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A Comparison of Members' Opinions of Union Performance, Management and Practices

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UNION VS. RIGHT-TO-WORK STATES

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National Employee Freedom Week is a nationwide campaign offering an unparalleled focus on the freedoms union employees have to opt out of union membership. Featuring a diverse and nonpartisan coalition of state-based and national organizations, National Employee Freedom Week empowers union employees with information to make the decision about union membership that's best for them, including identifying non-union alternatives that better suit their needs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the union landscape continues to shift—with membership rates declining, increasing adoption of Right-to-Work laws, and other changes-it is unclear whether employees working in non-Right-to-Work states (henceforth "Union") fare better than their Right-to-Work counterparts. Some argue that union employees in Right-to-Work states are at a significant disadvantage and not able to experience the same level of protection as employees in Union states.

To gauge union employee opinions about the role and effectiveness of the unions representing them, a national survey of 1,687 union members was administered to identify any differences between Union (943) and Right-to-Work (744) states in terms of contract negotiations, protections, and operations.

More than one-third of union members thought their most recent contract negotiations were very effective (Union, 36%; Right-to-Work, 36%) and said they were very satisfied with the outcome (Union, 36%; Right-to-Work, 35%). Union members in both Union and Right-to-Work states rated their current contracts' working conditions, number of hours, job security, healthcare benefits, wages and overtime wages highly. While many were satisfied with workplace training, vacation days, sick days, and their pension plans, about half of employees rated programs for continuing education, promotion systems, pay raises for cost of living increases, and bonus pay poorly.

A majority said that their union provided several protections, including protecting them from employer actions (discipline or firing), ensuring their employer abides by their contract, and improving safety at their workplace. One-in-ten experienced a contract violation (Union, 10%; Right-to-Work, 8%), with about half pleased with how it was resolved (Union, 48%; Right-to-Work, 52%).

Although union members surveyed in Union and Right-to-Work states mirrored each other demographically, only nominal differences were found between the responses from employees in Union and Right-to-Work states. In several instances, a slightly higher percentage of workers from Right-to-Work states provided favorable ratings of their union's role and performance.

- · For instance, 68 percent of union members in Right-to-Work states were satisfied with the wage component of their contract, compared to 67 percent in Union states;
- 77 percent of union members in Right-to-Work states were satisfied with the working conditions set by their contract, compared to 71 percent of those in Union states;
- Similarly, 59 percent of union members in Right-to-Work states reported that their union was helpful in improving workplace safety, compared to 57 percent in Union states.

Union members in both Right-to-Work and Union states expressed broad support for the opportunity to regularly vote on whether to keep representation from their current union (a process often called "recertification.") Over 70 percent of all respondents approved of such a legal change. Additionally, union members were supportive of a policy called "Workers Choice," where employees who opt out of the union can represent themselves with employers.

The data from this study suggests that there is no appreciable difference between union employees from Union and Right-to-Work states and that union employees in Right-to-Work states are not inadvertently suffering from the prohibition of union security agreements. There is also significant interest among union employees in all states in certain labor law reforms that would give them greater ability to select their representation.



SURVEYING THE IMPACT OF UNION REPRESENTATION IN UNION AND RIGHT-TO-**WORK STATES**

The union membership rate, or the percentage of wage and salary workers who were union members, was 10.7 percent in 2016 and has declined steadily in recent decades.1 This year, Kentucky and Missouri adopted Right-to-Work laws, bringing the total number to 28 states that have enacted legislation that prohibits union security agreements that compel employees in unionized workplaces to pay dues or fees, as a condition of their employment.

Some suggest that the decline in union membership has been exacerbated by Right-to-Work laws. Opponents argue that these laws contribute to lower wages and benefits, provide less employee protections, and discourage companies from negotiating with their workforce.

It is unclear whether these claims are representative of the experiences of employees from unionized workforces. The issue is: Do employees from Union and Right-to-Work states have differing opinions on the effectiveness of their union representation?

To better understand how employees from unionized workforces view the role and effectiveness of their unions, a national survey of 1,687 union employees was administered in Union and Right-to-Work states.

METHODS

An online survey of 1,687 union employees was conducted between April 24, 2017 and May 2, 2017. Table 1 (on the next page) provides a demographic profile of employees from 23 Union states and the District of Columbia, as well as Missouri and Kentucky, who only recently enacted Rightto-Work laws (943, MOE: +/- 3%), and 25 Right-to-Work (744, MOE: +/- 4%) states (that had Rightto-Work laws effective at the time of the survey).2

Participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk and screened for union workplaces. To ensure an adequate cross-section, state quotas were established based on current union representation. As the survey progressed, states that received the target response rate were closed on the survey form. Completed responses were further verified by union name and local number. Each qualified respondent was paid \$2 for participating in this survey.

Overall, the samples for Union and Right-to-Work states mirror each other demographically, suggesting that the respondents from Union and Right-to-Work states are very similar in this sample. The majority are dues paying members, work for private sector unions, and primarily represent service providers or goods-producing companies. Respondents included a mix of genders and total household incomes. On average, they paid \$402.73 in annual union dues and are represented by 254 different unions (including separate union locals).

CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

Employees were asked to rate how effective their union was in its most recent contract negotiation, how satisfied they are with the outcome of those negotiations and how they view the various elements of their current contract.

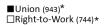
Negotiation Process

As Table 2 (on the next page) shows, employees give their union high marks for both how well the contract was negotiated and what was in it, regardless of whether they are in Union or Right-to-Work states. About one-in-ten thought they were not effective and were not at all satisfied.

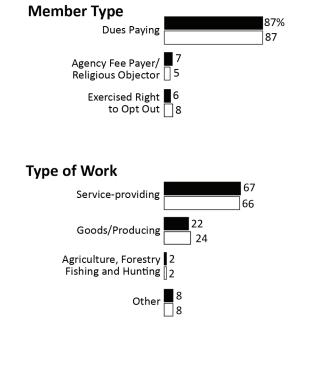
¹U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Economic News Release," January 26, 2017.

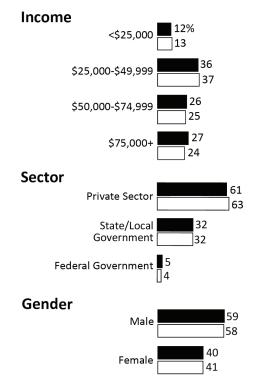
²In separate results not reported here, 117 surveyed members who had opted out of their union were excluded. The results did not change meaningfully, with no more than a one-percentage-point swing occurring.

Table 1 **Respondent Demographic Profile**





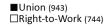


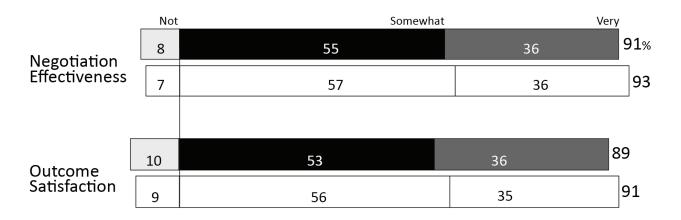


^{*}As of December 31, 2016.



Table 2 **Contract Negotiation Effectiveness and Satisfaction**





While about one-third thought the negotiations were "very effective" or are "very satisfied" with the outcome of their most recent negotiation, there are some differences based on demographics:

- More individuals working for goods-producing companies think their union is "very effective" (Union, 42%; Right-to-Work, 48%) and are "very satisfied" (Union, 44%; Right-to-Work, 45%) that those in other sectors.
- · Respondents from households with higher incomes—especially those in Union states (44%)—were more likely to rate the negotiations as being "very effective" than those from Right-to-Work states (32%).
- Likewise, those who pay annual union dues of \$2,000 or more were much more likely to say that their union was "very effective" in its most recent negotiation (Union, 48%; Rightto-Work, 54%) than those paying less.

Evaluation of Current Contract

Next, employees were asked to rate 14 components of their current contract, which is presented in Table 3 (on next page). Overall, union employees gave mixed reviews about their contracts.

- Most employees thought that their working conditions, number of hours, job security, healthcare benefits, wages, and overtime were the strongest parts of their contracts, and a majority rated them as "good" to "excellent," regardless of Union or Right-to-Work state.
- Employees were divided on training in the workplace, vacation days, sick days, and their pension plans, with most rating them positively, but sizeable groups rating them as "fair" or "poor."
- · Programs for continuing education, promotion systems, pay raises for cost of living increases, and bonus payments were the weakest parts of employees' contracts, with a majority rating them as "fair" or "poor."

When considering differences by Union and Right-to-Work states, these results suggest that employees in Right-to-Work states are equally—if not more—pleased with the components of their contract. In most cases, union employees in Right-to-Work states rated each component a few points higher than did union employees from Union states. Conversely, more union employees in Union than Right-to-Work states tended to be dissatisfied with components of their contract, rating each item as "fair" or "poor."

Table 3 **Evaluation of Contract Components**

■Union (943) □Right-to-Work (744)

Working Conditions	Poor 28 4 24 24 4 20	Fair Good Excellent 45 26 71% 51 26 77
Number of Hours	28 4 24 28 4 24	49 22 71 48 23 71
Job Security	32 7 <u>25</u> 30 7 23	45 <u>24</u> 69 42 <u>27</u> 69
Healthcare Benefits	36 8 28 35 7 28	41 23 64 40 25 65
Wages	32 4 28 30 4 26	49 18 67 51 18 68
Overtime Wages	37 10 27 37 10 27	38 26 64 37 26 63
Training in the Workplace	40 10 30 33 8 25	41 17 58 44 22 66
Vacation Days	39 10 29 38 8 30	40 20 60 41 21 62
Sick Days	42 10 32 39 10 29	38 20 58 41 19 60
Pension Plan	44 12 32 41 10 31	38 17 55 42 16 58
Continuing Education	52 20 32 46 16 30	33 15 48 38 15 53
Promotion System	53 <u>16</u> 37 49 <u>13</u> 36	35 11 46 38 12 50
Pay raises for Cost of Living Increases	54 19 35 52 17 35	33 12 45 33 15 48
Bonus Payment 60 58	30 30 3 24 34	28 12 40 29 13 42



UNION PROTECTIONS

In addition to negotiating contracts, unions provide workers several other benefits, including resolving disputes, improving safety, and other important working conditions and rules. Respondents were asked if their union was helpful in these areas. Table 4 provides a summary of the findings and again shows nominal differences between Union and Right-to-Work states, with slightly more union employees from Right-to-Work states saying their union was helpful.

Overall, two-thirds find their union helpful in protecting them from employer actions, such as discipline or firing (Union, 66%; Right-to-Work, 69%) and ensuring their employer abides by their contract (Union, 63%; Right-to-Work, 65%). More than half believe their union helps improve safety at their workplace (Union, 57%; Right-to-Work, 59%) and resolves conflicts with co-workers and management (Union, 56%; Right-to-Work, 56%). Less than half think their union helps get proper training for their job (Union, 41%; Right-to-Work, 45%).

CONTRACT VIOLATIONS AND OFFICER ELECTIONS

In both Union and Right-to-Work states, about one-in-ten union employees reported contract violations, as shown in Table 5, on the next page (Union, 10%; Right-to-Work, 10%). By type of union membership, one-in-four of agency fee payers or religious objectors reported a problem, regardless of whether they were in a Union or Right-to-Work state (Union, 25%; Right-to-Work, 23%).

Of those who said there were violations, half were pleased with how their union addressed this problem (Union, 48%; Right-to-Work, 52%), while many were not (Union, 42%; Right-to-Work, 40%) or were unsure (Union, 10%; Right-to-Work, 8%).

Additionally, these employees from Right-to-Work states were significantly more pleased with both local and national union officer election results. Regardless of the state, nearly two-thirds or more were pleased with the results of local union officer elections (Union, 64%; Right-to-Work, 80%), while half or more were pleased with their national union officer elections (Union, 51%; Right-to-Work, 66%).

UNION MANAGEMENT

Finally, employees were asked their opinions about union management, in terms of management compensation, national leadership and union selection, and opting out, which are presented in Table 6 (on page 9).



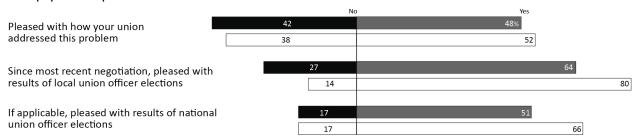
■Union (943) □Right-to-Work (744)



Point increase/decrease from total Union and Right-to-Work responses for dues paying members (Union, 817; Right-to-Work, 644), agency fee or religious objectors (Union, 65; Right-to-Work, 40) and those who exercised right to opt out of all dues (Union, 59; Right-to-Work, 58). Positive numbers represent percentages higher than the totals and negative numbers represent percentages lowers than totals.

Table 5 **Resolution of Violations and Elections** For Employees who Reported a Contract Violation





Management Compensation

Union employees from Union and Right-to-Work states are in general agreement on union management compensation. While over half think they are paid "just enough" (Union, 59%; Right-to-Work, 57%), one-fourth think they are paid "too much" (Union, 28%; Right-to-Work, 27%), and one-in-ten think they are paid "too little" (Union, 12%; Rightto-Work, 15%).

National Leadership

Less than half of union employees report that they participated in their national union officer elections (Union, 45%; Right-to-Work, 46%). Considering differences by respondent profile, about half of dues paying members participated (Union, 46%; Right-to-Work, 47%), while agency fee payers or religious objectors are more likely to have participated in union officer elections (Union, 55%; Right-to-Work, 55%) than are those who have exercised the right to opt out of their union (Union, 25%, Right-to-Work, 26%).

Additionally, less than half of union employees believe that their national leadership shares their concerns (Union, 43%; Right-to-Work, 49%), while one-in-five do not (Union, 18%; Right-to-Work, 17%) and one-third are unsure (Union, 38%; Rightto-Work, 33%). Those who pay \$2,000 or more in annual dues are more likely to agree (Union, 52%; Right-to-Work, 57%) than are those who pay less than \$500 annually (Union, 41%; Right-to-Work, 39%).

Union Selection and Opting Out

Three-fourths of surveyed union employees think that they should have the right to vote regularly on which union represents them (Union, 71%; Right-to-Work, 74%).

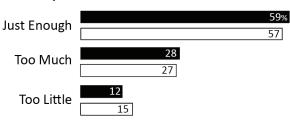
Furthermore, most agree that employees who opt out of union membership and stop paying dues should represent themselves in negotiations (Union, 77%; Right-to-Work, 77%).



Table 6 **Union Leadership**

■Union (943) □Right-to-Work (744)

Management Compensation



	e of Mem Agency Fee		
3	-28	-2	
2	-22	0	
0	-8	5	
-1	6	6	
-2	34	-2	
-1	13	-5	

^{*}Point increase/decrease from total Union and Right-to-Work responses for dues paying members (Union, 817; Right-to-Work, 644), agency fee or religious objectors (Union, 65; Right-to-Work, 40) and those who exercised right to opt out of all dues (Union, 59; Right-to-Work, 58). Positive numbers represent percentages higher than the totals and negative numbers represent percentages lowers than totals.

National Leadership

Participated in your national union officer elections

Believe the national leadership shares your concerns about your union

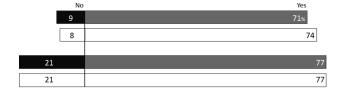
Feel there is internal corruption within your union or representatives

	No	1	Yes
49			45%
50			46
	18		43
	17		49
52		24	
56		24	

Union Selection and Opting Out

Employees should be able to have regular votes to choose which union represents them

An employee that opts out of membership and stops paying dues should represent him/herself in employer negotiations



Note: Union members who were unsure or did not respond are not included in this graph.

NOTES

