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Comparing Youth and Adult Desire for Unionization in Canada

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Abstract

Survey data for Canada indicates that youths have a stronger preference than adults for unionization. We show that most of that difference reflects the stronger desire of youths to have unions deal with workplace issues rather than a greater exposure of youths to these issues. In particular, youth preferences for unionization are influenced to a greater degree than for adults by social capital (e.g, familial union status and peer-group attitudes). The possible role of progressive HRM practices and legislative protection in substituting for unionization is also highlighted. Finally, implications of the findings for the future of unionization and organizing youth are discussed.

1. Introduction

It is often asserted that trade unions are outmoded institutions, unable to reach a new generation of workers imbued with individualistic values — values that are at odds with the collective ethos underpinning unionism (O'Bannon 2001: 100–1). These assertions attribute declines in union membership that are occurring across most of the Western industrialized world to young people's reduced desire for union membership. Such claims appear to be bolstered by the fact that the unionization rate for young workers (those aged 15–24) is less than half than that of adult workers (those aged 25+). In

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Editors' note: On 29 January 2002, Noah Meltz died in Jerusalem. The editors of this Special Edition and of the BJIR would like to recognize his contribution both to the conference from which the papers for this special edition were selected and to the Journal as a referee over many years, as well as his immense influence on Canadian industrial relations. The conference was organized to mark his retirement from the University of Toronto.

Authors' note: It has been a privilege and pleasure working with Noah on this and on our other collaborations. As a mentor and friend, he will be missed but never forgotten.

particular, Britain, Canada and the United States all display youth unionization rates that are two and a half times lower than those of adult workers (Bryson *et al*. 2001: 17).

However, to establish that the labour movement's future is at risk because young people are turning their backs on unions, one has to establish two things: first, that the youth–adult unionization differential is growing, and, second, that this is due to a lower desire for membership on the part of youths compared with adults. Our empirical evidence for Canada contradicts both of these claims. Specifically, we find: (1) that the youth–adult union density differential, while rising slightly during the mid-1990s, remained constant throughout the decade; (2) that the desire for union membership is actually higher among youths than it is among adults in our sample; and (3) that most of that greater demand reflects the stronger desire of youths to have unions deal with workplace issues, rather than the greater exposure of youths to these issues.

Our first result clearly undermines the main plank upon which the 'union movement is dead' view rests its case. Our second finding creates somewhat of a puzzle (since the actual unionization rate is much lower for youths compared with adults), but it is entirely consistent with a queuing model (Farber 1983: 1421; 2001: 17) of union membership determination in which unions do not represent all individuals who prefer to be in a unionized job because the costs to both individuals and unions of acquiring union status are unevenly spread across workers (for example, organizing costs are greater for some segments of employees than for others). Finally, our third finding — that predictors of desired unionization display greater response elasticity for youths as compared to adults — is compatible with a model where youth attitudes in general, and those towards union membership in particular, are relatively more malleable. Consequently, determinants of desired union membership, such as social capital and union voice procedures, should affect young workers to a greater extent than adults. The reasons for these relationships are outlined in detail later in the text.

The paper begins by examining unionization rates for youths and adults in Canada. We then turn to our specification of the determinants of preferences for unionization, first setting out theoretical considerations based on a comparison of economic and social psychological models of union attitude formation and then presenting our empirical model. Youth–adult differences in the factors that affect preferences for unionization are then discussed. The paper concludes with a summary of the main findings and a discussion of the implications of these preference differences for unions and management.

2. Unionization rates for youths and for adults

Union density rates in Canada have consistently been far lower for youths than for adults. Table 1 shows that in the decade of the 1990s youth density

ranged from almost one-half to one-third of the adult rate. This difference between youths and adults is much greater than the variation within the different adult subgroups where the unionization rates are fairly similar. As youths mature, the density rates of the older age cohort are similar to the density rates of the early adult age group in the preceding cohort. In 2000 the 25–44 age group had a union density rate very close to the rate for 25–44 year olds in 1990, and that figure is still almost double the youth rate in 1990 or 2000. The stability of the youth–adult density differential (last row of Table 1) implies that there is no disproportionate trend towards lower union membership among youths. It is this persistence of the large adult–youth density differential that requires explanation.

A number of reasons have been offered in the literature for the lower union density rates of youths compared with adults. In a Canadian context, membership and coverage tend to come with the job (Gallager 1999: 239; Payne 1989: 113). One obvious factor, contributing to low union density among the young, therefore, is that youths occupy jobs that have low union coverage rates, such as retail and private services (Meltz 1993: 209). As young cohorts age, they enter industries and occupations with higher density rates, and they also move from temporary jobs to more long-term jobs across a wider spectrum of industries, which again increases the likelihood of unionization.

It is also reasonable to expect that youths would have a lower preference for unionization than adults, since turnover rates are much higher among the young (Lowe 1998: 246), implying that young workers have a lower commitment to a job and are more inclined to exercise the exit option than the voice option when disapproving of working conditions. This higher

TABLE 1
Union Density in Canada by Age Group, 1990–2000 (%)[a]

Age group	*1990*	*1997*	*2000*
Total: 15+	35.2	31.1	29.9
Youth: 15–24	17.1	10.7	12.4
Adult:			
25+	38.7	35.7	33.6
25–44	36.7	31.8	30.3
45–54	44.9	44.1	41.5
55+	40.4	35.7	34.4
Δ [Adult–youth]	21.6	25.0	22.0

[a] Since January 1997, data on union membership have been collected as part of the Labour Force Survey (LFS), and these are used for our 1997 and 2000 data. The 1990 data are drawn from the Labour Market Activity Survey (LMAS), which was undertaken as a supplement to the monthly LFS. The LMAS is based on a sample of approximately 30,000 Canadian households, and the LFS on approximately 50,000 households. For 1990, the youngest age group was 17.

Source: Calculated from data given in *Perspectives on Labour and Income* (various issues): Statistics Canada 75–001-XPE: 1990 data from the Spring 1996 volume; 1997 data from the Winter 1997 volume; and 2000 data from the Autumn 2001 volume.

turnover of youths implies that their perceptions of the costs and benefits of unionization would be expected to differ from those of adults, especially if the benefits for youth tend to come in the distant future (Bain and Elias 1995: 81). It is to the determinants of those preferences that we now turn.

3. Determinants of preferences for unionization by youths and adults

The different preferences that youths and adults have towards unionization can be modelled from an economic framework that is complemented and enriched by a social psychological perspective. We begin with an economic analysis of preferences for unionization based on an expected utility approach advanced by Farber (2001: 16) and Riddell (1993: 117). Once we demonstrate how attitudes towards unionization enter the standard expected utility framework, Montgomery's (1999) social psychological model of self-concept formation will help us understand how these same preferences are shaped by family and the socialization process prior to, and during, the initial stages of a working career (e.g. Barling *et al*. 1991; Kelloway *et al*. 1996).

Attitudes and preferences are important, since they generally lead to the formation of a behavioural intention on the part of an individual, which, when afforded a sufficient degree of control over behaviour, will induce that individual to carry out their intentions when the opportunity arises (Ajzen 1991). Given that attitudes are important determinants of intentions, and that intentions are the immediate antecedents of behaviour (Sutton 1998), it is not surprising to find that positive attitudes towards unions tend to lead to pro-union actions, such as voting for unions in representation elections (Fiorito 1987: 282; Montgomery 1989). Attitudes towards unions, therefore, are an important ingredient in sustaining or replenishing membership.

An economic model of union preferences

Following Farber (1983: 1421) and Riddell (1993: 119), the conventional assumption among labour economists is that workers have stable preferences for unionization, and that individuals will prefer unionization if the expected utility of a union job exceeds that of a non-union job. This in turn depends upon the costs and benefits of unionization as affected by such factors as the expected union wage premium, and non-wage aspects of employment such as relationships with supervisors and chances for promotion or layoff. The utility associated with unionization will also be affected by unmeasured attitudes reflecting tastes or preferences towards union membership.

It is this latter inclination of an individual — to be either 'pro-union' or 'anti-union', independent of the benefits and costs of unionization — that is of particular relevance in the context of youth–adult differences in preferences for unionization. Traditionally, economists treat independent tastes for unionization as fixed, but such preference formation can be better under-

stood by extending the economic framework through social–psychological models of preference formation.

A social psychological model of union preference formation

Rather than utilizing a utility function, as economists do, social psychologists talk about the self and the process by which self-concepts are formed (Aronson 1988). We utilize that perspective by arguing that young workers start off essentially as 'black boxes' with no well defined self-concept concerning unionization. Their preferences concerning union membership are therefore malleable (Lowe and Rastin 2000: 203) and are substantially influenced by social background (e.g. whether or not a family member is a member of a union) and the attitudes of peers (e.g. whether family and friends are generally supportive of unions). The importance of family and the socialization process prior to, and during, the initial stages of a working career is emphasized, for example, in Barling *et al.* (1991) and Kelloway *et al.* (1996). The socialization process is further influenced by the nature of early workplace experiences (e.g. whether a worker is employed in a unionized or a non-unionized environment). The importance of initial exposures to unions and preferences for unionization throughout the life course is emphasized in Freeman and Diamond (2001), and for youths in particular by Fullagar and Barling (1989), Fullagar *et al.* (1995) and Payne (1989). Following Coleman (1988), this vector of various social factors that influence the demand for unionization can be grouped under the heading *social capital*.

Building upon this foundation of social capital, the socialization process for any given worker can be summarized using Montgomery's (1999: 6) attribution model of self-concept formation. The dynamics of the self-attribution model depend on the assumptions one makes about the *self-concept* and how well defined it is before a worker enters the labour market. A young worker with little or no employment experience has a different dynamic from an adult worker with many years of labour market experience. Youth preferences are established early and solidify with age and experience (Lowe and Rastin 2000: 216). The ordering of the feedback model reflects this process, with a young worker first influenced by social capital (e.g. familial union status and prevailing social and workplace norms), which leads to certain individual actions (e.g. applying for union jobs or participation in organizing drives). These actions are then internalized through *attributions* such as beliefs about the importance of loyalty to an employer or ideals concerning individual or collective solutions to workplace problems. Youth idealism in the unionization process is emphasized, for example, in Cregan and Johnston (1990). Finally, it is through these attributions that a pro- or anti-union self-concept is formed, which in turn feeds back into the initial social capital of the community, continuing to fuel the dynamic intergenerational process of preference formation outlined above. Summarizing the schematic laid out in Montgomery (1999: 6), the dynamic process moves from (1) social capital to (2) individual actions to (3) internalization through attribution formation to (4) self-concept formation,

which in turn feeds back into social capital formation in following periods.

The modelling framework above implies that, as workers mature and gain labour market experience, the proclivity to be for or against unionization becomes more inelastic (i.e. less responsive to alteration from social forces and prevailing workplace norms). As workers age, preferences become more fixed and less responsive to other variables. This has important implications for unions and their organizers, as it indicates that, although youths make up only one-fifth of all union members, they are attitudinally amenable to union membership, whereas adults appear to be less sensitive to altering their preferences for union representation based on factors found inside and outside the workplace.

4. Econometric analysis procedures

Our dependent variable is a measure of preferences for unionization based on the response to the survey question , 'All things considered, if you had a choice, would you personally prefer to belong to/remain in a labour union or not?' (Hereafter this is simply referred to as 'preferring a union'.) Logistic regression equations are estimated separately for youths and adults, based on the dichotomous dependent variable coded 1 if respondents would prefer to belong to a union, and 0 if not. The 12.8 per cent of respondents who indicated 'did not know' to the question on their preference for a union were omitted from the analysis, since they could not logically be grouped as being closer to either the 'yes' or the 'no' category, and a separate analysis of the 'did not know' category did not seem merited. The results are very similar if they are grouped with the respondents who indicated 'no'.

Our independent variables are drawn from survey responses that reflect the perceived costs and benefits of unionization for youth and adult workers. The independent variables are grouped into five general categories: (1) social capital indicators (whether there is a union member in the family, and whether family and friends support unions); (2) attitudes towards traditional union policies (positive attitude towards pay standardization; positive view of worker political power; preference for layoffs based on seniority; perception that collective solutions to work problems are best); (3) perceptions about the employer and the job (feels no loyalty to employer; feels employees are treated unfairly at work; perceives poor opportunity for advancement at work; worried about layoffs); (4) union–voice substitutes (no progressive HRM practices at job; feels unprotected by workplace law); and (5) individual characteristics (gender; union status; political position). How each variable is measured is detailed in Table 2. Our explanatory variables are coded such that a positive coefficient is expected.

As outlined in Nielson (1998: 116), for binary coded dependent variables, as in logistic regressions, the difference in probabilities of preferring membership can be decomposed into one part that is caused by differing propensities (R) and another part that is explained by differences in characteristics

(C) between youths (y) and adults (a). Using adults as the standard, the average estimated probability of desired unionization for both age groups is given by

$$\bar{P}_y = \sum_{i=1}^{N_y} F\left[X_{yi}\hat{\boldsymbol{B}}\right]/N_{yi} \tag{1}$$

$$\bar{P}_a = \sum_{i=1}^{N_a} F\left[X_{ai}\hat{\boldsymbol{\delta}}\right]/N_{ai} \tag{2}$$

where N_i is the number of observations for each age group j. Define

$$\bar{P}_a^{\,y} = \sum_{i=1}^{N_a} F\left[X_{ai}\hat{\boldsymbol{B}}\right]/N_{ai} \tag{3}$$

where (1) is the preferred rate of union membership among adults that would be predicted if each adult worker retained his or her 'union-preferring' individual and workplace characteristics, but the impacts of those characteristics on the probability of preferring to belong to a union were the same as those estimated for youths. The intergenerational union preference gap can then be decomposed using the following identity, which defines R and C:

$$|\,\bar{P}_a - \bar{P}_y\,| = \underbrace{\bar{P}_a - \bar{P}_a^{\,y}}_{R} + \underbrace{\bar{P}_a^{\,y} - \bar{P}_y}_{C} \tag{4}$$

The term R is the average probability that $D=1$ for adults minus the average probability that $D=1$ if adults reacted like youths. The term C is the average probability that $D=1$ for adults if they reacted like youths minus the average probability that $D=1$ for youths.

From an empirical perspective, the modelling framework outlined in Section 3 implies that the response parameters (i.e. coefficients) to social capital and various other determinants of unionization will be larger for youths than for comparable adults. As well, the cumulative effect of this greater responsiveness on the part of youths should explain a larger portion of the overall difference in the preferences on the part of youths compared with adults for unionization. That is, in the decomposition analysis, the component resulting from response differences (coefficients) between youths and adults should be greater than the component resulting from differences between youths and adults in their characteristics (independent variables).

5. The data and limitations

Our empirical analysis of the preferences for unionization utilizes data from the Lipset–Meltz (1997) Canada–US Labour Attitudes Survey for Canada. The survey utilized quota sampling (Kervin 1992: 220) to generate a

TABLE 2
Variable Definitions Based on 1996 Angus Reid Survey Questionnaire[a]

(1) *Dependent variable*	*(2)* *Survey question*
Prefer union membership	All things considered, if you had a choice, would you personally prefer to belong to a labour union or not?
Independent variables	
Social capital (No union member in family) Union member in family Do not know if union member in family	Does any other member of your family belong to a union — such as a spouse or your parents?
(Family and friends do not support unions) Family and friends support unions Do not know whether family and friends support unions	Most of my family and close friends don't like unions. [4-pt scale: Strongly agree, Moderately agree, Moderately disagree, Strongly disagree]
Attitudes to traditional union policies (Negative attitude to pay standardization) Positive attitude to pay standardization Do not know attitude to pay standardization	Imagine two workers of the same age, with the same years of service with their employer, doing nearly the same job. One earns [*X*] a week more than the other. The better-paid worker is quicker and more efficient at the job. In your opinion, how fair or unfair is it that one of these workers is paid more than the other? [4-pt scale: Very unfair, Somewhat unfair, Somewhat fair, Very fair]
(Negative view of worker political power) Positive view of worker political power Do not know attitude to worker political power	Workers should have more political power. [4-pt scale: Strongly disagree, Moderately disagree, Moderately agree, Strongly agree]
(Layoffs based on merit only) Layoffs based on merit and seniority Layoffs based on seniority only Do not know how layoffs should be based	All things being equal, should a company that has to lay off people do this on the basis of seniority or merit? [Select from categories indicating merit, merit and seniority or seniority only]
(Individual solution to work problems best) Collective solution to work problems best Do not know which is better	How would you prefer to solve a workplace problem of your own? Would you feel more comfortable dealing directly with management yourself, or would you feel comfortable having a group of your fellow employees help you deal with management?

Perceptions of working conditions	
(Feels loyalty to employer) Feels no loyalty to employer Does not know how loyal	How loyal would you say you feel towards your employer? [4-pt scale: Very loyal, Fairly loyal, Not very loyal, Not loyal at all]
(Employees treated fairly) Employees treated unfairly Do not know how employees treated	Job rating: treatment of employees by management [4-pt scale: Very good, Good, Poor, Very poor]
(Good advancement opportunities) Poor advancement opportunities Do not know opportunities for advancement	Job rating: opportunities for advancement [4-pt scale: Very good, Good, Poor, Very poor]
(Not worried about layoffs) Worried about layoffs Do not know if progressive will be laid off	How worried are you that your company will be laying off or cutting jobs in the near future? Are you [4-pt scale: Not worried at all, Not very worried, Somewhat worried, Very worried]
Union voice substitutes	
(No progressive HRM at work) Presence of progressive HRM at work Do not know whether HRM at work	Some companies are organizing workplace decision-making in new ways to get employees more involved – using things like self-directed work teams, total quality management, quality circles, or other employee involvement programmes. Is anything like this now being done by your employer? [YES . . . NO]
(Employees protected by law) Employees not protected by law Do not know how protected employees are	Do you feel that you are already protected by the law, against unfair treatment by your employer? [YES . . . NO]
Individual characteristics	
(Female) Male	
(Politically right of centre) Politically left of centre Centre of political spectrum Do not know	How would you describe your political views? Would you say you lean [Far to the right, Moderately to the right, In the political centre, Moderately to the left, Far to the left]
(Non-union) Union	

[a] Phrase in brackets ( ) for the independent variables of column (1) represents the excluded reference category in regression analysis as given in Table 5. To create single dummy variable response categories (and preserve degrees of freedom), scaled responses, like the 4-point scales of column (2), were combined into the independent variable categories of column (1), by grouping the first two scales (e.g. very loyal, fairly loyal) into the first category (e.g. feels loyalty to employer) and the last two scales into the second category.

representative sample of workers by determining how many responses were needed to obtain representativeness over observable characteristics based on Census data (e.g. region, gender, age and employment status) and then contacting households until those sample targets are met. Quota sampling does not have a sampling frame, and hence there is no conventional 'response rate' since there is no randomly drawn target sample from which a proportion of valid responses can be drawn. Of those contacted, however, 58.7 per cent responded. Given that quota sampling is designed specifically to ensure a representative sample across various observable characteristics (based on Census data in this case), it is not surprising that the survey characteristics match very closely the population characteristics as given by the Census (Table 3).

The purpose of the survey was to determine attitudes toward work, institutions and social policy. Information was obtained on general values of workers, including views on individualism versus group or communitarian orientation, the appropriate role of governments, confidence in institutions and perceptions of labour market outcomes such as their expectations about layoffs.

The Angus Reid Group, one of Canada's leading public opinion survey firms, administered the survey through telephone calls — which averaged

TABLE 3
Comparison of Lipset–Meltz Survey and Census Means (%)

	Survey	*Census*
Region		
British Columbia	12.3	12.7
Alberta	9.3	9.3
Saskatchewan	3.6	3.5
Manitoba	4.1	3.9
Ontario	36.9	37.5
Quebec	25.2	24.9
New Brunswick	2.9	2.6
Nova Scotia	3.2	3.2
Prince Edward Island	0.6	0.5
Newfoundland	2.0	2.0
Gender		
Male	49.3	49.1
Female	50.7	50.9
Age		
15–24	10.9	13.1
25–34	19.7	23.8
35–44	26.0	21.4
45–54	19.3	14.5
55–64	12.9	11.7
65+	11.2	15.5
Employment status		
Full time	49.5	47.4
Part time	12.9	11.0
Not employed	37.7	41.6
N	1,495	24,980,000

20–26 minutes per respondent — in June and early July 1996. The survey yielded a representative sample of 1495 working-age people in Canada. Cases were eliminated in our analysis if they were missing observations on the dependent variable, reducing our sample to 1204 (1057 adults and 147 youths).

The small youth sample makes it more difficult to obtain precise estimates of the underlying relationship for youths compared with the larger sample of adults. We sustained the youth sample size in part by including 40 non-employed respondents with the 107 who were employed at the time of the survey. The non-employed were asked all questions except those on perceptions of work conditions and jobs, and on union voice substitutes, i.e. those in groups (3) and (4) above. Their responses were coded as 'unknown' for these questions. For all other questions they are treated as regular respondents, responding with their views of the situation. The preferences of the non-employed are important, since many are looking for work and others are about to obtain work. We can assume that they respond to questions based on their past or expected status or on their general view of those situations. Their responses are meaningful, since our goal is to capture general preferences for unionization, not whether one would vote for a union at his or her particular job.

Including the non-employed in the analysis is further buttressed by the fact that we also ran the model with an added non-employed dummy variable (compared with employed). The logit coefficient of 0.053 was statistically insignificant ($p = 0.97$), yielding a marginal effect of 0.01. That is, there was virtually no difference in the preferences for unionization between the employed and non-employed. Furthermore, the other coefficients (unreported but available from the authors on request) remained virtually unchanged. In spite of this similarity between the preferences of the employed and non-employed, we regard the small sample for youths as a limitation of our analysis. We would have preferred to have a larger sample for youths, both to obtain more precise estimates and to be able to restrict the analysis only to the employed.

A second limitation of our analysis — common method variance — may arise if respondents with certain characteristics self-report in a way that systematically affects both independent and dependent variables, giving rise to spurious correlation. As emphasized by Hartley and Barling (1998: 167), once the survey data have been collected there is little that can be done, other than recognizing the possible limitation and interpreting the results with caution.

6. Results

A Chow-type test (Greene 2000: 826) on the similarity of the coefficients in the youth and adult equations yielded a likelihood ratio of 394.72, which is well above the critical value of 135.81 at the 0.01 level of significance from the chi-squared distribution. This indicates that the underlying structure (i.e.

coefficients) of the two equations were significantly different from each other so that separate equations are appropriate.

Decomposition analysis and overall picture

As indicated in Table 4, 56.7 per cent of youths in our sample (row 1) compared with 49.8 per cent of adults (row 2) expressed a preference for belonging to a union, an overall difference of 6.9 in favour of youths preferring unions (row 6). As indicated in row 4, about two-thirds (62 per cent) of the higher preference of youths for unionization can be attributed to the greater response of youths to preferring unionization, and about one-third (38 per cent as indicated in row 5) can be attributed to the fact that youths are more exposed to the social capital, workplace issues or attitudes that

TABLE 4
Decomposing the Adult–Youth Difference in the Probability of Preferring to Belong to a Union

Decomposition[a]	*Percentage points*
1. Average youth probability of preferring union membership	56.7
2. Average adult probability of preferring union membership	49.8
3. Average adult probability of preferring union with youth propensities	54.1
4. Difference due to propensities *(R)*	4.3 (62)[b]
5. Difference due to characteristics *(C)*	2.6 (38)[b]
6. Total difference due to propensities and to characteristics *(R + C)*	6.9 (100)[b]

[a] The probabilities (expressed as percentages) are calculated and defined as follows.

Average youth probability of preferring union membership:

$$\bar{P}_y = \sum_{i=1}^{N_y} F\left[X_y \hat{\boldsymbol{B}}\right] / N_y$$

Average adult probability of preferring union membership:

$$\bar{P}_a = \sum_{i=1}^{N_a} F\left[X_a \hat{\boldsymbol{\delta}}\right] / N_a$$

Average adult probability of preferring union with youth propensities:

$$\bar{P}_a^{\,y} = \sum_{i=1}^{N_a} F\left[X_a \hat{\boldsymbol{B}}\right] / N_a$$

Total difference due to propensities (R) and characteristics (C):

$$|\,\bar{P}_a - \bar{P}_y\,| = \underbrace{\bar{P}_a - \bar{P}_a^{\,y}}_{R} + \underbrace{\bar{P}_a^{\,y} - \bar{P}_y}_{C}$$

[b] The numbers in brackets represent the proportion (expressed in percentages) of the total difference in adult–youth preferences.

give rise to a greater preference for unionization to deal with such issues in general. This finding also confirms our hypothesis that older respondents have a more hardened attitude towards unions which cannot be so readily dislodged by external influences.

Table 5 indicates the separate impact of each of the various independent variables influencing the probability of preferring unionization among youths and adults in Canada. As is conventional, marginal effects or changes in probabilities are reported, calculated from the logit coefficients that are also given in Table 5.

In general, the results confirm our hypothesis that youths are more responsive than adults to the determinants of preferences for unionization. That is, the changes in probabilities are generally larger and more often statistically significant for youths (column 3) than for adults (column 7). Partly as a result of this, youths have a stronger overall desire for unionization than do adults, as discussed previously in the decomposition analysis and as indicated in the first row of the table, whereby 56.7 per cent of youths and 49.8 per cent of adults in our sample indicate that they would prefer a union. The subsequent rows show the effects of various characteristics on the preferences for union membership. Both the sample means of the explanatory variables and the effect they have on the probability of preferring unionization (i.e. the logit coefficients translated into changes in probability) are discussed and compared, since each provide interesting information on youth–adult differences in unionization.

The effects of social capital and social norms

Persons who have a union member in the family are themselves much more likely to prefer unionization, with the effect being more than three times as strong for youths than for adults. Specifically, the probability of preferring unions is 0.37 higher for youths from families with an existing union member, while it is 0.11 higher for adults in the same circumstances. As anticipated from the social psychological model of union preference formation, families are a more important influence in shaping the preferences of youths than is the case for adults.

A similar pattern prevails concerning the influence of family and friends and their support for unionization. That is, the influence of family and friends is important for both youths and adults, but, again, it is stronger for youths. Specifically, the probability of preferring unions is 0.41 higher for youths whose family and friends support unions, and only 0.29 higher for adults in the same circumstances. The influence of family and friends is therefore much stronger in determining the preferences of youths than of adults.

The effects of traditional union policies

The probability of preferring a union is higher among persons who prefer pay standardization to merit-based pay. This is understandable, given that

TABLE 5
Factors Influencing Probability of Preferring to Belong to a Union, Youths–Adults, Canada

	Youths (16–24)				*Adults (25–64)*			
Independent variables	*Means*[a] *(1)*	*Logit coef. (2)*	*Δ Probability (3)*	*Sig. level (4)*	*Means*[a] *(5)*	*Logit coef. (6)*	*Δ Probability (7)*	*Sig. level (8)*
Overall mean of dependent variable	0.567				0.498			
Social capital								
(No union member in family)	0.343				0.412			
Union member in family	0.359	2.39	0.368**	0.02	0.319	0.46	0.113**	0.00
(Family and friends oppose unions)	0.384				0.449			
Family and friends support unions	0.542	3.65	0.414**	0.00	0.506	1.32	0.290**	0.00
Attitudes to traditional union policies								
(Negative attitude to pay standardization)	0.789				0.772			
Positive attitude to pay standardization	0.203	1.62	0.302*	0.08	0.223	0.75	0.179**	0.00
(Negative view of worker political power)	0.213				0.358			
Positive view of worker political power	0.771	1.96	0.336**	0.02	0.614	0.99	0.229*	0.00
(Prefer layoffs based on merit only)	0.608				0.537			
Prefer layoffs based on merit & seniority	0.029	1.13	0.235	0.47	0.044	0.95	0.219**	0.01
Prefer layoffs based on seniority only	0.363	0.26	0.061	0.72	0.419	0.85	0.200**	0.00
(Individual solution to work problems best)	0.337				0.327			
Collective solution to work problems best	0.233	0.55	0.127	0.61	0.193	0.56	0.139**	0.02
Perceptions of working conditions and job								
(Feels loyalty to employer)	0.645				0.641			
Feels no loyalty to employer or unknown	0.355	−0.49	−0.123	0.73	0.359	0.65	0.157	0.12
(Employees treated fairly at work)	0.213				0.564			
Employees treated unfairly at work	0.578	3.98	0.419**	0.03	0.133	0.13	0.071	0.07

(Good or unknown opportunity to advance)	0.686				0.684			
Poor opportunity to advance at work	0.314	−1.02	−0.246	0.27	0.316	0.25	0.063	0.24
(Not worried about layoffs or unknown)	0.812				0.685			
Worried about layoffs	0.188	3.80	0.416**	0.02	0.315	0.00	0.001	0.98
Union voice substitutes								
(Have progressive HRM at job)	0.255				0.387			
No progressive HRM at job	0.407	4.92	0.427**	0.00	0.335	0.15	0.036	0.49
(Feel protected by workplace law)	0.510				0.511			
Feel unprotected by workplace law	0.169	2.19	0.354*	0.07	0.172	0.12	0.030	0.62
Individual characteristics								
(Female)	0.472				0.498			
Male	0.528	−1.09	−0.262	0.11	0.502	0.22	0.055	0.19
(Non-union respondent)	0.790				0.544			
Union respondent	0.210	2.19	0.355**	0.03	0.456	2.22	0.404**	0.00
(Politically right of centre)	0.205				0.197			
Politically at centre	0.524	1.25	0.254	0.22	0.502	0.71	0.170**	0.00
Politically left of centre	0.188	1.29	0.260	0.22	0.183	1.04	0.239**	0.00
Sample size	147	147	–	–	1057	1057	–	–

[a] The means indicate the proportion of respondents in each category. If they do not sum to 1, differences reflect the 'did not know' responses that were included in the regression but not reported here.
Significance level: $P < 0.05$**; 0.10*.
Excluded reference category for independent variable given in brackets ( ) in the first (independent variable) column.

unions also generally prefer such pay standardization. The effect is almost twice as large for youths (0.30) than for adults (0.18), highlighting our proposition that youths are more responsive than adults to the factors that influence preferences for unionization in general. The sample means also indicate that approximately 20 per cent of youths tend to have a positive attitude to pay standardization, with a slightly higher figure for adults.

Not surprisingly, the probability of preferring unionization is considerably higher for persons who also feel that workers should have more political power. The impact is especially large for youths (0.34) compared with adults (0.23). The mean values also indicate that proportionately more youths (77 per cent) than adults (61 per cent) in our sample think that workers should have more political power. In essence, youths have a more positive view of workers having political power than adults, and youths are more prepared to act on it by supporting unionization.

The proportion of respondents who follow the traditional union policy of preferring layoffs based solely on seniority was lower for youths (0.36) than for adults (0.42). These differences are not as large as one may have expected, given that layoffs based on seniority as opposed to merit would disproportionately benefit adults. Those youths who do believe that layoffs should be based only on seniority, however, do not seem prepared to translate their beliefs into reality by supporting unions (i.e., their coefficients on preferring unions are insignificant for youths). Adults who believe that layoffs should be based on seniority, however, are much more likely to act on their beliefs by supporting unions, since unions would help translate those beliefs into reality by supporting the seniority principle (i.e., the coefficient on preferring unions is positive, large and significant for adults who support the seniority principle).

The proportion of youths and adults in our sample who believe that individual solutions to workplace problems are better than collective solutions is fairly similar for youths and adults. The fact that almost half of each group responded they 'did not know' to this question (see note at bottom of Table 3) suggests that substantial numbers could be persuaded to support either collective or individual policies (e.g. unions or progressive HRM practices).

Even though similar proportions of youths and adults in our sample feel that collective solutions to workplace problems are better than individual solutions, adults seem more willing to act on their views by supporting unions (i.e., the adult coefficient is positive and significant, $P = 0.02$, while the youth coefficient is insignificant, $P = 0.61$). This is one of the few areas where adults seem more willing than youths (i.e. where the magnitude of the coefficient was greater for adults than for youths) to express a greater preference for unionization when they had a belief that was conducive to unionization.

The effect of working conditions and job characteristics

Adults who feel no loyalty to their employer, or who do not know if they feel loyalty to their employer, are 0.16 more likely to prefer a union than

adults who do feel loyalty to their employer (although this effect is significant only at the 0.12 level). For youths, the effect is statistically insignificant ($P = 0.73$).

The effect of the perception of employees being treated unfairly is more dramatic for youths. Specifically, the probability of preferring unions is 0.42 greater for youths who perceive that employees are being treated unfairly than for youths who do not perceive employees as being treated unfairly. For adults, the impact of unfair treatment is small (0.07) and statistically insignificant. Importantly, the sample means indicate that 58 per cent of youths compared with only 13 per cent of adults perceive employees as being treated unfairly at their workplace. In essence, youths have a much stronger perception of unfair treatment at the workplace and are more prepared to support unionization as a result. The substantial numbers of both youths and adults who reported that they 'did not know' whether employees are treated unfairly at work (see note at bottom of Table 3) suggests that substantial numbers could be influenced by unions or by progressive HRM practices that would facilitate fair treatment at work.

The mean values indicate that the same proportion of youths and adults (around 31 per cent) tend to think they have poor opportunity for advancement. Interestingly, this has an opposite effect on youths to that on adults. Adults who feel they have a poor opportunity for advancement are more likely to prefer unions, while for youths the opposite is the case (although statistically insignificant). This is not surprising, given that the seniority principle followed by unions is apt to favour adult opportunities for advancement at the expense of young workers.

Only about 19 per cent of youths, compared with 31.5 per cent of adults in our sample, worry about layoffs, perhaps reflecting the lower cost of layoffs to youths and the fact that they expect to be laid off given the practice of 'last in, first out'. The different impact that this concern for layoffs has on preferences for unionization between youths and adults, however, is large — increasing the probability of preferring a union by 42 per cent for youths, with zero impact for adults. This is somewhat surprising, since unions would tend to foster the 'last in, first out' phenomenon that tends to put youths at more risk of layoffs, compared to adults.

The effect of union voice substitutes

A lack of progressive HRM practices at work (e.g. self-directed work-teams, total quality management, quality circles and employee involvement programmes, as defined in Table 2) leads to a large preference for unions on the part of youths, but no effect on the preferences of adults. This highlights the possibility that progressive HRM practices can be a substitute for unionization (a concern long recognized in the literature), especially in the minds of younger workers in the years when their preferences for their 'ideal' working environment are being shaped. It also highlights the understandable resistance that unions often have to such practices, since they are a

viable threat to unions, especially for the new generation of workers that have not been raised under a history of unionism.

Similar portions of adults and youths in our sample felt that they were protected by workplace law (51 per cent). The fact that slightly over 30 per cent (see note at bottom of Table 3) of both youths and adults did not know if they felt protected again highlights the substantial numbers who could be influenced by such protection (to the extent that it is a substitute for the protection provided by unions). This is especially the case for youths, since those who felt that they were not protected by workplace law were 0.35 more likely to prefer a union than were youths who felt they were protected by such laws.

The effect of individual characteristics

The preference for unionization is lower for male than for female youths, and higher for male than for female adults. This is one of the few variables that has a sign difference between youths and adults. The sign reversal is consistent with unions catering to male preferences for older persons, but shifting towards female preferences as women become more prominent in the work-force and in unions. The effects, however, are statistically insignificant, marginally so in the case of youths ($P = 0.11$) and more so in the case of adults ($P = 0.19$).

The preference for unionization is vastly higher for both youths and adults who are currently union members than for those who are not union members. Youths who are union members are 0.36 more likely to prefer unionization than are youths who are not union members, and the effect is slightly larger for adults. The fact that union members (for both youths and adults) prefer unionization suggests that the number who want to remain certified vastly outweighs the number of union members who would prefer decertification.

As indicated by the sample mean values, the political orientation of youths and adults in terms of left, right and centre on the political spectrum are remarkably similar. This is somewhat surprising, given the perception that people become more conservative as they age, but it is consistent with the perspective that youths today are more conservative than youths of yesterday. As expected, persons at the centre and especially on the left in the political spectrum are more likely to prefer unions than are persons on the right of the spectrum, although the effects are not statistically significant for youths ($P = 0.22$).

7. Conclusions

Our analysis of the preferences for unionization on the part of youths and adults gives rise to the following generalizations.

1. Youths have a stronger preference than adults for unions in general, and most of that reflects the stronger desire of youths to have unions deal with workplace issues, than it reflects the exposure of youths to these issues. Conversely, as workers age they appear to have a weaker preference for unions to deal with workplace issues.
2. The preferences of young workers for unionization are malleable and are strongly shaped by their accumulated social capital, such as union membership in the family and the attitudes of family and friends towards unions, highlighting the cumulative and intergenerational effects that can be involved in the transmission of union status.
3. Substitutes for unionization such as progressive HRM practices and legislative protection also have a powerful effect on young workers' preferences for unionization. The fact that youths who felt unprotected by labour law had a strong preference for unions highlights the conventional dilemma that unions face in this area. They may support protective legislation for reasons of social justice and because it can raise the cost of non-union labour relative to union labour that already has that protection through the collective agreement; but such legislation can also be a substitute for unionization, to the extent that it reduces the need to provide the protection through unionization.
4. A large number of respondents indicated that they 'did not know' whether collective or individual solutions were better, or whether employees were treated unfairly at work, or whether they felt unprotected by workplace law. This highlights the substantial number of youths who could be persuaded into individual or collective solutions (e.g. progressive HRM practices or unions) to deal with such workplace issues.

Our analysis implies that there is a large potential among youths in our sample to either support or oppose unionization, depending on the views of family and friends about unions and depending on conditions inside the workplace. In essence, unions have an opportunity to increase the rate of unionization among youths if youths become more acquainted with unions and if they are in workplaces where they believe that employees are not being fairly treated. Investment by unions in education and organizing can have a long-term payoff for the labour movement. By tilting the taste for unionization more strongly in the positive direction, any union organizing an educational programme targeted to today's youth can have a multiplier effect on successive generations because, as workers age, independent predictors of union preferences become less important and less effective in shifting tastes for unionization.

The large impacts of the 'union member in the family' and the 'family and friends support unions' variables offers one explanation for the cumulative, snowballing effect that occurs when initial union decline seems to foster subsequent union decline, as in the USA over the last three decades. If union membership begins to fall, then it is less likely that there will be a union member in the family, and less likely that family and friends will support

unions (especially given the earlier positive effect of union status on preferences for unionization). In such circumstances, union decline begets further union decline, given the much stronger effect that these variables have on youths than on adults. The implications of this finding for union organizing are striking, since the intergenerational transmission of non-union forms of social capital will persist as young cohorts mature and continue working throughout their life cycle. Of course, the same process works in the opposite direction. Effective union organizing today can have multiplier effects well into the future, as it leads to more union family members and more union-friendly family and peers, both of which enhance preferences for unionization, especially among youths upon which future unionization is built.

A number of surprises in our empirical study also add to possibilities for organizing youths. Relative to adults, youths have a more supportive view of worker political power and they are only slightly more supportive of merit as a basis for layoffs. Youths are more positive about unions than adults, and this is a potential that unions can build upon. The fact that almost half of the youths had no views on individual versus collective solutions to problems in the workplace adds further credence to the perspective that their views are malleable. This may account for the large discrepancy between greater stated desire for union membership and lower realized demand for unionization. (Union density at the time of the survey was only 13.0 per cent for youths, compared with 36.0 per cent for adults, even though youths had a stronger preference for unions than did adults.) It also means that the manner in which unions and management ultimately respond to the views and needs of young persons will have a strong influence on the future of unions and of workplace practices.

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