may be facing the most serious challenges in maintaining representation on Capitol Hill, this seems to be indicative of a change in labor's overall presence in favor of smaller unions making up a larger proportion of the movement's representation.

## The Labor Agenda

In addition to providing an indicator of the intensity of union participation, congressional hearings also enable the analysis of *what* policy topics dominate unions' political agendas. Are labor unions' agendas changing as the correlates of testimony change over time? In this section, I briefly consider broad trends in the labor movement's aggregate policy agendas and present evidence to suggest that there has been a narrowing of labor's policy agenda concurrent with increasing resource scarcity over the last four decades.

In addition to drawing on the Policy Agendas Project as a source of control variables on the broad political environment, I used the Policy Agendas Project coding scheme to classify each of the congressional hearings in my dataset by topic. With over 83,000 records, the Policy Agendas Project's dataset contains a detailed topic code for each congressional hearing held between World War II and the late 2000's. By matching the hearings in my data with hearings catalogued by the Policy Agendas Project on the basis of Congressional Index accession numbers (a unique identifier for each hearing), I can construct a data set with indicators of the types of hearings in which unions are testifying.

On first glance, labor's political agenda (see Figure 4) has been fairly stable in the context of a decline in its overall participation in hearings. While the percentage of hearings devoted to labor and immigration policy has increased slightly since the early 1990's, the data show little evidence of an aggregate shift away from testimony on broader social issues. It is possible, however, that this apparent stability is masking cross-union variations in participation. If, for example, industrial unions are participating less on hearings about social issues (e.g., healthcare, education), but the (relatively) high-growth

unions in the healthcare and education sectors are participating more in such hearings, the aggregate trend will be flat. Testing for such cross-union differences would require crafting a meaningful typology of different types of unions, however – which is significantly complicated by the trend toward industrial and occupational diversification within unions.

Union legislative directors indicate that in on average, their agendas have narrowed somewhat over time as unions have struggled to gain attention in a hostile political environment. With fewer resources and less interest on the part of legislators, some unions have had to pick and choose which topics are most important to their policy goals. Suggestions that a hostile political environment may have forced unions to retreat to a less ambitious agenda is supported by a glance at the total number of policy topics (as defined by the Policy Agendas Project) that labor as a whole testified on in a given year: by this measure, the breadth of labor’s agenda has been sliced in half since the 1970’s (Figure 5), with a sharp decline immediately following the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994.

Figure 4. The Labor Agenda, by Broad Category

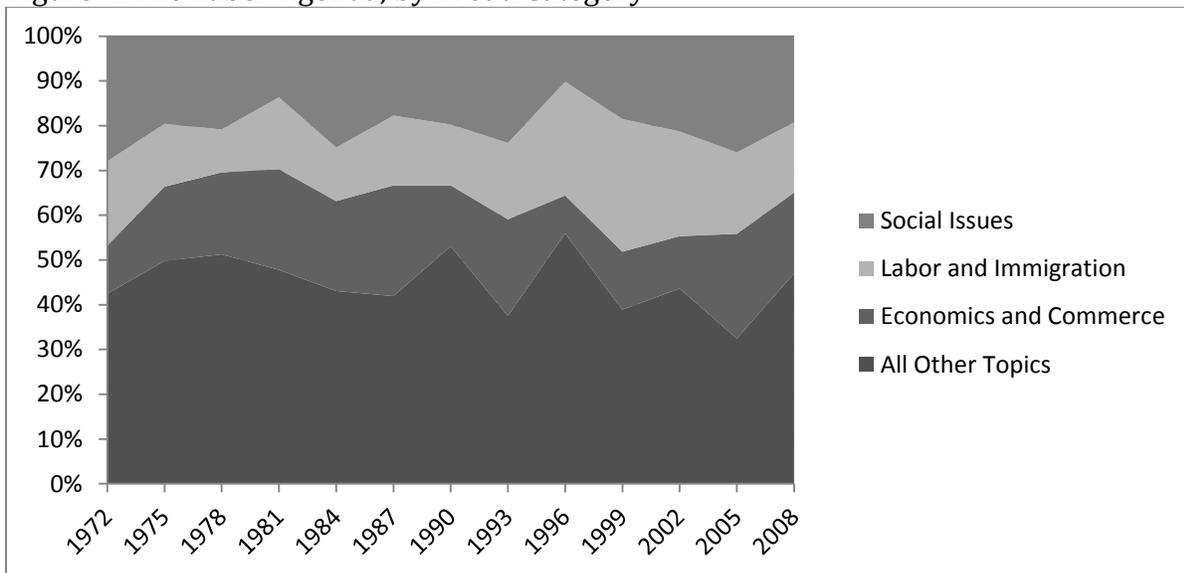


Figure 5. Number of Discrete Topic Codes Among All Union Appearances Each Year

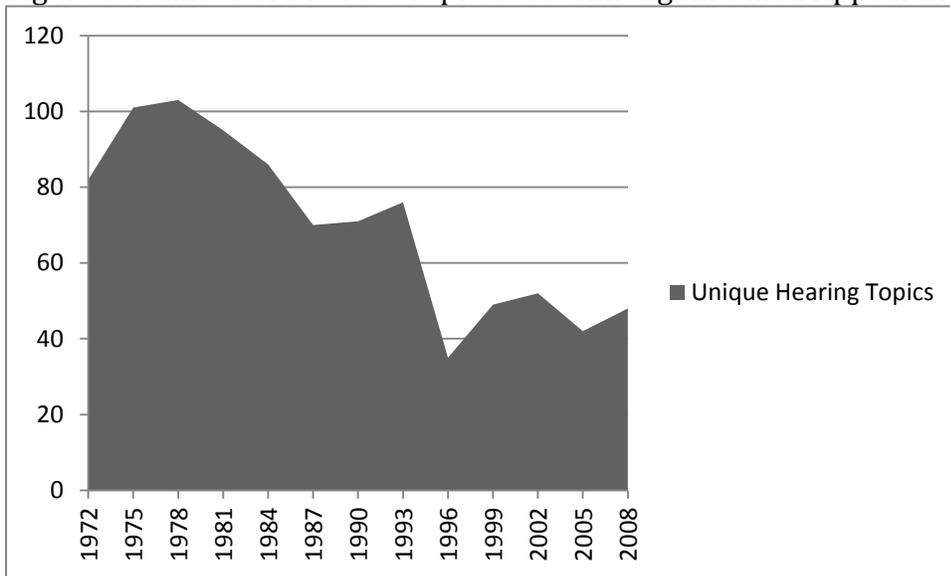
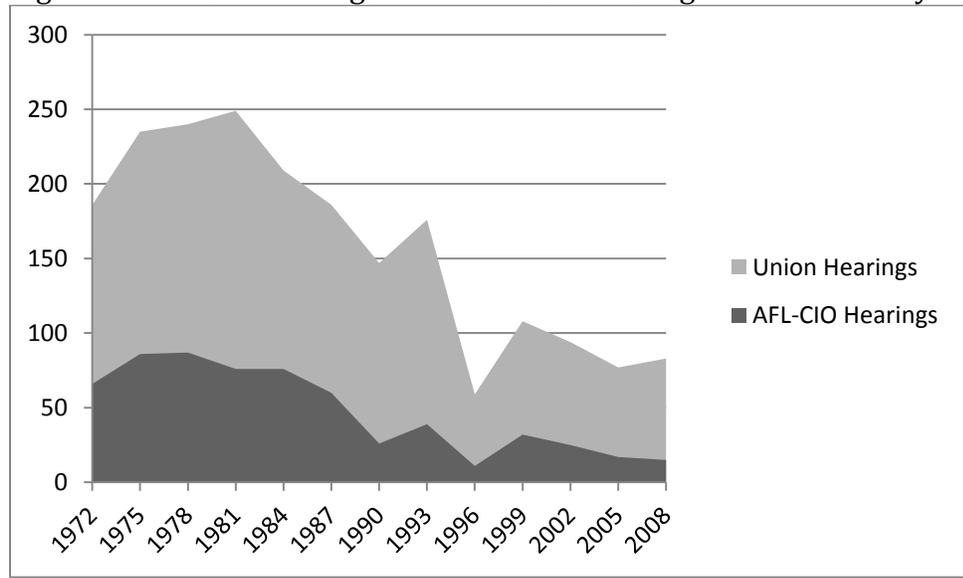


Figure 6 shows that the AFL-CIO's decline has been roughly proportional to the overall drop in union participation. Dues are calculated for each member union to the AFL-CIO national organization on the basis of the size of the constituent union's membership rolls. Due to falling union density, the AFL-CIO has lost important sources of revenue. Sources within the AFL-CIO and its constituent unions agree that the AFL-CIO national headquarters in Washington, DC has probably lost about half of its staff over the last twenty years on account of a series of budget cuts. Consistent with Pfeffer and Salancik's (1978) prediction of organizational retreat to focus on core functions in times of crisis, several of the research units within the AFL-CIO that were once dedicated to broad progressive causes of interest to the labor movement – such as the Center for International Labor Solidarity and the Social Security Department – have either been eliminated altogether or suffered severe cutbacks over the last few decades.

It is difficult to say whether the decline in AFL-CIO activity in 1996 is merely a byproduct of a generally weak year for the labor agenda or a result of a change in strategies

when John Sweeney became president in 1995 and called for a shift away from the organization’s traditional electoral and legislative advocacy role in favor of reinvigorating union organizing. The Sweeney agenda and subsequent calls for labor to more aggressively pursue organizing, which ultimately culminated in the creation of the Change to Win federation in 2005, may partially account for a decline in union and AFL-CIO activity in 1996 and subsequent years. Figure 4 and 5 suggest that, while the overall congressional agenda was narrower in 1996 than other years, it was proportionately composed more of topics that are not traditionally on the union agenda. An analysis of 1996 hearings on the Policy Agendas Project website suggests that legislative activity related to defense and international affairs was particularly high in 1996, which could also partially account for the dip in union and AFL-CIO activity in 1996.

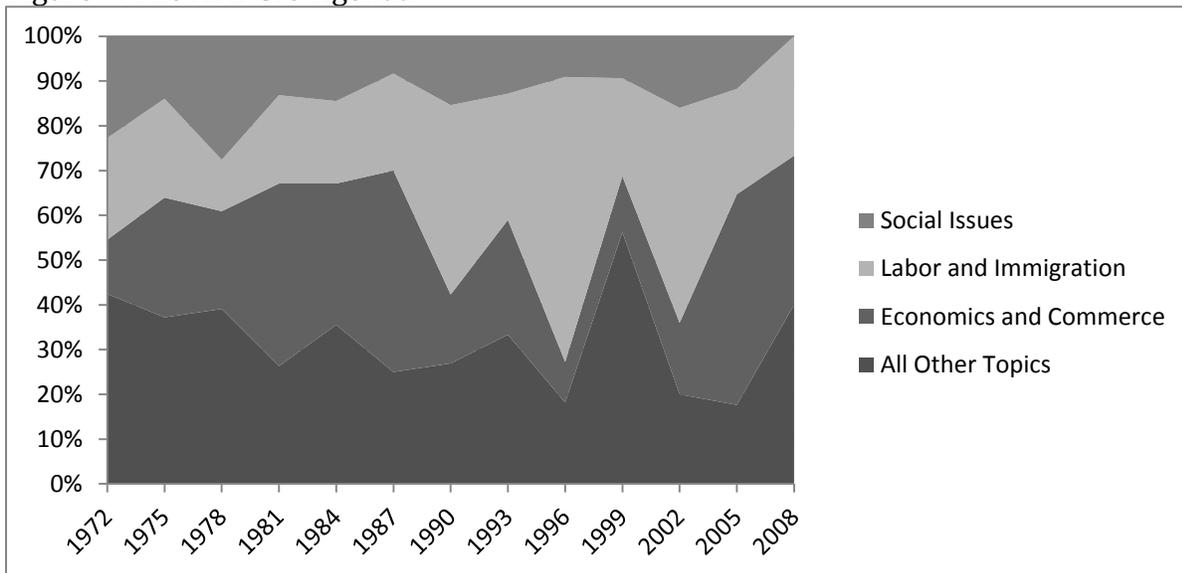
Figure 6. AFL-CIO Hearings Relative to Union Congressional Activity



A look at the AFL-CIO's agenda (Figure 7) supports this story of retrenchment. The federation appears to be devoting fewer resources to broader social issues in place of

issues more directly related to unions' role in the workplace. Though my interview sources believed that the AFL-CIO has not significantly adjusted its agenda in light of the increasingly public sector nature of its member unions, Figure 7 suggests that there have been substantive changes in the federation's agenda. It does seem that the proportion of the AFL-CIO agenda devoted to economic issues has shrunk substantially since the early 90's, and that this divestiture has come at the same time that labor and immigration issues have absorbed a relatively larger slice of the agenda.

Figure 7. The AFL-CIO Agenda



While a more substantive analysis of these trends is beyond the scope of the core research questions posed in this thesis, they are indicative of the potential uses of my dataset. For example, the effect of union revitalization efforts on legislative agendas could be studied by contrasting the nature of congressional testimony presented by revitalized unions relative to unions characterized by traditional models of organizing and advocacy. I also have data on the departmental affiliation of AFL-CIO witnesses that could be used to

further analyze the inner workings of the AFL-CIO. (See Appendix 1 for further details about my data collection process.)

## **Congressional Hearings, a Changing Institution**

The preceding empirical analysis speaks to the predictors of labor's political representation, but not to the nature, and potentially changing nature, of congressional hearings as a tool in the union's political arsenal. Indeed, scholarly accounts of the role of congressional hearings in the policymaking process are largely lacking. To understand the role of congressional hearings in the contemporary labor toolkit, I conducted a series of interviews with labor union legislative directors in the summer of 2010. I spoke with eight legislative directors and other high-level officials in labor unions and the AFL-CIO labor federation. Respondents were found through a snowball sampling technique, starting with initial leads from Cornell ILR faculty. Each interview was conducted by telephone, and lasted between 30 minutes and an hour; interviews were not recorded, but I took extensive "field notes" during the interviews. In each interview, I asked legislative directors to describe the function of congressional hearings in their overall legislative advocacy strategies, explain the process of being invited to appear in congressional hearings, and describe how their legislative advocacy strategies have changed.

One of the key findings to emerge from my interviews is that congressional hearings' role in the policymaking process has changed from a key source of information on policy proposals to more of a formality. To my knowledge, this finding is absent from the literature on American political institutions. According to union officials, members of Congress take hearings less seriously now than in the past and attend them only

intermittently. Indeed, legislators now drop in and out of hearings rather than stay for the entire hearing, and the norm is to ask a few questions of a particular witness and then leave. This is possibly a consequence of the compression of the congressional workweek in recent years. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that hearings are shorter. Even if the number of hearings per year has not changed significantly over the years, the number of people invited to testify before each hearing may have changed in the aggregate, in addition to the effects of Republican control over hearing schedules. This may affect the number of “slots” in which a union could potentially be scheduled to testify, and might partially explain the trend towards reduced hearing participation over time.

One of the trends noted by sources with historical knowledge of hearings is a trend towards amplifying the entertainment value of hearings, with a new emphasis on “soundbytes” and emotional first-hand accounts of events over academic, fact-laden testimony. “Common” people are more likely to appear today than in the past, as their accounts become more valued by committee staffers, who in turn want to maximize the probability that a hearing will be picked up by cable news channels or quoted in members’ press releases. This emphasis on emotion is not only a result of the 24-hour news cycle or television coverage of hearings. Union lobbyists speculate that part of the reason for the decline of fact-laden testimony from researchers, academics, and union officials detached from the day-to-day experience of workers is the availability of technical data and detailed research reports that can be downloaded through the Internet. The policy positions of most major unions, for example, can be found on their respective websites, along with research reports and press releases.

This availability of information means that, for some legislators, positions are set in place before the hearing begins. Union legislative directors report that questioning tends to be predictable; questions for many witnesses today are “softballs” that allow witnesses to offer emotion-laden opinions, rather than representing rigorous inquiry. While all of my sources agree that hearings’ shift from fact dissemination to public relations tool has been gradual, many suggest that hearings have been “for show” to some extent for as long as they can remember – including some sources who have worked in the labor movement’s political arm for the duration of my dataset. While some have argued that congressional hearings have the potential to shape policy (e.g. Burstein and Hirsh 2007), I have been careful not to make claims about the relationship between representation in hearings and obtaining favorable policy outcomes. Individuals with experience testifying in congressional hearings have told me that they doubt that they had the opportunity to persuade anyone through testimony, regardless of how powerful their arguments may have been.

It should be noted that the trend towards sensationalizing advocacy in hope of gaining media coverage has not only been driven by the committees. Unions themselves have also placed a greater emphasis on staging events and planting soundbytes into testimony in hope of standing out in the deluge of information that characterizes American politics today. Additionally, one source suggested that unions are interested in leveraging positive media coverage to improve public opinion of labor. While other sources spoke of negative attitudes towards labor in a general sense as an obstacle to testimony in recent years that even a Democratic Congress cannot overcome, they generally did not see

improving the overall standing of labor in American society to be a goal of legislative advocacy departments.

Despite institutional changes that seem to devalue the role of the hearing, some unions still view appearance in congressional testimony to be a high priority. According to one union legislative officer, whenever a request for a hearing witness comes in from a congressional committee it instantly becomes the office's highest priority. Others, however, said that in recent years they have declined some requests for testimony or simply submitted a short written statement in lieu of taking the effort to prepare a witness for live testimony due to the perception that hearings lack impact. Regardless of external impact, the role of congressional hearings as evidence of a union's involvement in policymaking for internal consumption should not be underestimated. Membership-based organizations of all kinds publicize their appearances in congressional hearings through newsletters, website features, social media and the like as evidence of the organization's activities and creation of member value.

Associated with the trend towards more personal, emotional testimony is that committees may be de-emphasizing the formal organizational affiliation of witnesses in the formal record of the hearing. The new Democratic Congress seems to be interested in hearing from ordinary workers without regard to which union they happen to belong to, even if the legislative department of the worker's union was instrumental in facilitating his or her appearance through coordination with committee staff, writing testimony, covering travel expenses, and so on. My sources suggest that this may have intensified significantly in recent years, which could be a partial explanation for why there was not a more dramatic rise in the overall number of labor witnesses in the 2008 Congressional Index

year following the 2006 Democratic takeover of Congress. However, this trend does not seem to be consistent across unions: while service sector unions may portray their members as ordinary workers, professional unions emphasize the greater credibility of testimony from technical experts (e.g., airline pilots). Future studies could take note of witnesses listed without affiliation and track their appearances over time as a crude measure of the diffusion of “person on the street” testimony.

My interviewees also stressed that hearings are only one of many mechanisms through which unions can influence public policy. Unions are sometimes able to bring their members to Washington and stage grassroots efforts at influencing debates already underway, as in the SEIU’s controversial practice of staging protests on commuter bridges at rush hour, but normally the campaign season infrastructure is not used to directly pressure legislators on Capitol Hill. Some unions have reinvested in efforts to influence policy through maximizing informal contact with legislators and congressional staffers. In essence, they have reverted to classic back-room lobbying. Letter writing is another staple of union legislative activism that has not died down in recent years - indeed, the exclusion of unions from hearings in years of Republican control may have elevated the importance of unsolicited letters. Appearances at receptions and hearings outside of the official schedule of congressional committees – for example, at meetings of federal advisory boards and regulatory comment sessions – may also be on the rise, according to some union sources.

Considering the scope of the activities stretching beyond congressional hearings described in my interviews with union legislative directors, it is worth revisiting the original predictions of Pfeffer and Salancik that were applied to labor by Katz, Batt, and

Keefe: unions may respond to environmental challenges (namely, weak labor law and hostile attitudes) through a reinvestment in efforts to secure a more favorable environmental context, including investment in political campaigning and lobbying. Despite reports that the AFL-CIO has seen a dramatic drawdown in organizational capacity in the wake of budget cuts, some unions report a reinvestment in legislative advocacy in recent years. For example, one of the major Change to Win unions reported that both measurable resources and less tangible energy and inertia in favor of legislative action has increased in recent years. Additionally, labor as a whole made some investments in interorganizational linkages that should be acknowledged in any discussion of their response to environmental threats. The Economic Policy Institute was formed in the mid-80's – a time when unions were beginning to realize the full extent of the political and public opinion challenges facing labor – in large part to help coordinate labor's political message and avoid duplicative research across union legislative and research departments.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The core lesson of this research is that unions' organizational resources and environments shape their participation in congressional hearings, often in complex ways. Membership size is certainly a key predictor of which unions are represented, but its role has changed over time. The political environment matters a great deal for whether unions are able to participate, with Democratic control of political institutions improving unions' chances at gaining seats at the table. The impact of economic factors is more varied, though: for example, while high unemployment rates make unions more likely to

participate, higher wages in unions' core industries appear to depress participation. And, these relationships change over time; membership, for example, is a significantly less important predictor of the extent of a union's congressional testimony in 2005 than it was in 1984.

What implications does this research have for practitioners working in the labor movement? One implication is that labor unions have more control over their legislative destiny than those who fixate on the political environment might predict. While party control of Congress matters, to be sure, it is not the sole determinant of who gets to speak in hearing testimony.

Membership seems to matter a great deal, suggesting that organizing may bring additional benefits to other aspects of unions' operations. Unions seeking more political influence should not discount the interdependence of legislative advocacy and organizing efforts: more members not only mean more dues revenue, but also more foot soldiers that can be deployed in letter-writing and grassroots advocacy, as well as more legitimacy in the eyes of congressional committee schedulers.

The finding that membership is becoming a less important predictor of testimony over time should encourage unions to think beyond the raw number of membership cards they issue and strategically consider *who* they organize. Additionally, the finding that unions operating in low wage, high union density sectors of the economy are likely to be represented could guide union organizers to more aggressively seek out workers in fields where labor has a strong foothold yet a clear need still exists – on a pessimistic note, one interpretation of this finding suggests that union organizing in the low union density service sector may not be an effective strategy for unions seeking greater political

representation. Alternately, because their members feel more economically secure, one might imagine that unions representing better paid occupations are more content with the “status quo” and feel less pressure to actively influence public policy. The literature on social movement unionism and union revitalization (e.g., Voss and Sherman 2000, Milkman 2006, Bronfenbrenner 2007) likewise offers a plausible interpretation: many of the largest unions commonly labeled “revitalized” – such as the SEIU and CWA – organize in the service sector, which is traditionally associated with lower wages than manufacturing and transportation.

With respect to interest group politics more broadly, this study suggests that the benefits of size for large membership organizations have diminished over time. While this study does not definitely test whether this diminishing effect is a function of the overall growth in the number of organizations represented on Capitol Hill, the growth of powerful niche interests seems to be a likely culprit for the diminishing effectiveness of large organizations. However, other explanations exist, such as the possibility that membership is no longer as strong of an indicator of the organizational resources that enable policy advocacy as it once was. Further research on this topic is warranted.

## **Limitations**

Like all sociological research, this study leaves some stones unturned. A more complex study of the applicability of resource dependence theory to organized labor might consider gathering data on collaborations and competition within the labor movement, which have significantly affected legislative strategies over the years. Additionally, this study does not measure change in organizational resources as an independent variable, as

in a time series analysis: consequently, it is difficult to definitively determine whether a sense of organizational decline has any particular effect on political activism through my quantitative analysis. (However, as noted already in this thesis, I did broach the topic in my interviews with union legislative directors, which yielded some insights.)

One weakness of the listing of consultants in *Washington Representatives* is that little is stated about the role of each consultant in the policymaking process; *Washington Representatives* does not differentiate between a consultant hired to launch a full-blown corporate campaign and a consultant brought on for a quick strategy session, although it remains the best source of data available for this project. Likewise, membership is an imperfect measure of organizational resources. While I attempted to capture financial resources through the inclusion of within-industry union members' weekly wages, this is certainly an imperfect measure, if for no other reason than that different unions charge their members different dues. Ideally, data on union finances would be available for the entire length of my dataset from a centralized source; while Department of Labor LM-2 filings are available online for the later years of my dataset and data from the early 80's are available in Troy and Sheflin's *Union Sourcebook* (1985), filling in the remaining years of my dataset would be impossible without extensive travel for archival research.

### **Directions for Further Research**

In addition to filling the need for comprehensive data on the whole universe of labor unions noted by Southworth and Stepan-Norris, this dataset permits analysis of the obstacles facing labor unions in the post-accord era and the process of legislative advocacy for national membership-based organizations. Additionally, this study tests Pfeffer and Salancik's predictions on organizational political activism in a unique context. Despite some

of the institutional changes to affect Congress in recent years, hearings remain a powerful statement of the agenda of the nation's policymakers. Future projects with this dataset could consider how network ties between labor unions, as manifested through joint hearing appearances, affect legislative representation. Under what circumstances are collaborative or concurrent efforts to influence policy most influential? The effect of union mergers could also be studied using this data: are workers in merged unions effectively represented by their new legislative departments? Additionally, this dataset could be used in conjunction with data on legislative actions, answering questions related to policy *change*, rather than simple *representation*. Do unions achieve meaningful policy changes as a result of congressional hearings, controlling for other factors that could influence the policymaking process? It may be useful to locate archival data on unions' campaign contributions to pair with this data to investigate the relationship between legislative advocacy and electoral campaigning, though this would require substantial archival research.

## Conclusion

Though my analysis of congressional hearing testimony yields relatively few surprises about the nature of labor union legislative advocacy, it confirms much of what is already known about the effects of organizational resources on political influence. Strong organizations are most likely to be heard in the political arena, even if we don't know whether their voices lead to substantive policy change. However, this thesis also tells a story of changing institutions. Membership is becoming less predictive of congressional hearing testimony over time, and congressional hearings are themselves transforming from a forum for the presentation of policy-related facts to a series of talking points and

soundbytes. Given the enormous stakes involved in the formulation of public policy, the impact of these changes on the democratic process and policy outcomes deserve more attention.

## Appendix 1: Extended Description of Data Sources

The dataset of congressional hearing appearances was collected from the annual volumes of the Congressional Information Service’s Index of Subjects and Names (CIS Index). I used the CIS Index to identify every congressional hearing with at least one union witness in every third volume, starting with the 2008 printed index and working back to 1972. Although the dates of the hearings cataloged in each year’s CIS Index do not correspond perfectly to the calendar year, I see no reason to believe that this practice results in year-to-year inconsistencies that significantly skew my analysis. The decision to sample every third annual volume was motivated both by a desire to maximize longitudinal coverage under time and resource constraints. For each union hearing, I recorded the year of the volume, the “accession number” (a unique identifier), the congressional committee holding the hearing (with the word “Senate” included in Senate committees), a brief description in my own words, a code for each union and labor federation that appeared (up to a maximum of 13 recorded unions), the AFL-CIO division if the AFL-CIO was present at the hearing, and the date of the hearing. This coding procedure yielded a record similar to Table 5, which omits the empty columns for additional unions and AFL-CIO divisions that did not participate in this particular hearing. A few unions were missed because I did not recognize them as unions in the CIS Index books using this method, though after using the *Encyclopedia of Associations* to define the universe of unions in existence in each year (see below) I was able to go back and identify all union appearances missed in my initial data collection.

Table 5. Sample Data Collection Record

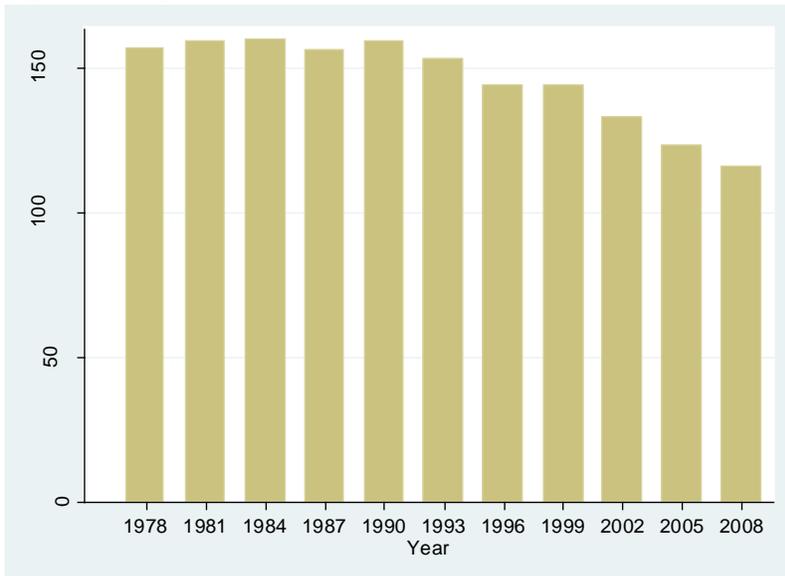
CIS Year	Accession Number (book)	Committee	Brief Title	Specific Union	Second Union	Third Union	Fourth Union	Fifth Union	AFL-CIO Division	Date
1981	1981-H161-26	Agriculture	Prohibition of export of unprocessed logs	1	134	142	65	143	State/Regional	02/16/1981

The next step in assembling my dataset of hearings was to code each hearing based on subject matter. In order to achieve this, I relied on the existing master dataset from the Policy Agendas Project, an effort to track the contours of the congressional agenda over time by coding each congressional hearing since 1945 in accordance with a carefully constructed codebook with approximately 200 unique topic codes. I was already quite familiar with the Policy Agendas Project’s codebook and coding procedure through my contributions to the project from working on it as an undergraduate research assistant on at the University of Washington several years ago; knowing that each hearing is reviewed by at least three coders (and is subject to substantial review if there is any disagreement) gives me great confidence in the validity of the project’s topical codes. I downloaded the master datafile of congressional hearings (with approximately 83,000 records) containing unique topic codes for each hearing, and matched their hearing records with my own dataset on the basis of CIS accession numbers. From this dataset, for example, I learned that the hearing shown in the above table was coded as 2103, which corresponds to “Natural Resources, Public Lands, and Forest Management.” Because the Policy Agendas

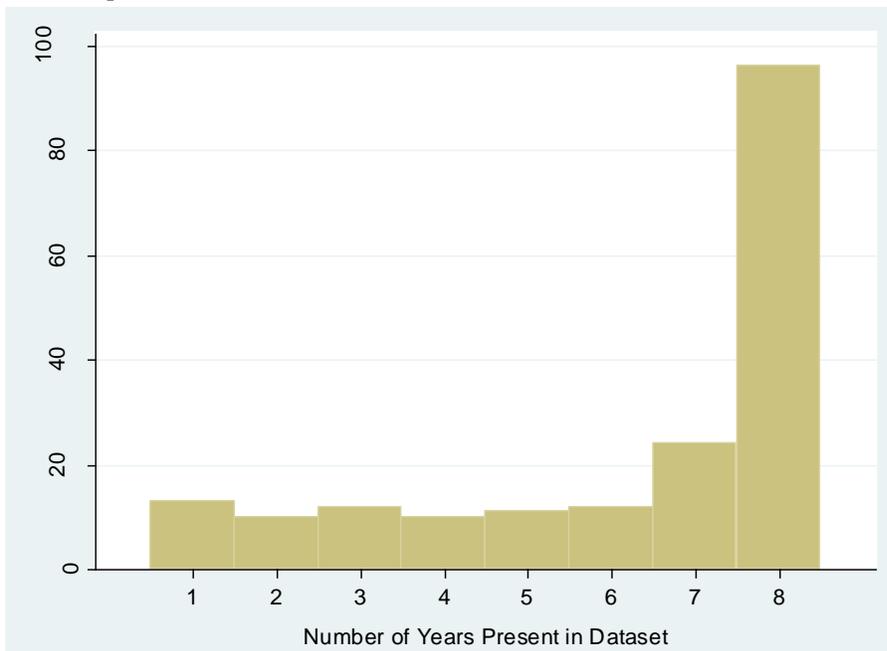
Project had not yet coded 2008 hearings at the time I appended these codes in 2010, I coded the 2008 hearings in my dataset according to my knowledge of their codebook. In order to produce Figures 4 and 7 in this thesis, I collapsed dozens of related codes together to simplify analysis.

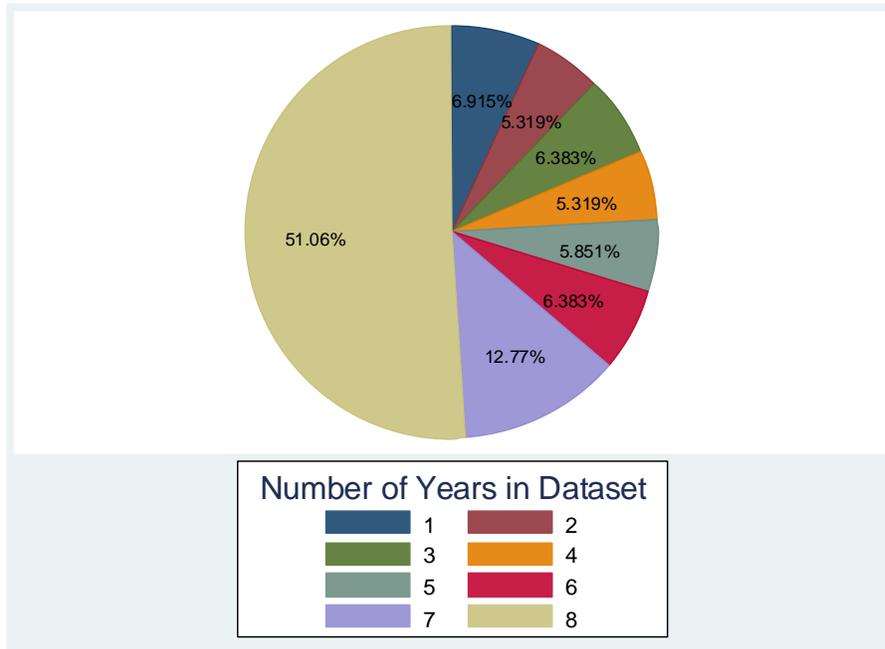
While this dataset permitted descriptive analysis of trends in labor's congressional agenda, I wanted to learn more about the factors that affect congressional hearing appearances. To achieve this, I constructed a measure of the number of hearing appearances by each union in each year. Creating this variable required building histograms of the union codes that appeared in each CIS Index volume. I then used the *Encyclopedia of Associations* annual volumes to fill in membership for each union-year case in my new dataset. Because data for each year's *Encyclopedia* is collected in the year before publication, *Encyclopedia* data led hearings data by one year (i.e., 1979 *Encyclopedia* data was matched to data from the 1978 CIS Index). As I identified unions listed in the *Encyclopedia* that did not exist in my dataset (and could not be found after double-checking the CIS Index), they were added for the appropriate year and listed as having zero hearing appearances. Likewise, the *Encyclopedia*, by providing a definitive list of the unions in existence in a given year, allowed me to avoid listing unions in my dataset that had officially merged or dissolved – resolving a substantial concern, given that the number of unions in existence shrank from 160 in 1984 to 116 in 2008 (see Figure 8). Unfortunately, tracking the reasons for the emergence or dissolution of unions was beyond the scope of my data collection, though I can be certain that 51.06% of the unions in my dataset appeared across all eight years analyzed in Tables 2-4 (Figures 9-10). The *Encyclopedia* also provided useful, up-to-date data on AFL-CIO affiliation, which was quite useful because several unions have drifted in and out of the AFL-CIO over the years. After establishing a union's existence, membership and AFL-CIO affiliation through the *Encyclopedia*, I used the *Washington Representatives* annual series of directories to identify the number of staff lobbyists and external registered lobbying consultants hired by each union in each year. As with the *Encyclopedia*, data collection from *Washington Representatives* volumes led CIS Indices by one year to ensure consistency. *Washington Representatives* data was thus collected in every third year from its initial publication in 1979 through 2009.

Figure 8. Population of International Unions and Labor Federations, 1978-2008



Figures 9 and 10. Number of Dataset Years in Which Each Union is Present, as Frequencies and Proportions





I then categorized each union into one of the standard major industry groupings used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in its *Employment and Earnings* annual volumes. This is one area where my data collection may have been vulnerable to subjectivity, as it was sometimes necessary to make an educated guess about a union’s core industry; for example, the United Auto Workers were judged to be a manufacturing union due to their historical affiliation with the auto industry, even though they have an active ongoing initiative to organize graduate teaching assistants. For each union-year, I entered the respective industry-level union density rate and average weekly wages for union members the union’s core industry. All weekly wages were translated into 2009 dollars using the BLS Inflation Calculator, available online at [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm). Unemployment and GDP growth rate data were obtained directly from the BLS website.

Data on the number of chambers of Congress controlled by Democrats each year and the party affiliation of the President were confirmed using *The World Almanac*. Data on congressional attention devoted to foreign policy, defense, labor, and commerce topics were obtained from the Policy Agendas Project. The number of hearings in each CIS Index year were obtained through the Policy Analysis Tool at [www.policyagendas.org](http://www.policyagendas.org). Multiple topic codes were combined to create the “foreign and defense policy” variable. Finally, I relied on the Policy Agendas Project to calculate the number of congressional hearings in each CIS Index volume (using the spreadsheet with all 83,000 hearings containing CIS Index accession numbers) to control for the overall level of congressional activity each year.

Interview data came from a variety of subjects who, despite being recruited through snowball sampling, seem to have represented a reasonable cross-section of the labor movement. Due to the small N (8) of legislative directors and related officials interviewed,

it would breach confidentiality to name the specific organizations for which they work. It should be sufficient to say that they included the AFL-CIO national association, an AFL-CIO public safety workers' union, a large multi-occupation AFL-CIO manufacturing sector union, and a large multi-occupation service sector union affiliated with Change to Win. I relied on handwritten notes to record the key points made by my subjects, which were incorporated into an early draft of this thesis shortly after the interviews were completed late in the summer of 2010.

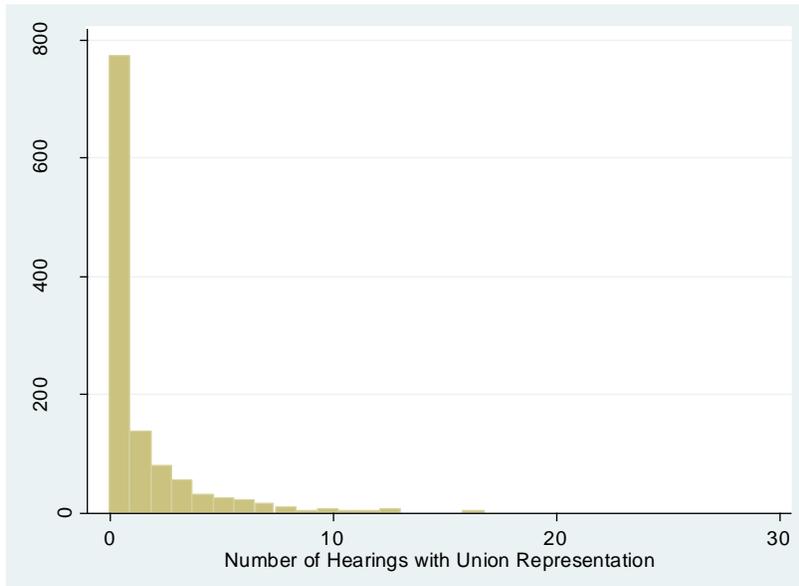
## Appendix 2: Distributions of Variables

The charts below show the distributions of my dependent and independent variables for years covered in my regression models.

### Hearing Participation

This chart shows the distribution of my dependent variable, the number of hearings participated in by a particular union in a particular year. The concentration of unions participating in zero hearings suggests that the majority of unions do not participate in a hearing in a given year; among those unions that do participate, most participate in less than 10 hearings. Though invisible on this chart, the maximum number of hearings participated in by a particular union in a given year is 28.

Figure 11. Pooled Histogram of Hearing Participation by Union-Year



### Membership

The charts below shows the general contours of my membership variable. While the International Brotherhood of Teamsters was the largest union in my dataset through the mid-90's, the National Education Association took its place as the largest union from 1999 onwards. I also illustrate the characteristics of my membership variable through a

pooled histogram that indicates the distribution of union-year cases based on membership size; nearly half of the union-year cases in my dataset have less than 100,000 members, which is not particularly surprising given the ongoing prevalence of small unions in creative industries, the professional sector, and obscure occupations (e.g., longshoring). Table 6 gives another overview of changes in the distribution of my membership variable across the years analyzed in Tables 2-4. Examples of these small unions can be seen in a list of the ten smallest union-year cases in my dataset (Table 7) along the ten largest union-years in my dataset (Table 8).

Figure 12. Scatterplot of Union Membership by Year, with Largest Distinguishable Unions Identified

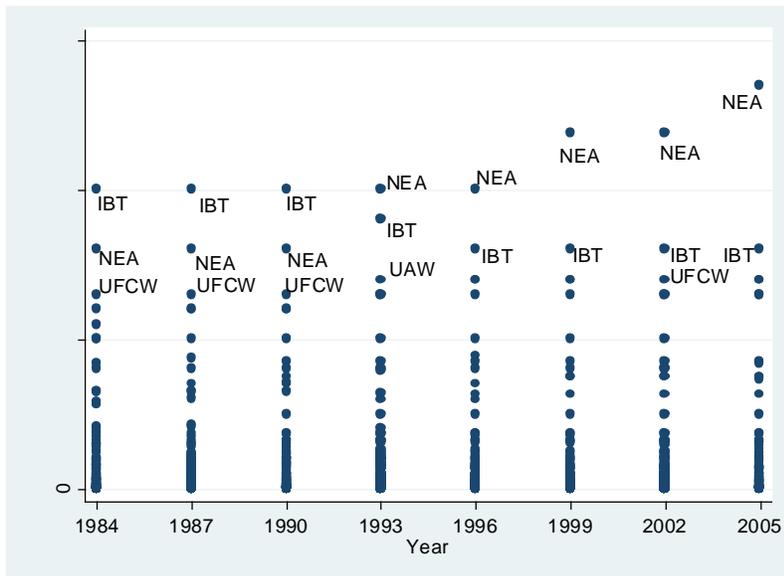


Figure 13. Pooled Histogram of Union Membership

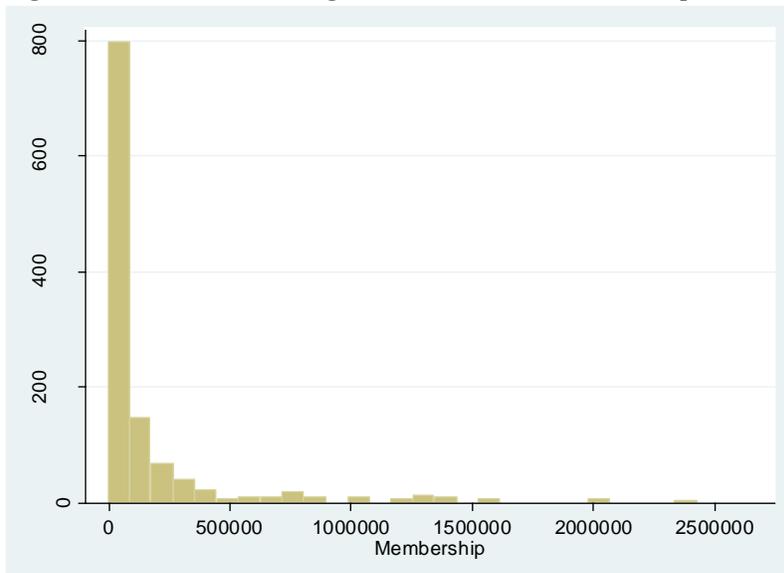


Table 6. Percentile Distribution of Membership Size

	All Years	1984	2005
1 <sup>st</sup>	125	57	150
5 <sup>th</sup>	300	380	250
10 <sup>th</sup>	600	860	600
25 <sup>th</sup>	5,000	5,000	6,753
50 <sup>th</sup>	35,000	32,500	50,000
75 <sup>th</sup>	145,000	152,500	145,000
90 <sup>th</sup>	370,000	375,000	500,000
95 <sup>th</sup>	837,932	818,966	850,000
99 <sup>th</sup>	1,600,800	1,600,800	1,600,000

Table 7. Ten Smallest “International” Union-Year Cases in Dataset

Year	Name of Union	Membership
1999	Flight Engineers’ International Association	20
1987	Guild of Italian-American Actors	50
1984	Guild of Italian-American Actors	50
1990	Yiddish Writers’ Union	57
1987	Yiddish Writers’ Union	57
1984	Yiddish Writers’ Union	57
1990	Guild of Italian-American Actors	70
1993	Guild of Italian-American Actors	70
1999	National Association of Special Police and Security Officers	75
1999	International Union of Journeymen Horseshoers of the US and Canada	110

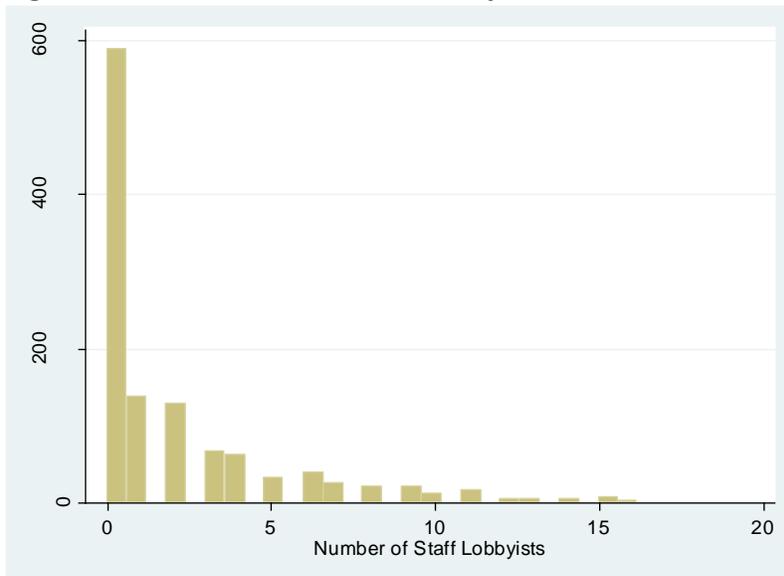
Table 8. Ten Largest “International” Union-Year Cases in Dataset

Year	Name of Union	Membership
2005	National Education Association	2,700,000
2002	National Education Association	2,376,108
1999	National Education Association	2,376,108
1996	National Education Association	2,000,800
1993	National Education Association	2,000,800
1990	International Brotherhood of Teamsters	2,000,000
1984	International Brotherhood of Teamsters	2,000,000
1987	International Brotherhood of Teamsters	2,000,000
1993	International Brotherhood of Teamsters	1,800,000
1984	National Education Association	1,600,800

### Lobbyists

Figure 14 illustrates the distribution of my variable measuring the number of staff lobbyists employed by each union.

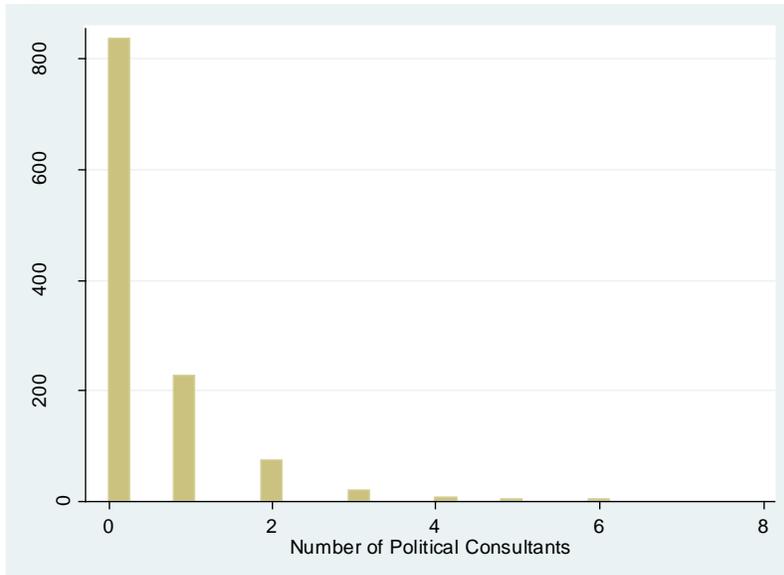
Figure 14. Distribution of Staff Lobbyists



### Consultants

Figure 15 illustrates the distribution of my variable measuring the number of political consultants hired by each union.

Figure 15. Distribution of Union Political Consultants



### AFL-CIO Affiliation

Figure 16 shows the change (or lack thereof) in the proportion of unions in my dataset affiliated with the AFL-CIO federation across the years analyzed in Tables 2-4.

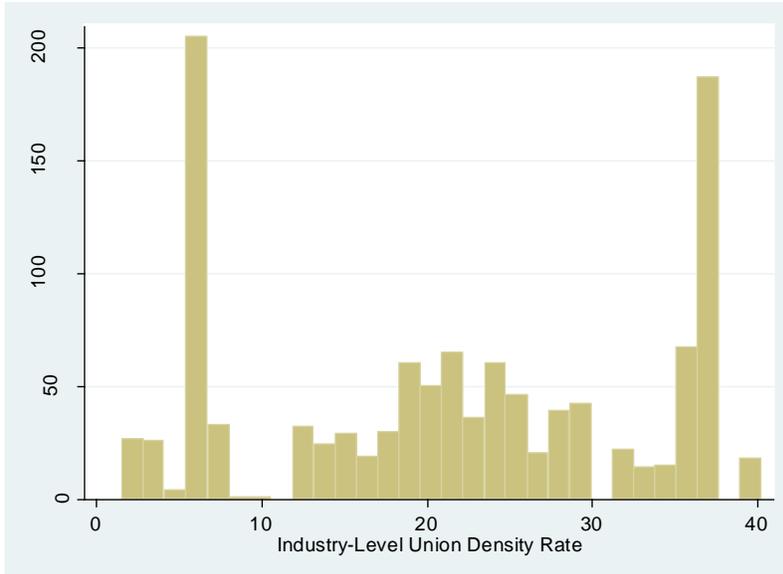
Figure 16. Longitudinal Change in AFL-CIO Affiliation



### Union Density

Figure 17 illustrates the distribution of my variable measuring the union density rate for the core industry associated with each union.

Figure 17. Distribution of Industry-Level Union Density Rates



### Union Weekly Wages

Figure 18 illustrates the distribution of inflation-adjusted weekly wages for union members in ten industry supersectors by year. Mining, an outlier in 2002, is illustrated. Figure 19 gives the frequency of union-years characterized by each bracket of wages.

Figure 18. Distribution of Industry-Level Union Member Weekly Wages by Year

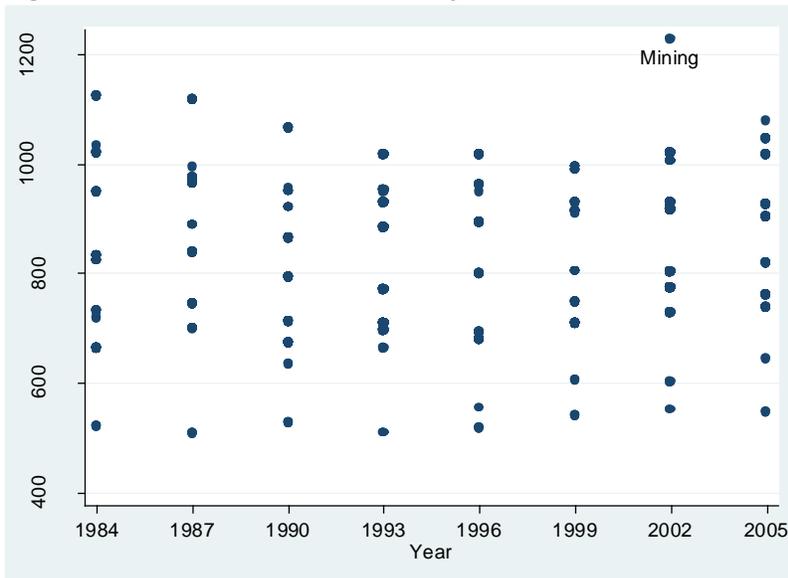
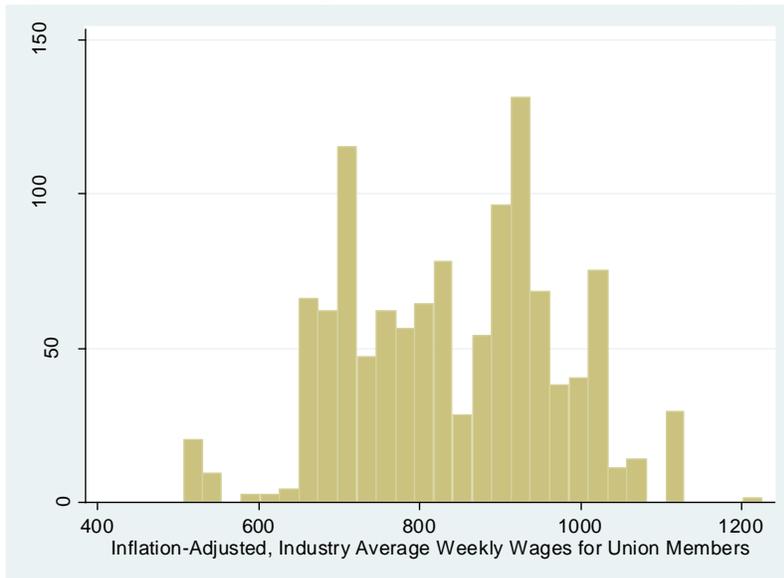


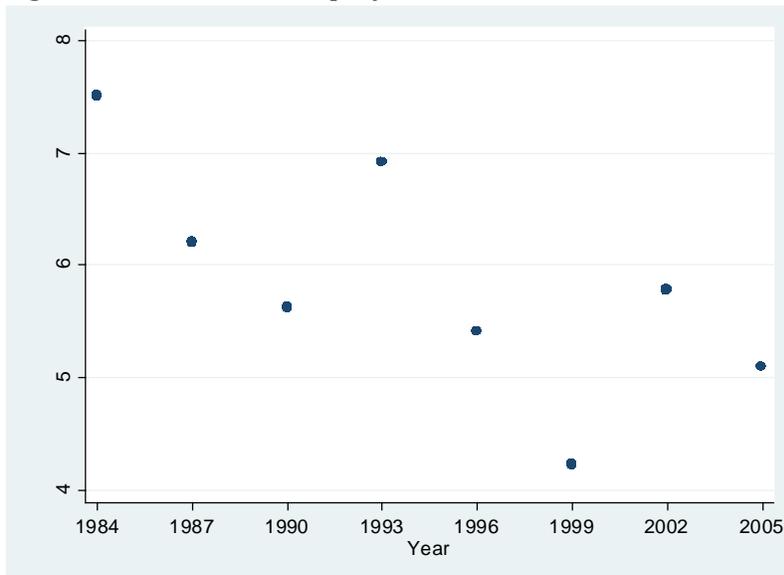
Figure 19. Pooled Histogram of Union Member Industry-Level Weekly Wages



### Unemployment Rate

Figure 20 illustrates the distribution of my variable measuring the average unemployment rate in each year of my dataset.

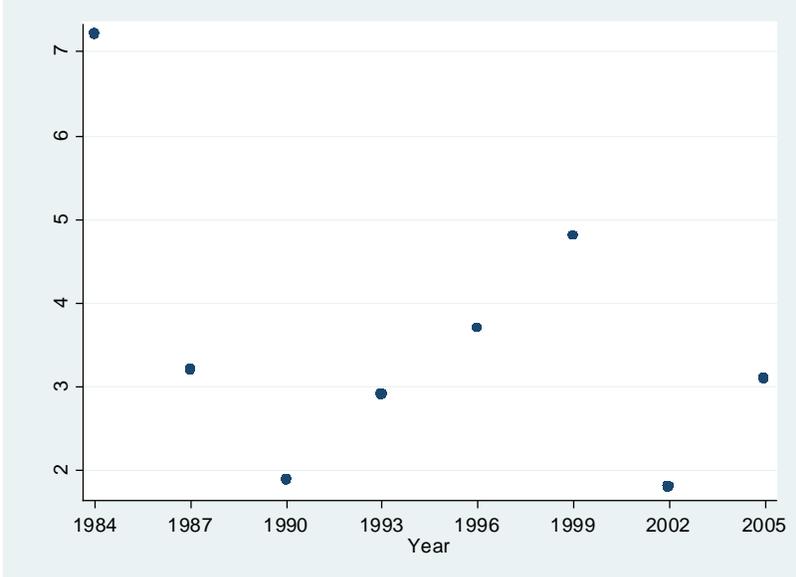
Figure 20. Annual Unemployment Rates



### GDP Growth Rate

Figure 21 illustrates the distribution of my variable measuring the average GDP growth rate in each year of my dataset.

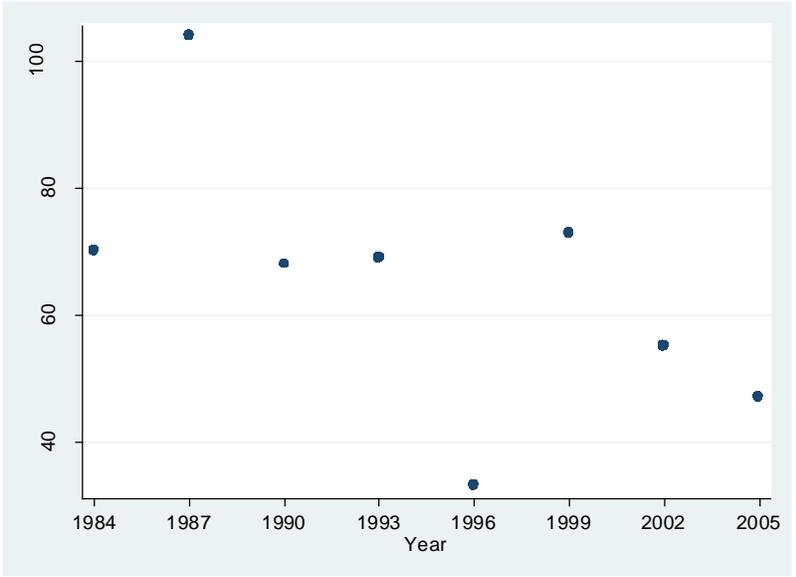
Figure 21. Annual GDP Growth Rate



**N of Labor Hearings**

Figure 22 illustrates the distribution of my variable measuring the number of labor and related congressional hearings in each year of my dataset.

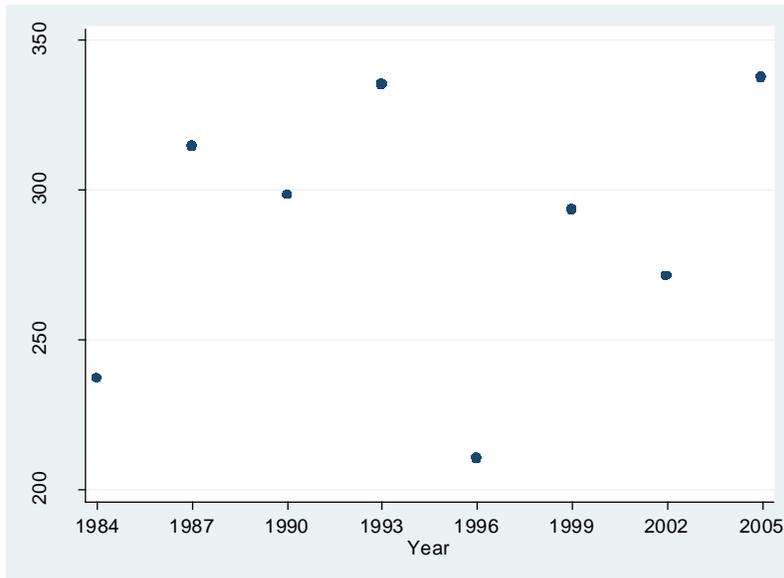
Figure 22. Number of Labor-Related Congressional Hearings Each Year



**N of Foreign and Defense Hearings**

Figure 23 illustrates the distribution of my variable measuring the number of foreign and defense policy congressional hearings in each year of my dataset.

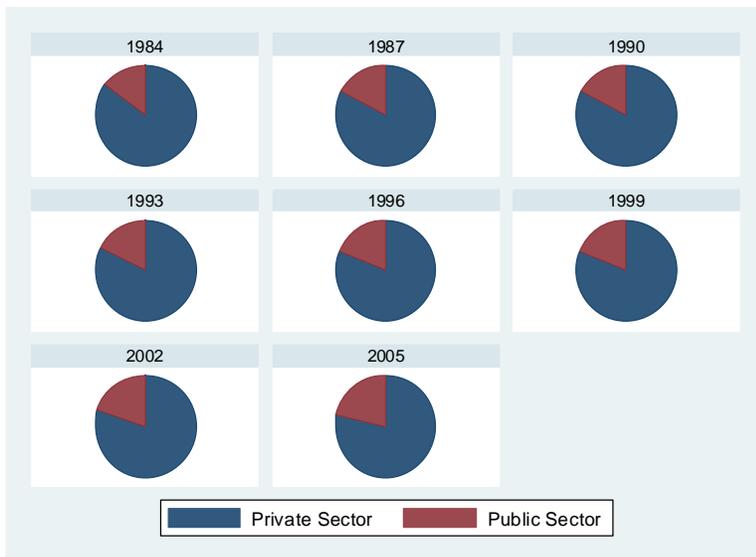
Figure 23. Number of Foreign and Defense Policy Congressional Hearings Each Year



### Public Sector Constituency

Figure 24 shows the change (or lack thereof) in the proportion of unions in my dataset that primarily organize workers in the public sector across the years analyzed in Tables 2-4.

Figure 24. Longitudinal Change in Proportion of Unions Primarily Representing Public Sector Workers



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