Analyzing Union Voting by Workforce Sector in the 2016 Presidential Election

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Abstract

In the 2016 presidential election, there was evident change in the voting behavior of both blue and white collar workers in states such as Ohio and Pennsylvania that assisted in Donald Trump's win. While there was some realignment in party backing in a handful of unions, there were a number of union members that went against their union recommendation and voted for Trump.

I research how union members in private and public sectors voted in the 2012 and 2016 election to compare the rate of union members defecting to Trump across the various sectors of the workforce.

In order to do so, I collected data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) to analyze two specific sectors, private and public, and evaluate their level of unionization in those states. I then compared this measure with voting data from 2012 and 2016.

I expect to see that private unions will have an increase in support for Trump over Romney, and public unions will have somewhat less of an increase towards Trump.

Introduction

Labor unions have consistently played a role in all levels of political elections over the past century. From mobilizing members and non-members through GOTV (Get Out To Vote) efforts such as door knocking and cold calling, to helping fundraise for candidates and super-PACS, they still help significantly despite the decrease in union membership over the years. According to the National Institute of Labor Relations Research, big labor political spending exceeded \$1.7 billion dollars in the 2016 election, with the majority of that money going towards the Democratic candidates. (Loos, 2017, p. Par. 3)

Specifically Democrats and labor unions have always had somewhat of a relationship between one another since unions first began, but their bond did not strengthen until around the 1930's during the Great Depression. Known as being one of the "champions" of labor unions, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's platform was to help reinvigorate the U.S. economy during one of its hardest times, and wanted to start by helping labor unions in any way possible. Despite the negative attacks towards the New Deal and the creation of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), union membership and economic growth began to grow hand in hand. This not only led FDR to be elected for 3 more terms, but it also created a stronger bond between unions and Democrats.

In 1980, Ronald Reagan and his political campaign was known to be the metaphorical throwing a monkey wrench in a washing machine when it came to that relationship between Democrats and unions, when he defeated the Democratic candidate and former President Jimmy Carter, winning 44 states and their 489 electoral votes. With his public approval rating of the Carter administration plummeting over his term and into the 1980 election, this allowed Reagan to earn 45% of the union household vote (Roper Center For Public Opinion Research, 1980),

which was one of the highest ever for a Republican presidential candidate. Reagan was even able to nab the Teamsters endorsement, which is still one of the largest labor unions in the U.S today. Since the Reagan administration, unions had quickly shifted its votes back towards the Democratic candidates for almost 3 more decades.

That is, until the 2016 election, when Donald Trump's pro-industry and pro-jobs platform began appealing to not only many blue-collar workers, but to many white collar workers as well. According to the Washington Post, this allowed Trump to "Get Reagan like support from Union Households", raking in 43% of the union vote. (Roper Center For Public Opinion Research, 2016)

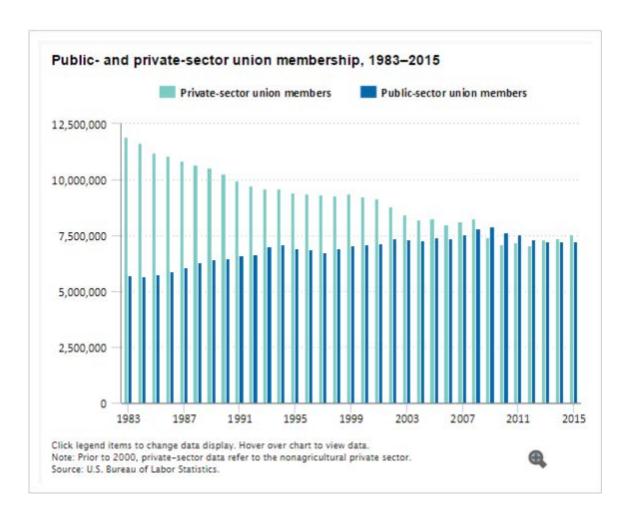
I will examine Donald Trump's disruption of the union vote by evaluating the rates of unionization in both public and private sector unions in all 50 states, and then comparing it to the change in vote towards the Republican candidates from the 2012 and 2016 election. My hypothesis' will be that *states with higher rates of private unionization (blue collar workers) will have an increase in support for Trump over Romney*, while *states with higher rates of public unionization (white collar workers) will show less support for Trump over Romney*.

As a point of clarification, private and public unions are defined as two separate entities: public unions are a trade union which primarily represents the interests of employees within public sector or governmental organizations. These jobs include all forms of Government workers (city/municipal, state, and federal). These can comprise of a wide variety of different job titles that range from garbage men, police officers, teachers, all the way to state and federal administrators. The Federal Bureau of Investigations is even a part of this criteria, who are covered under the FBI Agents Association.

Private unions are union members that work for for-profit businesses that are not owned and operated by the government. These jobs include factory workers, service industry workers, construction workers, miners, pilots, and etc.

Of the two groups, public union membership was once a lot more minimal than private unionization was, especially during and after WWII, but in the past half-century, public unionization has actually surpassed the private union powerhouse, and now remains at a steady number, with small amounts of fluctuation in recent years, as cited in the line graph on page 6. "white collar" jobs refer to public unionization because of how many of these positions require a college education and are less labor intensive, while "blue collar" refers to private unionization because they do not require a college education and are more labor intensive. That being said, "white collar" and "blue collar" jobs can be found in both public and private sector's.

In the figure on page 6, which is taken from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, shows a steady decrease in private unionization since 1983, while public unionization began to increase in membership during that same period. The decrease over the past couple of decades can be attributed to a number of reasons, such as automation and globalization (the process of organizations moving overseas), but also the intimidation of many of these corporations to deunionize many of its members. This has led to only about 6-7 percent of private sector workers across the United States (Moffitt & Rosenfeld, 2016, p. Par. 1) And while there has been a slight decrease for public unionization since around 2009, public unions are much stronger and less easy to destabilize because a large portion of these jobs are all government-based.



Literature Review

Understanding Labor Unions and Their Role in Politics

To start off, labor unions serve multiple purposes, most of which revolve around protecting its members by improving work conditions, hours, and creating equal and fair pay. Ultimately, they are meant to protect the corresponding interests of the members and in their respective industry. They do so primarily through collective bargaining negotiations with employers, but also by staying active within local, state and federal politics.

Tracy Roof discusses the "complex interplay between unions and Congress, showing the effects of each other on the other, how the relationship has evolved, and the resulting political outcome." (Roof, 2011, p. 16) One major area that Roof elaborates on is union voting during congressional elections, and while they are not mobilized as much as they are during presidential elections, they still push their members to go vote in these elections in support of candidates who best serve their interests, especially in highly unionized states. He also evaluates union role in specific labor law reform, health care policy, and economic policies and their influence in the political arena.

One other major role that labor unions play in political campaigns and elections is financially supporting candidates through monetary donations. According to Veronique De Rugy in the National Review, "Fourteen of America's 25 biggest campaign donors are unions", which lists of some of the largest contributors to political campaigns. This list includes private companies such as Microsoft, Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, and AT&T, to significant union groups like AFSCME (American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees), National Education Association, United Auto Workers, and American Medical Association. Among that list, AFSCME is one of the largest union contributors, totaling more than \$60 million dollars in

union political contributions, right below ACTBlue, which is a nonprofit technology organization that provides software for democrats to raise money on the internet. Additionally, in research done by Peter Francia, he presents evidence that organized labor's influence in the U.S. election remains significant by taking data from the American National Election Study and the National Election Pool, and finds "(1) union households, despite drops in union membership as a percentage of the workforce, have remained a sizeable percentage of the U.S. electorate, especially in regions outside the south; (2) Unions boost voter turnout, including among those from traditionally underrepresented demographics and (3) unions continue to produce a strong Democratic vote in presidential and congressional elections, and boost the Democratic vote among middle-income whites – a critical 'swing' constituency." (Francia, 2012, p. 1) This shows that not only do unions have high influence in mobilizing voters, but they also still have influence in supporting democratic political candidates through a number of means and channels, including through monetary donations.

One major example of this would be the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), which is "a federation of 60 national and international labor unions that represent over 13 million working women and men." (Bloomberg, 2017, p. Par. 10) The AFL-CIO is a large, powerful force during election time, and do a lot of behind the scenes work in order to mobilize voters. "In the 2000 Presidential election, AFL-CIO unions made 8 million phone calls to members, sent out 12 million pieces of mail, distributed 14 million leaflets at union workplaces once a week from September to Election Day and spent more than \$43 million dollars to help win a popular vote victory for the Democratic Presidential Candidate." (Freeman, 2003, p. 10) Many of these unions also donate large sums of money either to political action committees, or "Super PACs" that help support either Democrat and/or Republican

campaigns, especially during Presidential elections. In the 2016 election, the AFL-CIO donated \$16,013,719 to Democratic Super PACS in support of Hillary Clinton. (Federal Election Commission, 2017) Additionally, when evaluating the top 10 union contributors (both blue and white collar unions) for the 2016 elections, \$218,946,267 was donated in support of Democratic/Liberal Super PACS/Campaigns, while those same 10 contributors only donated \$4,275,744 to Republican/Conservative Super PACS/Campaigns. (Federal Election Commission, 2017) According to the National Institute of Labor Relations "Big Labor" spent upwards of \$1.7 Billion during the 2016 election campaign, primarily to the Democratic candidate. So how did the candidate with not only the higher monetary backing, but also the backing of a number of different unions, lose the Presidential election? (Loos, 2017, p. Par. 3)

Changes in Union Voting Over the Past Decade (and Low Union Turnout)

The 2016 Presidential election was quite unpredictable in a number of different of aspects. The outcome of the both Republican and Democratic primaries, the increase in third-party voters since the 1996 (Dave Leip's Atlas, 2017), and the overall general election results. One might infer that these can all be viewed as having a causal relationship because of the "upset" that occurred in both primaries which led to a major split between parties in the presidential election, and ultimately resulted in both parties and their members splitting from their party lines and voting third party. Regardless, the election in itself definitely took many by surprise. One point that sticks out most is how unpredictable the American voters really were during the 2016 Presidential elections, especially those who belong to a union. As previously stated, unions and their relationship with the Democratic Party has always been a strong one, except for in the Reagan vs. Carter election, which temporarily pivoted the union political stance from Democrat to Republican. And while there has been an evaluation in other research as to

what different factors played into such a turning point the relationship between unions and their change in affiliation in both the 1980 and 2016, there hasn't been much research as to which specific sectors have changed.

One thing that did not change was the voter turnout compared to 2012. According to Michael D. Regan from PBS, "estimates show more than 58 percent of eligible voters went to the polls during the 2016 election, nearly breaking even with the turnout rate set during the last presidential election in 2012. However, many union leaders were surprised to find out that many of their own members either decided to stay at home, or voted for the opposing candidate on November 6th." (Regan, 2016, p. Par. 2) Many articles raved that "Organized labor is searching for answers after union households failed to turn out for Hillary Clinton despite a massive voter mobilization effort – a sharp departure from decades of union support for Democratic presidential candidates" and "Clinton outperformed Trump among union households by just 8 percent, the smallest Democratic advantage since Walter Mondale's failed campaign against Ronald Reagan in 1984." (Hesson & Levine, 2016, p. Par. 3) This begs the question as to why voter turnout was so high, yet union turnout was so low.

One problem that the Clinton campaign ran into during the 2016 election was the fact that Donald Trump's economic platform resonated immensely with blue-collar workers and their union leaders. Like Reagan, "Mr. Trump has championed many issues straight out of the organized labor's wish list – he is pressing manufacturers not to ship jobs overseas, he has promised \$1 trillion in infrastructure spending, he has threated a 35% tariff to slow Mexican imports and he has vowed to overhaul NAFTA. Not only was he able to gain the support of many of these blue-collar workers, but in pursuing this dream list, Trump hopes 'to keep their support to ensure a lasting Republican majority.'" (Greenhouse, 2016, p. 2)

And as if losing blue-collar workers weren't the last of the DNC's concern, "USA's teachers unions are wondering what happened to their chosen candidate – and how so many of their members could have voted for her opponent." (Toppo, 2016, p. 1) Despite early and eager endorsements of Clinton by both unions, the nation's school teachers and other school workers contributed substantially to Trump's Nov. 8th win. About one in five American Federation of Teachers members who cast a ballot voted for Trump. Among the larger National Education Association, which comprises more than 3 million members, more than one in three who voted did so for the billionaire developer." (Toppo, 2016, p. 3) This caught many by surprise, especially since the education budget typically is first on the chopping block when it comes to federal budgeting.

So why are many of these pro-democrat unions beginning to yet again change their position on the political spectrum?

In research done by Jan E. Leighly and Jonathan Nagler, they test "for the distinct effects of union membership and union strength on the probabilities of members and non-members voting, and then test whether the effect of individual union membership and overall union strength varies across income levels." (Leighley & Nagler, 2006, p. 1) Furthermore, they research the causal relationship between unions and their effect on voter turnout, and find that "the decline in union membership since 1964 has affected the aggregate turnout of both low and middle-income individuals more than the aggregate turnout of high-income individuals." (Leighley & Nagler, 2006, p. 1) They find that that unionization does in fact have a positive effect among all income levels, and that decrease in unionization since 1964 has ultimately negatively affected voter turnout.

A similar research paper arose 5 years earlier, called "Organized Labor and Electoral Participation in American National Elections", supports Leighly and Nagler's test and sees a causal relationship between union member and voter turnout (both union and non-union members). He believes that "unions still play an important role in the democratic process through their ability to mobilize both their members and the general electorate. They do so by routinely staffing party- or candidate-run phone banks or canvassing patrols, all of which may promote interest and provide information about said candidates." (Radcliff, 2001) However, the decreases in total union membership also decreases the amount of participants to help with these campaigns, and ultimately affect voter turnout overall.

Jake Rosenfeld and Patrick Denice (2017) further research the vote-share of unions from 1980 to 2016 between the two parties, and found that in the 2016 election, union voters only supported the democratic nominee over the republican by 8 points, where as in the 1992 Presidential election, union households supported Clinton over George H. W. Bush by over 30 points. (Rosenfeld & Denice, 2017, p. 3) This begins showing a steady shift among union members moving away from its once beloved Democratic party over the past couple of decades. That being said, one of the key areas to look into are how the highly unionized states such as the rust belt performing when it comes to presidential elections. Paul Clark researches a number of swing states that are also highly unionized, and further tests Rosenfeld and Denice's hypothesis' by zeroing in on states such as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. He does so primarily to see if the 2016 election "is a singular anomaly resulting from the unique candidacy of Donald Trump, or a longer-term realignment of voters." (Clark, 2017, p. 1) He found that there was not enough evidence to determine whether or not this realignment will persist, but he does attribute much of Donald Trump's win to the fact that he knew exactly what these union members wanted

to hear. "He spoke passionately to them about their most basic fears and concerns – safety, security, and jobs. His rhetoric about the system being 'rigged' against working class Americans and his targeting of straw men who threatened their way of life –immigrants, terrorists, the media, and liberal elites – rang true to these voters." (Clark, 2017, p. 4) On top of that, in a mirror image of Jimmy Carter's mistake of overlooking the union vote, Hillary Clinton neglected to appeal to unions and instead decided to focus on other groups, which ultimately tarnished her pro-union credibility. With all these factors considered, Clark states that "The 2018 and 2020 elections will be a pivotal moment in the political history of the nation. If the working-class voters who put him in office come to believe that a Trump presidency and the Republican Party did not advance their interests as they had been promised, they will again look for change." (Clark, 2017, p. 1). Conversely, if he does follow through with many of his promises, Trump may be able to clench their vote yet again in the 2020 Presidential election.

As previously stated, there has been little research in understanding how separate sectors in unions vote. While in the past, union support has been generalized as one entire group, there are hundreds of different unions, supporting all different kinds of professions. From white collar jobs such as real-estate agents, teachers, and even pharmacists, to blue-collar workers such as factory workers, postal workers, and police officers, there are wide variety of different kinds of unions that look out for the interests of very different lines of work. John Camobreco and Michelle Barnello are two political scientists who found the value in understanding these different sectors, and evaluate whether public sector members (which are more white collar than private union members) tend to support Democrats more. They research this question in a period from the 1950's to the early 2000's, and found that support among unionized workers that supported Democratic presidential candidates in the early 2000's primarily came from college

educated and professional white union members, which shows a reversal since the 1950's (meaning that white uneducated blue-collar workers were once the group that supported the Democratic candidate.) But what about in the 2016 presidential election? Was Donald Trump able to gain support from both the private and public union sectors in the United States, or was he able to only get support from one specific sector?

This brings me to the research at hand: states with higher rates of private unionization (blue collar workers) will have an increase in support for Trump over Romney, while states with higher rates of public unionization (white collar workers) will show less support for Trump over Romney.

The reason behind this hypothesis' is to gauge both sectors in voting activity during the 2012 and 2016 Presidential elections to better understand how they reacted during these elections, and determine whether or not they had an influence in the overall outcome of the 2016 Presidential election.

Methods

In the data used, I combine two different sources of data in order to test my hypothesis.

The first source of data that I use is the Current Population Survey data from the Bureau of Labor statistics. This data contains all of the union membership that seperates into two different sectors: public and private unions. It additionally splits it into two more narrow groups from that data, which are private construction and private manufacturing unions. However, for the purpose of this study, I decided to leave the types of unions more broad.

The CPS survey keeps track of all of the current members of both private and public union members in a state-by-state basis, and totals out to be 7,191,185 public union members and 7,586,637 private union members from all 50 states.

The second set of data comes from Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections, which divides all of the voting data also on a state by state basis. I will be using data from 2012 and 2016, specifically the Republican candidate vote share. In that data, I subtract Donald Trump's vote share by Mitt Romney's vote share. For example, if Donald Trump earns 53% of the vote in Wisconsin, and Mitt Romney and earned 46% of the vote share, the data would show a +7% increase for Donald Trump when using the SPSS application.

I combine these two different sources of data to evaluate states and their total private and public unionization, while cross-referencing this with the change in 2012 and 2016 vote share data. I analyze it by using scatterplots to create a visual representation of the data, along with creating a correlation matrix to test the strength of these two variables to see if the relationship is statistically significant.

I also highlight a number of different swing states, since many of these states played a crucial role in Donald Trump's win in the 2016 Presidential election.

Data Analysis

I first look at the scatter plots in order to determine whether or not they confirm my hypothesis. In order for these scatter plots to follow my hypothesis, more unionization, in states with an increase in Republican vote share between 2016 compared to 2012. When looking at a visual scatterplot, the area that best fits my hypothesis would be if the points were to increase towards the top right corner of the scatterplots.

Hypothesis 1: States with higher rates of private unionization will have an increase in support for Trump over Romney

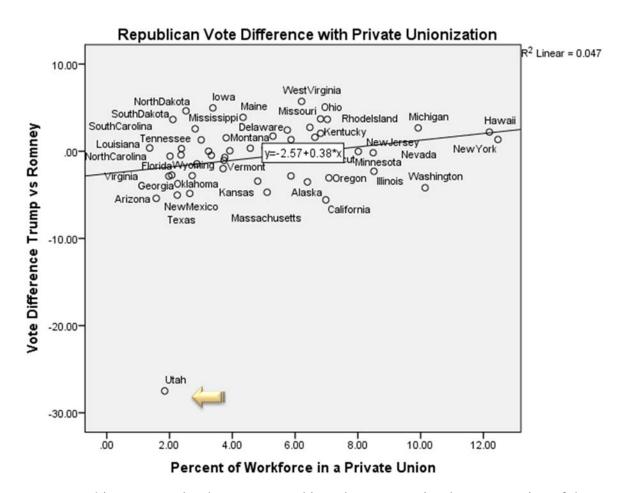


Figure 1 is a scatter plot that was created in order to get a visual representation of the data collected. One point of interest that sticks out right away is the state of Utah. In the 2012

election, Utah voted heavily for Mitt Romney because of his religious ties to the state (since the state has the largest demographic of Mormons in the United States, and his alma mater is Brigham Young University). The voter share for Romney ended up being over 70% in the election, which ended up being a 25% change from 2012 to 2016, as well as the independent candidate, who earned 21% of the vote share, ultimately created a heavily skewed scatterplot. While it gives somewhat of a perspective of the distribution of union members in the private workforce, I decide to remove the state of Utah in the next figure so that I can better identify each state and their placement on the scatterplot.

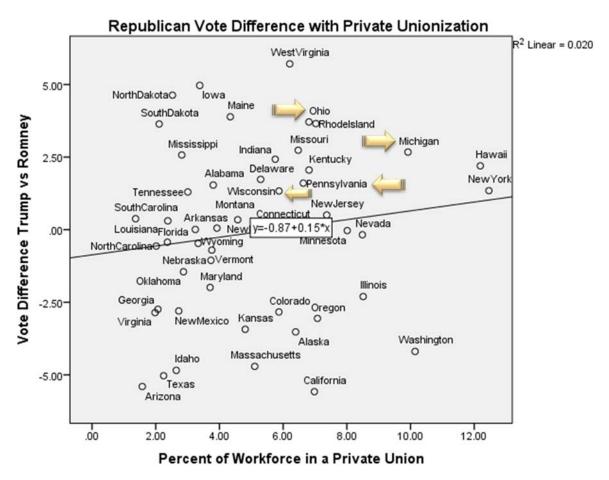


Figure 2 is a scatter plot with all states except for the state of Utah. At first glance, you can already distinguish a positive slope that is not very significant. While the slope is going in the right direction, there is high amounts of dispersion all over the scatterplot, resulting in a weak

correlation between the two variables. Among the 50 states, roughly 22 states are under 4% private unionization, and only 6 of them are at high amounts of private unionization.

Additionally, between the moderate to high unionized states, only about 10 of them increased in support towards Trump, but half of those states are still invalid towards this hypothesis because in order for them to be true, they need to

In the 2016 Presidential election, the swing states included Iowa, Florida, Nevada, Colorado, North Carolina, Virginia, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. When evaluating these states in Figure 2, there are a handful of these swing states that follow this hypothesis, which include states such as Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin. That being said, while these states have a positive relationship with the hypothesis at hand, it is still a weak relationship, and doesn't necessarily mean that the hypothesis can be accepted. In fact, the rest of the swing states are distributed all over the rest of the scatter plot, mostly outside of the criteria of being "acceptable" in this hypothesis. For instance, Colorado is a swing state that falls under the vote difference towards Romney, while states such as Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia not only being negative in the vote difference towards Trump, but also having low private unionization to begin with.

In regards to all the states including the swing states, there are only 7 states that actually agree with the hypothesis, but again, having a weak correlation with the hypothesis. These states are Michigan, Hawaii, Ohio, Rhode Island, Missouri, and Kentucky.

One last interesting point of interest would be the state of New York, which is Donald Trump's home state, and also the domain for most of his businesses. With high amounts of unionization, there was surprisingly little change in vote difference from 2012 to 2016. And while there was a positive increase, it still wasn't by much.

Hypothesis 2: States with higher rates of public unionization will also show less support for Trump over Romney.

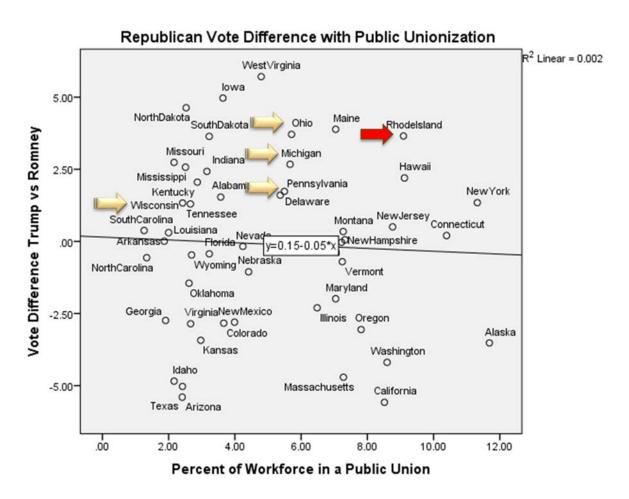


Figure 3 pertains to the second hypothesis, in which it depicts public unionization and the vote difference. Similar to the Figure 2, it leaves out Utah again as it is an outlier. At first glance, you can see a downward slope in the scatter plot, with a little bit higher amount of dispersion than in the private union scatter plot. In Figure 3, it again singles out the 4 important swing states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin, along with the state of Rhode Island being marked with a red arrow. Of those four states, Pennsylvania and Michigan both shifted heavily to

the left, meaning that there were lower amounts of public unionization than there were private unionization.

Additionally, there were more states that shifted to the bottom right corner of the scatter plot, resembling that despite high unionization in those states, there was a negative percent in vote difference towards Trump. However, more of the swing states did appear higher on the y-axis than in private unions, meaning that there was a positive increase in voter share towards Trump. That being said, the scatter plot goes against what the hypothesis states because although it is looking for "less" of an increase than in private unionization, it is still looking for an increase rather than decrease, which is what the scatter plot is resembling. In order to justify this, I will look at the correlation matrix.

Correlation Strength of Unionization and Vote				
	Vote Difference Trump vs Romney	Percent of Workforce in a Private Union	Percent of Workforce in a Public Union	
Vote Difference	1	1. 0.141	-0.048	
Trump vs Romney		2. 0.333	0.746	

Figure 4 is a correlation matrix that measures the strength of the correlation between 2 variables numerically. A correlation matrix uses a scale from -1 to 1, with the positive and negative sign signifying the direction in which it is going. In Figure 4, labels 1 and 2 annotate the 2 values that represent the first hypothesis, correlating the strength of private unions and the vote difference from 2012 to 2016. Label 1 shows the coefficient correlation, which is 0.141, which means that although it is a positive correlation, it is a very week one. Label 2 is the p-

value, which also helps to understand whether or not the correlation is statistically significant. Any value below .05 means that it is in fact statistically significant, while anything about .05 means that it is not statistically significant, and needs to be rejected. The p-value for private unions in this scenario is .333, which is well above the .05 acceptable p-value, meaning that this hypothesis is to *be rejected* because it is not statistically significant.

The second column is the correlation matrix that pertains to the second hypothesis, and the last figure in this thesis. Labels 3 and 4 again denote the correlation coefficient and the p-value. The coefficient is -0.048, which is a negative correlation, but also a very weak to no correlation at all because of how close to 0 it is. Additionally, the p-value is .746, which is well above what the normal acceptable p-value of .05 is, meaning that this hypothesis is also to be rejected and not statistically significant as well.

Conclusion

As determined by the correlation matrix and reinforced by the visual scatter plots, the relationship between the change in percent for both the Democratic candidate and the Republican candidate cannot be directly attributed to the amount of unionization in each state. While Donald Trump definitely appealed to a large number of the working class during the 2016 presidential election, unions only make up a small percentage of the vote in these elections, and continue to decrease in size, especially in the private sector.

Additionally, while there are still some specific types of unions in the public sector that can be identified as being more Republican such as police officers and fire fighters, public unions continue to be strongly Democrat.

Lastly, since the results would be inversely related if I was to conduct similar research on the democratic presidential candidates, this would mean that the scatter plots would be similar except with opposite effects. This means that the scatter plot of private unions would be a negative slope and then a positive slope for public unions. Unfortunately, those too, would show a very weak to no correlation at all.

The original idea behind this research question was to get a better grasp around how specific types of industries and their union members voted in the 2012 and 2016 election, and evaluate it by county instead of state. This would have given a much more narrow focus on both sides, but unfortunately was not feasible due to the lack of information that was available. In the future, it would be interesting to see what kind of change happens on a county or individual level, and evaluate it within each specific industry (such as service, construction, healthcare, etc.) so that you can get a more narrow focus of how these specific groups had voted in the 2016 election compared to the 2012 election.

Appendix

Figure 1

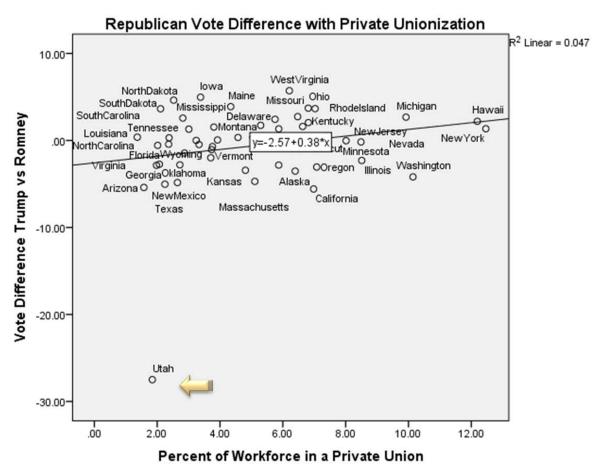


Figure 2

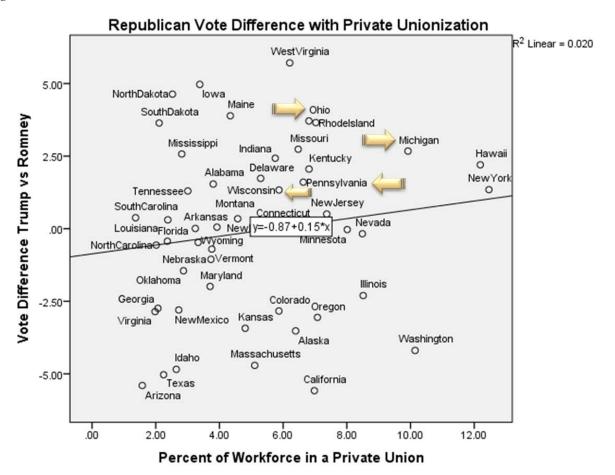


Figure 3

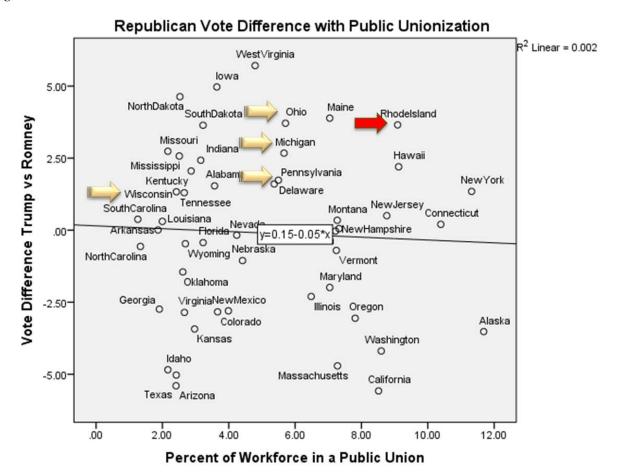


Figure 4

Correlation Strength of Unionization and Vote				
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Trump vs Romney		2. 0.333	0.746	

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