



The Varied Voice of Labor: Unpacking the Political Engagement of Labor in the 2024 Election

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Introduction

Unions have long played a critical role in American politics, serving as vehicles for political engagement and mobilization of working people and representation of their interests in local, state, and national politics. Organized labor's position in politics has evolved over the course of the twentieth century, and since the New Deal, labor has generally been a close ally of the Democratic party. At the same time, union membership has been steadily declining, especially in the private sector, since the 1970s.

The 2024 presidential election occurred against a backdrop of ongoing political realignment, with traditional Democratic voting blocs drifting away, either to the Republican party or non-participation in the electoral system. Within this context, and despite the continued decline in union membership in recent decades, union members represented a crucial constituency over which both parties competed. While post-election analyses have established that union members were one of the few social blocs to maintain high levels of support for the Democrats over Republicans, we also caution treating union members as a unified voting bloc. As we will show in this paper, treating union members as a unified bloc can obscure the important variation across different unions, sectors, and demographic groups within organized labor.

Tackling this question, our research addresses a substantial gap in understanding unions' political practices and members' political behaviors and views. Most surveys include too few union members to enable meaningful analysis of differences within the labor movement. This prevents analysis of how the political practices of unions may vary across unions, sectors, occupations, and varying demographic and political backgrounds of workers.

To overcome these limitations, we surveyed 3,000 workers, split between union members and non-union workers. Our methodology yielded sufficient samples of members from major unions including the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), National Education Association (NEA), American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), United Food & Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW), and Communications Workers of America (CWA), allowing us to examine variations across these important labor organizations. This design thus enables us to make comparisons not just between union and non-union workers, but also between different unions and their members.

Our report focuses on unions' role in political education, communication, and mobilization. We explore how unions serve as sources of information about the economy and specific public policies for their members, and how they mobilize members for political action across different levels of government. The findings from our research reveal several important patterns:

- Union members continue to turn out to vote and vote for Democrats at higher rates than non-union workers. Union members were 7.8 percentage points more likely to vote for Kamala Harris than non-union workers, and 4.3 percentage points more likely to vote at all. The union difference was particularly pronounced among Black and Hispanic voters, potentially mitigating the broader trend of Democratic losses among these groups. At the same time, there was wide variation across unions in Democratic support, ranging from just 33% support for Vice President Harris among Teamsters members to 77% support for Vice President Harris among National Education Association members.

- Voters in 2024 reported that inflation was one of the most important issues they considered when going to the polls. While union members and non-union workers experienced inflation in similar ways, union members were more likely to identify corporate greed rather than government decisions as the driver of recent inflation. However, different union members attributed blame for inflation in different ways, which can potentially be explained by the fragmentation of the media environment and the proliferation of divergent narratives about the economy depending on information source. While labor unions might have been one trusted messenger to workers about the economy, we find that most unions did not provide consistent messaging to their members about economic developments like inflation. Just 12% of union members reported receiving information about the economy from their union.
- By comparison, we found that unions were important sources of information about government, with nearly 80% of members receiving some communication about state, local, or federal government policies at least once annually. However, our findings revealed that union political mobilization was less common than we would expect for an election year, with 56% of union members reporting no political mobilization requests from their local union in 2024. Put differently, more than half of all union members were not asked by their union to do anything related to politics in 2024. We found wide variation across unions in the intensity of their political mobilization: while just 40% of NEA members reported receiving no political requests last year, that figure reached 68% for Teamsters members and over 80% for UFCW members.
- Union members were generally aware of at least some of the Biden-Harris Administration's labor policy accomplishments, such as National Labor Relations Board rulings, infrastructure investments with labor standards, and stepped up enforcement of worker protection laws. We observed a strong relationship between union members' awareness of and perceived benefit from Biden-Harris Administration labor policies and their likelihood of voting for Harris in 2024. At the same time, a non-trivial bloc of union members—most frequently those in unions not communicating about federal policies—were unaware of Biden-Harris labor policies. These findings suggest that federal policies, as communicated through unions, may have contributed to voting behavior among union members, and also that the lack of more communication about the federal government to union members may have meant that union members did not understand the full extent of the Biden-Harris labor agenda and its impact on their unions.

Methodology

We commissioned YouGov to conduct a survey of 3,000 union members and non-union workers. The survey was conducted between January 24, 2025 and February 12, 2025. YouGov interviewed 3,000 respondents, who were divided into two samples: 1,366 non-union workers and 1,634 union members.

Each sample was weighted through propensity scores constructed from the 2022 Current Population Survey (CPS) sample with internet usage supplement. The union sample was weighted to be representative of union members by age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, region and employment status (full-time or part-time); the non-union worker sample

was weighted to be representative of employed US adults by age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, region and employment status (full-time or part-time), and went through individual stratification on union membership.

A significant advantage of our approach was that we were able to construct a large enough sample to include meaningful subsamples of individual unions. We determined 50 was a minimum number of observations for each union to be included in any analysis. While we want to be cautious about inferences drawn from these subsamples, especially for smaller unions, we can still report preferences and attitudes of these unions’ members. The overall subsample for each union is listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of respondents for each union

Union	Respondents
<i>SEIU</i>	194
<i>NEA</i>	157
<i>AFSCME</i>	125
<i>AFT</i>	98
<i>IBT</i>	72
<i>UFCW</i>	56
<i>CWA</i>	56

Turnout and Vote Choice

Even preceding Donald Trump’s victory in the election in November 2024, blue-collar workers—defined as those without a college degree—have been moving away from the Democrats and towards Republicans. One of the electoral trends that has received the most attention from pundits and analysts was the recent decline in Democratic support among Black and Hispanic workers. At the same time, amidst the overall movement of working-class voters away from the Democrats, union members continue to support Democratic candidates at higher rates than non-union workers. One exit poll reported that the Harris campaign managed to *increase* support amongst union voters, when compared to Joe Biden in 2020.

Our survey confirms these early estimates. We found that 56% of union members reported voting for Kamala Harris, compared to 48.2% of non-union workers; 32.4% of union members reported voting for Donald Trump, compared to 35.9% of non-members, reported in Table 2. There was also a notable difference in voter turnout: 7.9% of union members reported not voting, compared to 12.2% of non-union workers. While our analysis cannot test whether unions caused their members to vote this way, the sizable union difference suggests that union members, in the aggregate, were still closely allied with the Democratic party.

Table 2: Union member vs non-union member vote choice in 2024

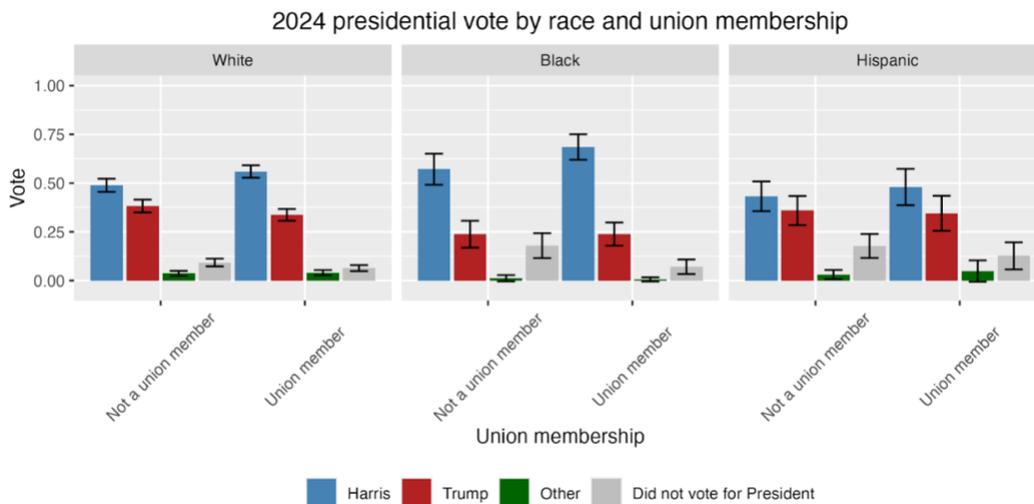
Candidate	Union member (%)	Non-union member (%)	Difference (pp)
<i>Kamala Harris</i>	56% (SE = 1.4)	48.2% (SE = 1.4)	7.8 pp
<i>Donald Trump</i>	32.4% (SE = 1.3)	35.9% (SE = 1.3)	-3.4 pp
<i>Other</i>	3.6% (SE = 0.6)	3.6% (SE = 0.5)	0 pp
<i>Did not vote</i>	7.9% (SE = 0.9)	12.2% (SE = 0.9)	-4.3 pp

We also analyzed vote choice by union membership and race and ethnicity. Our results in Figure 1 show that Black union members were substantially more likely to vote for Kamala Harris compared to Black non-union workers (68.5% vs. 57.1%), while both groups showed similar support for Donald Trump (around 24%). The most notable difference appears in voter participation rates: Black non-union workers were more than twice as likely not to vote compared to Black union members (17.9% vs. 7.1%), suggesting that Black union members are an especially high turnout group.

We saw a similar trend among Hispanic voters, who were more likely to vote for Kamala Harris compared to non-union Hispanic workers (48% vs. 43.2%). Hispanic union members had somewhat higher voter participation rates compared to non-union workers, with non-voters at 12.7% for union members and non-union workers at 17.8%.

While there are narratives that Trump’s victory was propelled by the defection of Black and Hispanic voters from the Democratic voter coalition, our findings suggest that was not the case for union members.

Figure 1



We were also able to explore voting patterns across individual unions and find substantial differences, reported in Table 3. Among those unions where we had sufficient observations for comparison, Harris' support ranged from just 32.9% among Teamsters (IBT) members to 77.5% among National Education Association (NEA) members. Unions with significant public sector membership like NEA and AFT generally show stronger Democratic support, while unions with more private sector representation like IBT and UFCW show relatively stronger Republican support. SEIU and AFSCME fall between the education unions and industrial unions, with moderate but still majority support for Harris. This suggests that while union members on average tend to be more likely to have voted for Vice President Harris, the relationship varied dramatically by the type of union, the sector it represented and the demographic composition of its membership.

Table 3: 2024 vote choice by union

Union	Harris	Trump	Other	Non-vote
<i>SEIU</i>	57.3% (SE = 4.2)	27.4% (SE = 3.6)	1.7% (SE = 1)	13.6% (SE = 3.5)
<i>NEA</i>	77.5% (SE = 3.4)	14.9% (SE = 2.9)	4.5% (SE = 1.7)	3.1% (SE = 1.4)
<i>AFSCME</i>	52.1% (SE 5.6)	31.9% (SE = 4.9)	4.7% (SE = 2.1)	11.3% (SE = 5.3)
<i>AFT</i>	75.2% (SE = 4.6)	14.1% (SE = 3.7)	4.8% (SE = 2.3)	6% (SE = 2.5)
<i>IBT</i>	32.9% (SE = 6)	49.4% (SE 6.8)	7.8% (SE = 6.2)	9.9% (SE = 3.9)
<i>CWA</i>	65.8% (SE = 8.1)	23.3% (SE = 7.8)	4.9% (SE = 3.3)	6% (SE = 3.5)
<i>UFCW</i>	49% (SE = 8.3)	39% (SE = 9)	0.6% (SE 0.6)	11.5% (SE = 4.5)

Views about Inflation

Many news outlets, pundits, and strategists have pointed to inflation as one of the top issues in the 2024 elections. As some commenters saw it, Harris was perceived by voters as representing the incumbent administration, and like many other incumbents around the world, Harris was punished by an electorate that was experiencing a prolonged cost-of-living crisis. One question we explored in this survey was whether there were alternative narratives around inflation that could have been articulated by the campaigns and civil society groups, such as unions. In particular, we wondered whether unions were communicating to their members about inflation in ways that framed the issue around corporate greed and power, rather than the Biden-Harris Administration's actions or other causes.

We started this analysis by asking how respondents experienced inflation, with respondents indicating whether they experienced price increases for the following expenses: groceries, gas,

rent, and mortgages. On the whole, the variation between union members and non-union workers was not particularly large, as reported in Table 4. Grocery expenses were by far the most common way workers experienced inflation (around 90% for both union and non-union workers), followed by gas, rent, and then mortgages. The vast majority of workers (over 95%) selected at least one of these expenses.

Table 4: Comparison of union members vs non-union workers on inflation experience

Experience	Union members	Non-union workers
<i>Groceries</i>	91% (SE = 0.9)	88% (SE = 0.9)
<i>Gas</i>	67.1% (SE = 1.3)	69.5% (SE = 1.3)
<i>Rent</i>	30.1% (SE = 1.4)	33.3% (SE = 1.3)
<i>Mortgage</i>	19.8% (SE = 1.1)	19.8% (SE = 1.1)
<i>None</i>	4.1% (SE = 0.6)	4.4% (SE = 0.6)

While there was not a substantial difference across union and non-union workers in the experience of inflation, we did find notable differences in how workers apportioned blame for price increases. We asked respondents to select from a series of statements that was closest to their opinion on inflation. The possible responses were as follows: (1) inflation is mostly the result of bad decisions by the government; (2) inflation is mostly the result of corporate greed; (3) inflation is mostly the result of the pandemic; and (4) inflation is mostly the result of workers' increased wages.

As summarized in Table 5, union members were more likely to attribute inflation to corporate greed (48.5% vs 40.5%), while non-union workers were more likely to blame government policies (45.8% vs 38.8%). Given the timing of the survey, just four days after the inauguration of Donald Trump, and that the questions emphasized the 2024 election, we interpret blame for government decisions as directed towards the Biden-Harris Administration. These findings suggest that union members tended to understand the sources of inflation differently from non-union workers. While close to a majority of union members identified corporate greed as the primary driver of inflation, it is notable that nearly 40% of union members still blamed the Biden-Harris Administration for inflation.

Table 5: Attribution of inflation, union vs non-union workers

Cause	Union members	Non-union workers
<i>Corporate greed</i>	48.5% (SE = 1.4)	40.5% (SE = 1.4)
<i>Government</i>	38.8% (SE = 1.4)	45.8% (SE = 1.4)
<i>Covid-19 Pandemic</i>	9.8% (SE = 0.8)	9.4% (SE = 0.8)
<i>Higher wages</i>	3.1% (SE = 0.6)	4.3% (SE = 0.6)

We also find that beliefs about the causes of inflation among union members strongly predicted voting behavior in the 2024 election, as shown in Table 6. Those union members who blamed corporate greed overwhelmingly supported Harris (68.8%), while those blaming government policies predominantly supported Trump (53.6%). A breakdown of attribution of inflation among different types of union members can be found in the appendix.

Table 6: Vote choice by inflation attribution among union members

Cause	Harris	Trump	Other	Did Not Vote
<i>Corporate Greed</i>	68.8% (SE = 1.4)	17.6% (SE = 1.2)	4.3% (SE = 0.7)	9.3% (SE = 1)
<i>Government</i>	32.9% (SE = 1.4)	53.6% (SE = 1.5)	3.2% (SE = 0.5)	10.3% (SE = 1)
<i>Pandemic</i>	67.7% (SE = 2.9)	21.7% (SE = 2.6)	2.1% (SE = 0.8)	8.5% (SE = 1.8)
<i>Higher wages</i>	38.2% (SE = 5.6)	42.1% (SE = 5.4)	3.4% (SE = 1.8)	16.3% (SE = 4)

The final variation across union members we explore is across unions. As outlined in Table 7 there were large differences across unions in attribution of inflation. In general, more left-leaning unions representing public-sector workers were more likely to attribute inflation to corporate greed over the government or the pandemic, with two important exceptions: SEIU (where a slim plurality of members blamed the government over corporate greed) and UFCW (where corporate greed was neck-and-neck with government as the source for inflation).

Table 7: Attribution of inflation by union

Union	Corporate Greed	Government	Pandemic	Higher Wages
<i>SEIU</i>	42.8% (SE = 4.3)	46.8% (SE = 4.3)	7.9% (SE = 2.1)	2.5% (SE = 1.3)
<i>NEA</i>	65.8% (SE = 3.9)	24.3% (SE = 3.6)	8.9% (SE = 2.4)	1% (SE = 0.7)
<i>AFSCME</i>	52.8% (SE = 5.6)	34.9% (SE = 5.1)	6.8% (SE = 2.3)	5.5% (SE = 3.9)
<i>AFT</i>	59.4% (SE = 5.1)	21.9% (SE = 4.3)	16.8% (SE = 3.9)	1.9% (SE = 1.4)
<i>IBT</i>	40.5% (SE = 7)	50.1% (SE = 6.8)	7% (SE = 3)	2.4% (SE = 1.7)
<i>CWA</i>	54.3% (SE = 7.8)	31.2% (SE = 7.1)	12.7% (SE = 4.5)	1.7% (SE = 1.7)
<i>UFCW</i>	41.5% (SE = 7.9)	46.3% (SE = 8.6)	8.7% (SE = 4)	3.5% (SE = 2.5)

One potential explanation for the divergence across union members in attribution of inflation involves how union members received and interpreted information about the economy. To that end, we asked respondents, “thinking about how you get information about the economy, what source of information do you trust the most?” As Table 8 shows, there was significant variation in how respondents answered. Notably, unions were not a common source of information about the economy, *even for union members*: just 11.8% of union members said that they received information about the economy from their union. Instead, union members tended to receive information from TV or radio, newspapers, and social media or podcasts.

Table 8: Information source about the economy, among union members

Source	% Selected
<i>TV or radio</i>	22.1% (SE = 1.2)
<i>Newspapers</i>	17.4% (SE = 1)
<i>Social media or podcasts</i>	17.2% (SE = 1)
<i>Union</i>	11.8% (SE = 0.9)
<i>Friends or family</i>	11.6% (SE = 1)
<i>Political candidates</i>	1.9% (SE = 0.4)
<i>None of the above</i>	17.9% (SE = 1.1)

Our analysis of workers' perceptions about inflation reveals two striking conclusions. First, while there was a notable difference in the way that union members attributed blame for inflation, with corporate greed the most commonly identified source, a sizable minority of union members did identify that Biden-Harris Administration's policies as the driver of inflation. Second, we found that the vast majority—over 85%—of union members were not relying on their union for trusted information about the economy in the context of the 2024 election. Taken together, these findings present a potential missed opportunity. It is possible that if unions had played a more prominent role in delivering information about the economy, then more members may have identified the cause of inflation as explained by unions.

Union Political Communication, Education, and Mobilization

Building on the findings reported above about the limited role unions played in serving as an information source about the economy, we ask whether unions provided broader political communication, education, and mobilization opportunities to their workers.

We first consider variation across unions in political mobilization with a question that asked: “In the past year, has anyone from your local union asked you to do any of the following things?”

The list of activities included the following: attend a political event; volunteer for a political campaign; share political information with your friends, family, and others in your community; contribute money to a political campaign; contact a local official; contact a state official; contact a federal official; or none of the above.

We find that political mobilization—even in a presidential election year—was surprisingly uncommon for union members. Well over half—56%—of all union members reported no political mobilization in 2024. This majority of unmobilized union members runs against the common perception of unions as highly political actors and suggests that many union locals may simply steer clear of politics, even in an election year.

As Table 9 indicates, union members were most frequently asked to share political information in their community (20.8% of all union members reported this ask), and were least likely to be asked to contribute money to political campaigns (just 10.2% reported this ask). Union requests for political engagement to members tended to be clustered: most union members (64%) who received at least one request from their local union also received at least one other type of mobilization.

Table 9: Local union asked member in 2024 to...

<i>Attend a political event</i>	17.4% (SE = 1.1)
<i>Volunteer for political campaign</i>	12.9% (SE = 1)
<i>Share political information in community</i>	20.8% (SE = 1.1)
<i>Contribute money to political campaign</i>	10.2% (SE = 0.9)
<i>Contact local official</i>	17.2% (SE = 17.1)
<i>Contact state official</i>	16.9% (SE = 1)
<i>Contact federal official</i>	12.5% (SE = 1)
<i>No political mobilization</i>	56.1% (SE = 1.4)

There was substantial variation across unions in the frequency of political requests. Table 10 shows that the frequency of union members reporting no political mobilization varied from under half in the NEA, CWA, and SEIU to over 70% for IBT and UFCW. Different unions clearly vary in the intensity of their political mobilization, with members in unions like the NEA or CWA receiving about two different types of political mobilization requests, on average, while AFSCME, IBT, and UFCW members received fewer than one type of political mobilization request, on average.

Table 10: Frequency of political mobilization across unions

	<u>No</u> political mobilization	Average number of types of political asks
<i>NEA</i>	39.8% (SE = 4)	1.7 (SE = 0.2)
<i>CWA</i>	44.1% (SE = 7.8)	1.7 (SE = 0.3)
<i>SEIU</i>	43.8% (SE = 4.2)	1.2 (SE = 0.1)
<i>AFT</i>	44.4% (SE = 5.2)	1.2 (SE = .2)
<i>AFSCME</i>	57.6% (SE = 5.6)	0.9 (SE = 0.2)
<i>IBT</i>	67.8% (SE = 6)	0.6 (SE = 0.1)
<i>UFCW</i>	81.1% (SE = 5.5)	0.3 (SE = 0.1)

In Table 11, we review the types of political mobilization requests from unions to their members across different sectors. While public sector union members, and especially those employed in K-12 education, tended to receive the most requests for political engagement overall, there was high intensity political mobilization in other sectors as well, such as construction union members being asked to attend political events or share political information.

Table 11: Types of union political mobilization by sector

	<i>All union members</i>	<i>Private sector members</i>	<i>Public sector members</i>	<i>Education members</i>	<i>Manufacturing members</i>	<i>Construction members</i>
<i>Attend a political event</i>	17.4% (SE = 1.1)	15.9% (SE = 1.5)	18.8% (SE = 1.6)	20% (SE = 2.4)	13.4% (SE = 4.3)	22.8% (SE = 4.8)
<i>Volunteer for political campaign</i>	12.9% (SE = 1)	11.1% (SE = 1.2)	14.9% (SE = 1.5)	17.9% (SE = 2.3)	9.7% (SE = 3.9)	13.9% (SE = 3.8)
<i>Share political information in community</i>	20.8% (SE = 1.1)	18.3% (SE = 1.5)	23.5% (SE = 1.7)	26.1% (SE = 2.5)	13.1% (SE = 3.8)	23% (SE = 4.8)
<i>Contribute money to political campaign</i>	10.2% (SE = 0.9)	8.9% (SE = 1.2)	11.6% (SE = 1.2)	11.3% (SE = 1.6)	4.8% (SE = 2.4)	13.2% (SE = 3.4)
<i>Contact a local official</i>	17.2% (SE = 17.1)	15.5% (SE = 1.4)	19% (SE = 1.4)	26.2% (SE = 2.2)	9.8% (SE = 3.8)	16% (SE = 4)
<i>Contact a state official</i>	16.9% (SE = 1)	13.9% (SE = 1.4)	20% (SE = 1.5)	27% (SE = 2.2)	4.3% (SE = 2.5)	13.6% (SE = 3.7)
<i>Contact a federal official</i>	12.5% (SE = 1)	9.4% (SE = 1.1)	15.8% (SE = 1.4)	15.5% (SE = 1.8)	2.4% (SE = 1.7)	8.3% (SE = 3)

In addition to exploring union political requests, we also consider the frequency with which local unions serve as a source of political information and education about what is happening across different levels of government. We asked union members to share how frequently their local union shared information about state and local government, or the federal government.

As Table 12 indicates, communication about government was more common than political mobilization requests, and roughly similar across levels of government. Most union members (just under 80%) reported receiving information about the government at least once a year, and the most common frequency was between monthly and a few times a year. A small minority of union members—around 13%—reported very frequent communications on a more regular basis, every week or two.

Table 12: Frequency of union political communication about government

	<i>State/local government</i>	<i>Federal government</i>
<i>Every week or two</i>	13.4 (SE = 1.2)	12.9 (SE = 1)
<i>Every month</i>	28.9 (SE = 0.7)	24.7 (SE = 1.2)
<i>A few times a year</i>	29.2 (SE = 1.3)	31.1 (SE = 1.3)
<i>Once a year</i>	6.6 (SE = 1.3)	7 (SE = 0.7)
<i>Never</i>	21.9 (SE = 1.2)	24.2 (SE = 1.2)

As with political mobilization, there was substantial variation across unions in the extent to which unions were sharing information about different levels of government. We document this variation in Table 13, which shows the proportion of union members reporting no communication from their local union about either state or local government or the federal government. Looking across levels of government, UFCW appeared to be the least involved in sharing information about the government, with nearly half of their members reporting no contact about governmental issues. On the other end of the spectrum, the vast majority of SEIU members reported receiving information about state, local, and federal government issues (over 80% of members reported this information). AFT members were also similar to SEIU. Some unions were more likely to communicate about one level of government over the other: NEA and AFSCME members, for instance, were more likely to hear about state and local government developments as compared to the federal government, which makes sense given that the bulk of their members work in state and local government.

Table 13: Union members reporting no Information about government, by union

	<u>No</u> state/local government information sharing	<u>No</u> federal government information sharing
<i>SEIU</i>	14.5% (SE = 2.6)	14.8% (SE = 2.6)
<i>NEA</i>	13% (SE = 2.7)	20.3% (SE = 3.2)
<i>AFSCME</i>	26.8% (SE = 5.4)	38% (SE = 5.5)
<i>AFT</i>	12.6% (SE = 3.6)	18.4% (SE = 4.1)
<i>IBT</i>	26.1% (SE = 5.5)	34.4% (SE = 6.9)
<i>CWA</i>	24.7% (SE = 7.9)	20.4% (SE = 7.7)
<i>UFCW</i>	48.6% (SE = 8.3)	46.2% (SE = 8.2)

Awareness of Biden-Harris Administration Labor Policy

In our final analysis, we consider the awareness that union members had of the labor and worker policies of the Biden-Harris Administration and their assessment of how their union was affected by those policies. We explore respondents' perceptions of the following policies, duplicating the same text that respondents were shown on the survey:

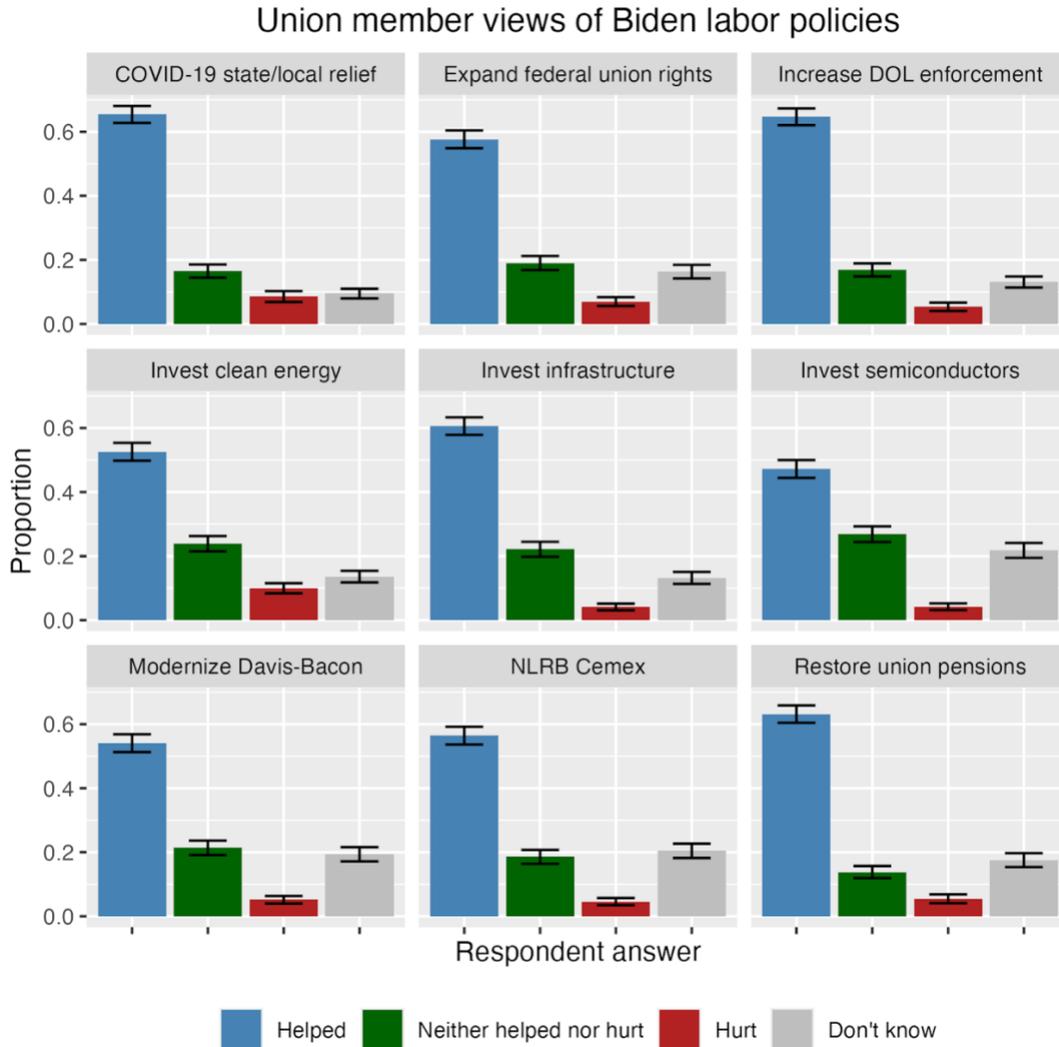
- Clean energy: Investing in clean energy technology manufacturing
- NLRB *Cemex*: National Labor Relations Board ruling requiring employers to bargain if they commit an unfair labor practice during union elections
- Semiconductor investments: Investing in semiconductor manufacturing in the United States
- Infrastructure investments: Investing in building roads, bridges, rails, and other infrastructure
- Pension bailout: Restoring union pension benefits for plans that lost funds
- Expand federal union rights: Enabling more federal workers to collectively bargain with the federal government
- Modernize Davis Bacon: Modernizing requirements for federally-supported construction projects to pay laborers and mechanics at prevailing wages and benefits
- DOL enforcement: Increasing enforcement of wage and hour and occupational health and safety regulations
- COVID-19 fiscal relief: Providing funds to state and local governments during the COVID-19 pandemic

For each policy, respondents could indicate whether the policy strongly helped, somewhat helped, neither helped nor hurt, somewhat hurt, or strongly hurt their union. Respondents could also indicate that they weren't sure or that they hadn't heard about the policy.

Overall, large pluralities (and mostly majorities) of union members thought that Biden labor policies would help their unions. However, there was variation across policies, with clean energy investments and COVID-19 state and local fiscal relief being the most controversial in terms of perceptions that the policies hurt unions. Figure 2 plots the variation in perceptions across the nine policy areas.

“...large pluralities (and mostly majorities) of union members thought that Biden labor policies would help their unions.”

Figure 2



For the most part, majorities of union members had heard about all nine policies, with at least 67% of union members reporting knowledge of at least one of these initiatives. Still, significant minorities of union members were in the dark about some of the Biden Administration’s policies. Union members were least aware of the Administration’s investments in domestic semiconductor manufacturing (22% had not heard about the policy), the National Labor Relations Board’s decisions making it easier for the Board to recognize unions in face of illegal employer opposition (20%), and the Department of Labor’s efforts to modernize Davis-Bacon requirements for prevailing wage calculations and enforcement (19%). Union members were most knowledgeable about the state and local government fiscal relief provided as part of COVID-19 pandemic relief (less than 10% of union members had not heard of this policy).

Looking across sectors in Figure 3, we find broad variation in perceptions of the impact of the Biden Administration’s labor agenda across three of the largest segments of the labor movement: construction, manufacturing, and education. Construction union members were

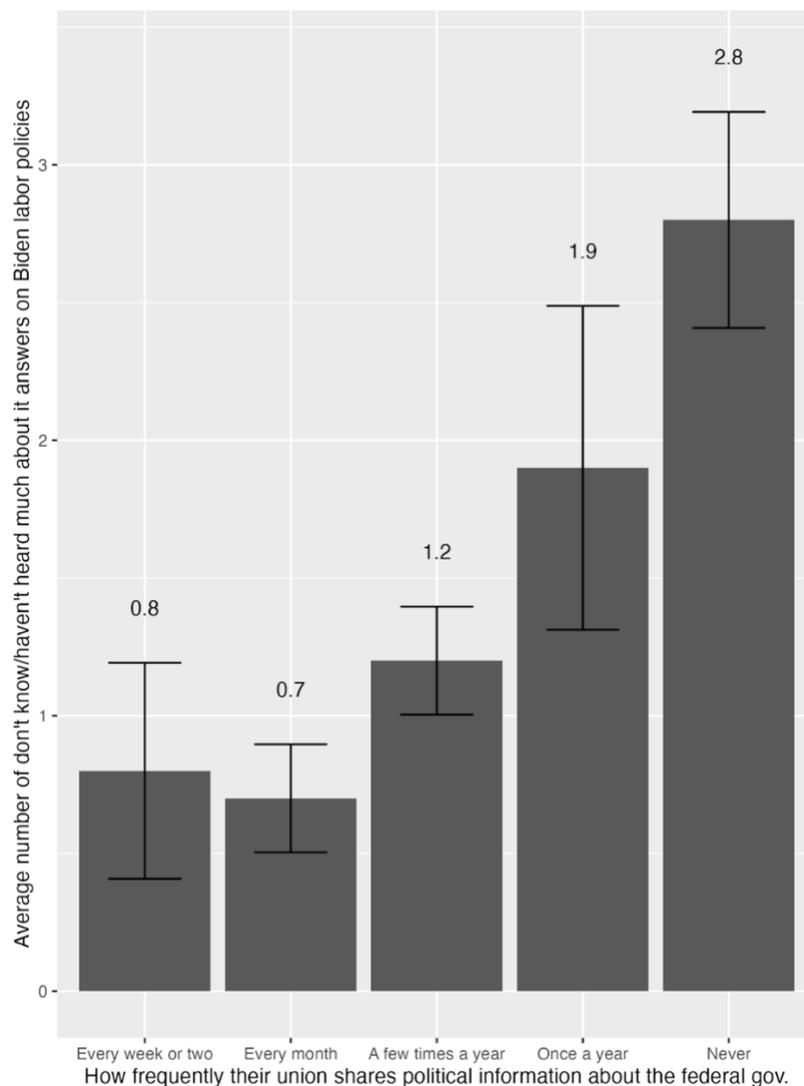
generally much more supportive of the Administration’s physical infrastructure investments than manufacturing or education union members, which makes sense given the construction jobs they supported. Similarly, construction unions were most supportive of Davis-Bacon modernization, which is most relevant to their members given the application of federal prevailing wages to construction work and not manufacturing or education. Education unions were especially strongly supportive of COVID-19 state and local fiscal relief, which makes sense given their dependence on that revenue to retain and hire staff and boost wages during the pandemic. Clean energy investments were most controversial among manufacturing union members, whose members stand to potentially lose work as a result of the transition to clean energy (for example, unionized automobile workers employed in the conventional automobile sector). Last, construction and manufacturing unions were supportive of the semiconductor investments, which received less support among education union members, which makes sense given the lack of a direct connection to teachers and educators. Perhaps surprisingly, there was broad support for DOL enforcement, restoring union pensions, and the NLRB decisions facilitating union recognition across sectors, including in the public sector where these policies were not as directly relevant to members. This may reflect the sense that these policies were good for the union movement as a whole.

Figure 3



We also examine which union members were most likely to be aware of Biden-Harris Administration labor policies, considering the findings in the previous section that unions vary in their intensity of political communication to their members. In Figure 4 we look at the number of Biden-Harris Administration labor policies that union members reported not hearing about, broken out by the frequency with which their local union communicates about the federal government to members. We find a strong correlation: union members whose locals communicate more frequently about the federal government were more knowledgeable about the Biden labor agenda than union members who received fewer communications from their locals about the federal government. Union members reporting communication about the federal government at least once a month reported not knowing about one policy on our list, on average. That figure increased to two policies for members who reported communications only annually, and three policies for union members who reported never receiving communications from their local union about the federal government.

Figure 4



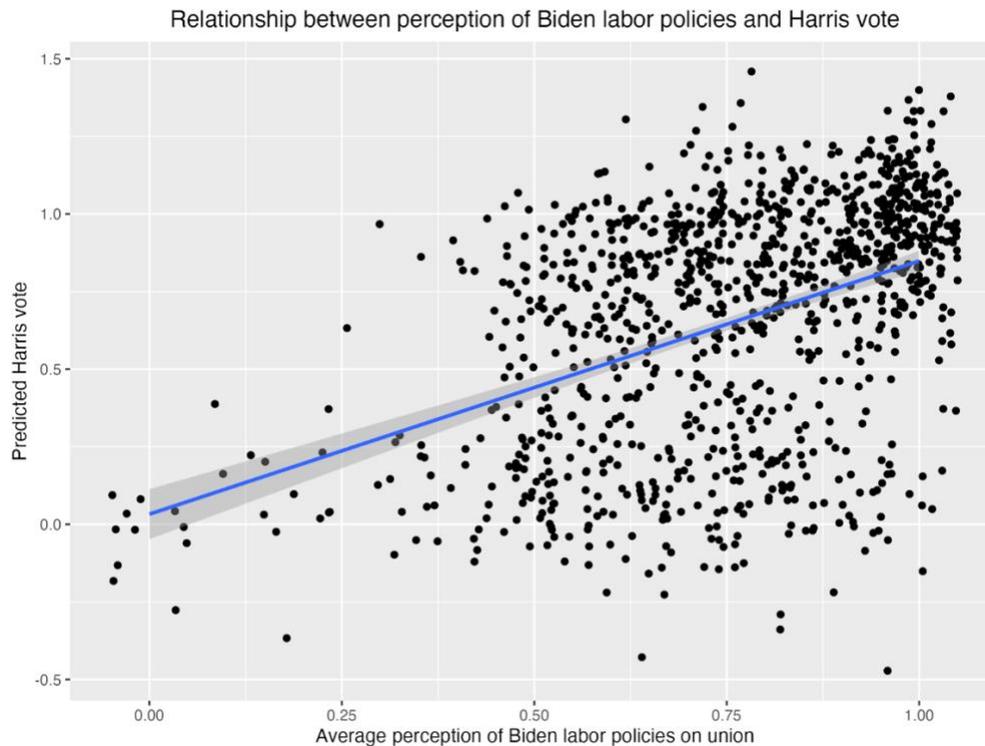
While Figure 4 does not establish a causal relationship—we cannot know if union communications caused members to be more knowledgeable about the Biden-Harris labor agenda—it is strongly suggestive that local unions are an important source of information about labor issues in the federal government, even if unions were not a significant source of information about the broader economy.

Last, we consider whether knowledge of the Biden-Harris labor agenda was related to union members' votes in 2024. As we documented in the earlier section, while union members tended to support Vice President Harris at higher levels than non-union workers, there was still important variation across unions in Harris support—with a majority of some unions voting for former President Trump over Harris. While our survey evidence does not speak to causal relationships, we ask whether one potential explanation lies with perceptions that union members hold about how much their union benefited from the Biden-Harris Administration's labor policies.

We test this theory in Figure 5. On the horizontal axis, we plot the average impact that union members thought that each Biden-Harris labor policy would have on their union, ranging from 1 (all policies strongly hurt their union) to 5 (all policies strongly helped their union), excluding respondents who didn't know about the policies. On the vertical axis we plot respondents' vote for Harris in the 2024 election (compared to votes for Trump, third party candidates, or not voting at all). We see a strikingly strong positive relationship: the more policies that union members thought strongly benefited their union, the more likely union members were to cast a vote in 2024 for Vice President Harris. By comparison, the fewer policies that respondents thought benefited their union—or the more policies respondents thought hurt their union—the more likely respondents were to vote for former President Trump. This relationship persists even after controlling for union members' partisanship, ideological attachment, self-reported interest in politics, and sector of employment, suggesting that it does not, for instance, simply reflect that Democratic or liberal union members felt more supported by Biden policies and were more likely to vote for Harris.

“... the more policies that union members thought strongly benefited their union, the more likely union members were to cast a vote in 2024 for Vice President Harris.”

Figure 5



While not causal evidence, our findings in Figure 5 suggest that the tangible impact that policies had on workers may have mattered—especially as communication about the policies and their impact were refracted through workers’ own unions. This finding suggests that the Biden labor agenda may have had an impact on bringing more union members to support his Vice President in the 2024 election. It also suggests that union members who were either not aware of Biden’s labor policies—for example, because their union was not communicating about those policies—or members who thought the policies hurt their unions (as in the case, for example, of clean energy investments) may have seen lower levels of support for Vice President Harris.

Conclusion

Our findings reveal that despite declining membership rates, unions continue to serve as critical political institutions in American democracy. The "union difference" in voting patterns—with union members supporting Harris at markedly higher rates than non-union workers—underscores organized labor's persistent role in electoral politics. Perhaps most significantly, our data shows that union membership may mitigate some of the drift of working-class workers, especially Black and Hispanic workers away from the Democratic party.

At the same time, our research highlights substantial variation across the labor movement in voting patterns, engagement, communication, and mobilization. The stark differences between industrial unions like the Teamsters and public sector unions like the NEA point to a diverse labor movement with varied political priorities and identities. Similarly, the inconsistent level of

political mobilization across unions—with most local unions avoiding political engagement entirely—suggests that organized labor's political impact could be significantly greater with more consistent member outreach and education. As our findings on Biden-Harris Administration labor policies demonstrate, union members who were aware of and believed their union benefited from these policies were substantially more likely to support Harris, suggesting the importance of effective policy communication through union channels. Relatedly, our finding that few unions were communicating to their members about inflation and cost-of-living issues in the run-up to the 2024 election suggests a real missed opportunity for unions, acting as trusted intermediaries to workers, to share narratives about how the economy works.

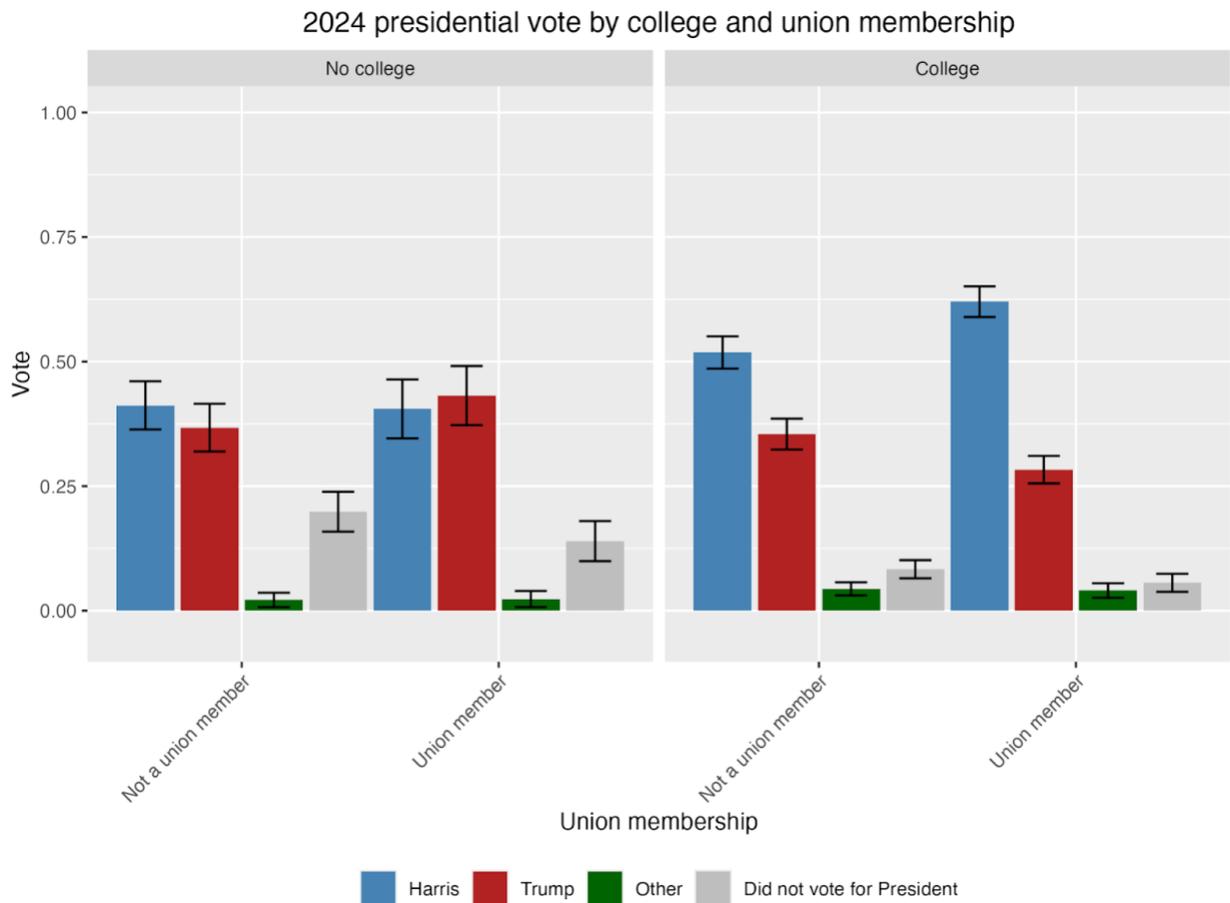
Looking ahead, these findings have implications for the labor movement and for union members. For unions, our research suggests that more consistent political engagement and policy education could strengthen their political impact and potentially enhance member solidarity around shared economic interests. For example, as the economic fallout from the Trump Administration's policies continues, unions can play an important role in fostering discussion around their impacts on working people.

Ultimately, our findings affirm that unions remain a pivotal actor in American politics, with the potential to shape electoral outcomes and the broader political environment, but also with significant variation that warrants further research.

Appendix

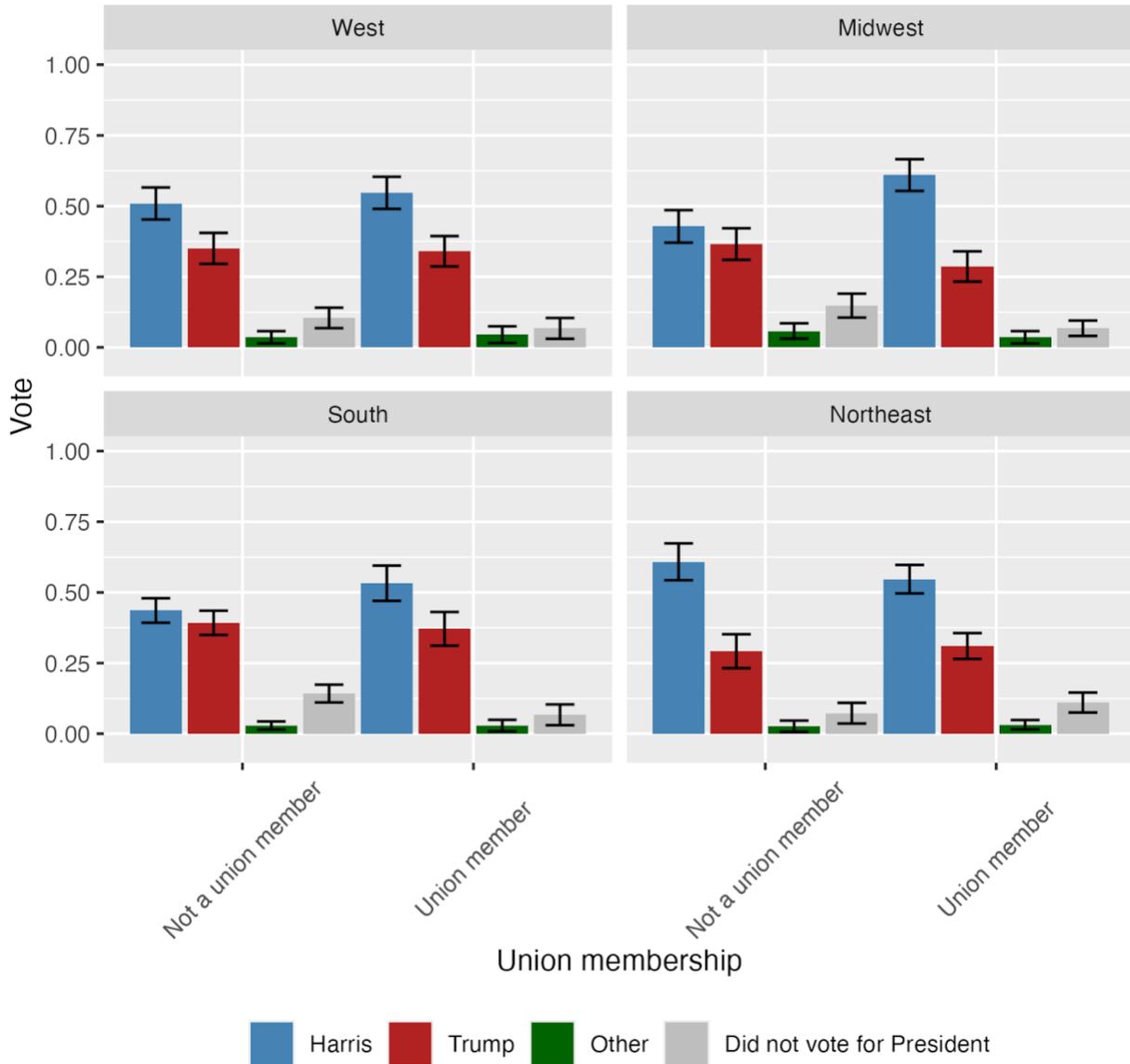
Union members' vote choice

In addition to our analysis of union members' vote choice by race and ethnicity, we also consider differences in voter turnout and choice by education and union membership in light of the continued polarization of the electorate by educational attainment. In Table X, we find that college-educated union members showed higher levels of support for Harris compared to non-union workers, while non-college educated union members were less likely to support Harris compared to non-union workers. The union-non-union member gap is increasingly pronounced at higher levels of education.



In addition, we find that the differences between union members and non-members vary by geography. The biggest differences were in the Midwest and in the South, where support for the Harris campaign was 18.2% and 9.2% higher, respectively. Similarly, union members were 8% and 7.5% more likely to vote than non-union workers in the Midwest and South, respectively. Curiously, the union difference is minimal in regions that have stronger Democratic support, especially the Northeast.

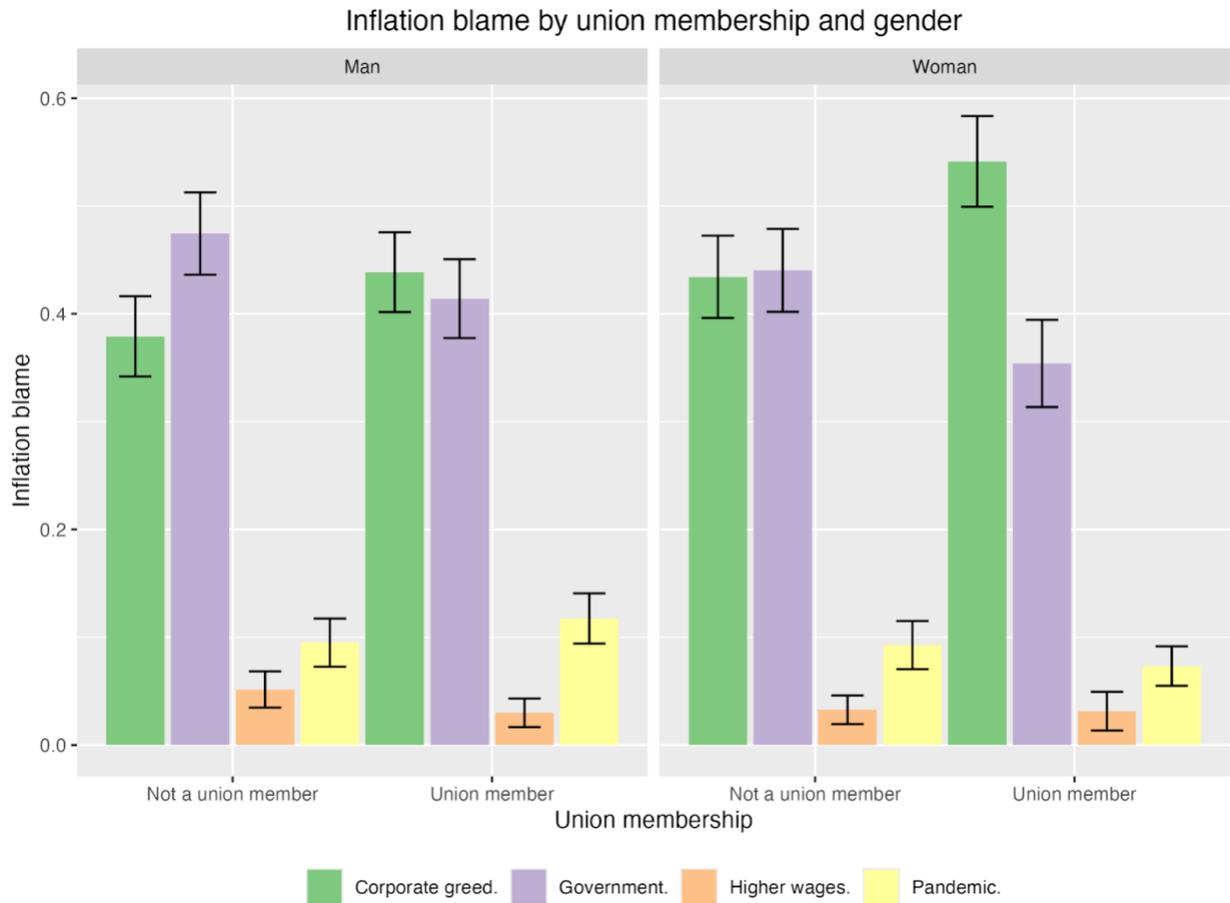
2024 presidential vote by region and union membership



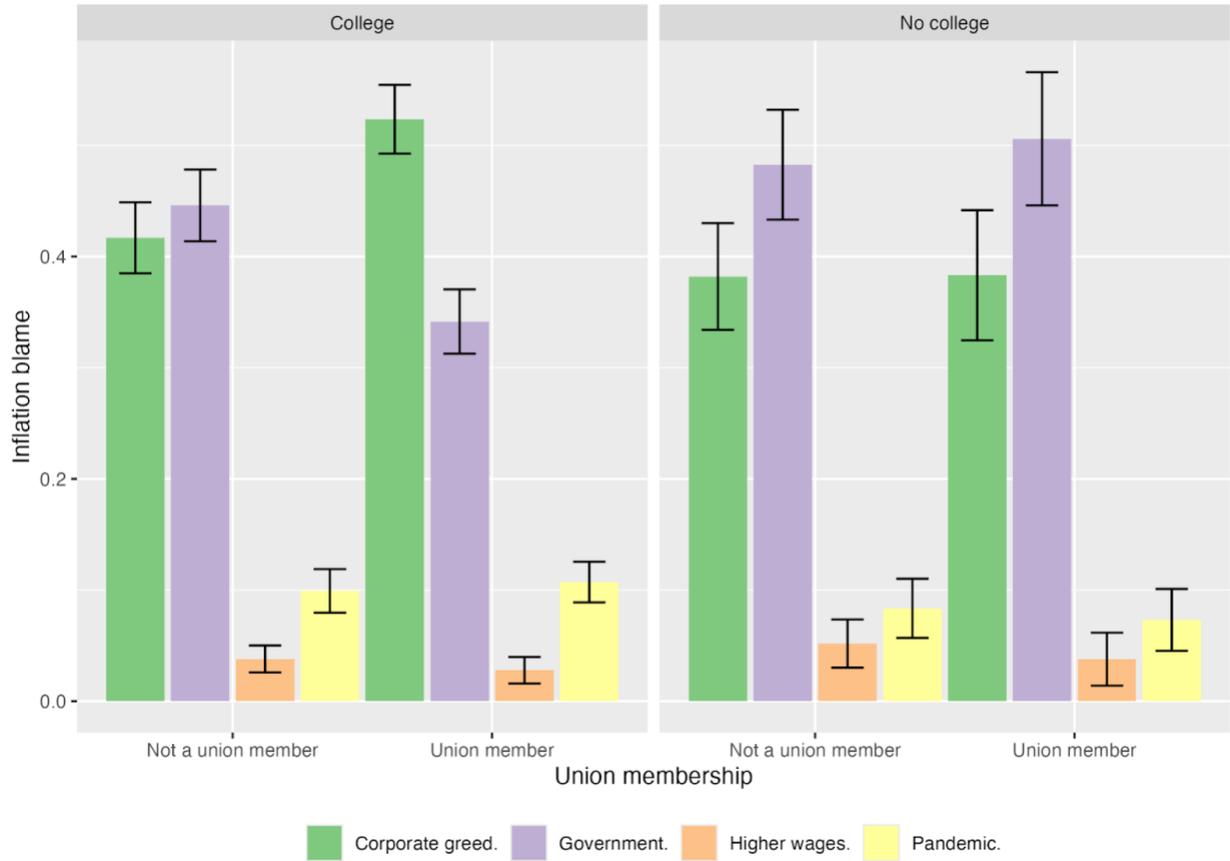
Further analyses of inflation attribution

When we broke down the attribution of causes for inflation among different types of union members, we found important differences by gender, education, race, and geography. Female union members were significantly more likely to blame corporate greed (53.6%) than men (43.7%), who were nearly equally split between blaming corporations and government. There was a clear education gradient to blame for inflation, with attribution of inflation to corporate greed increasing with educational attainment from 36.4% of those without a high school diploma to 56.8% for those with postgraduate degrees. (Attribution of inflation to government

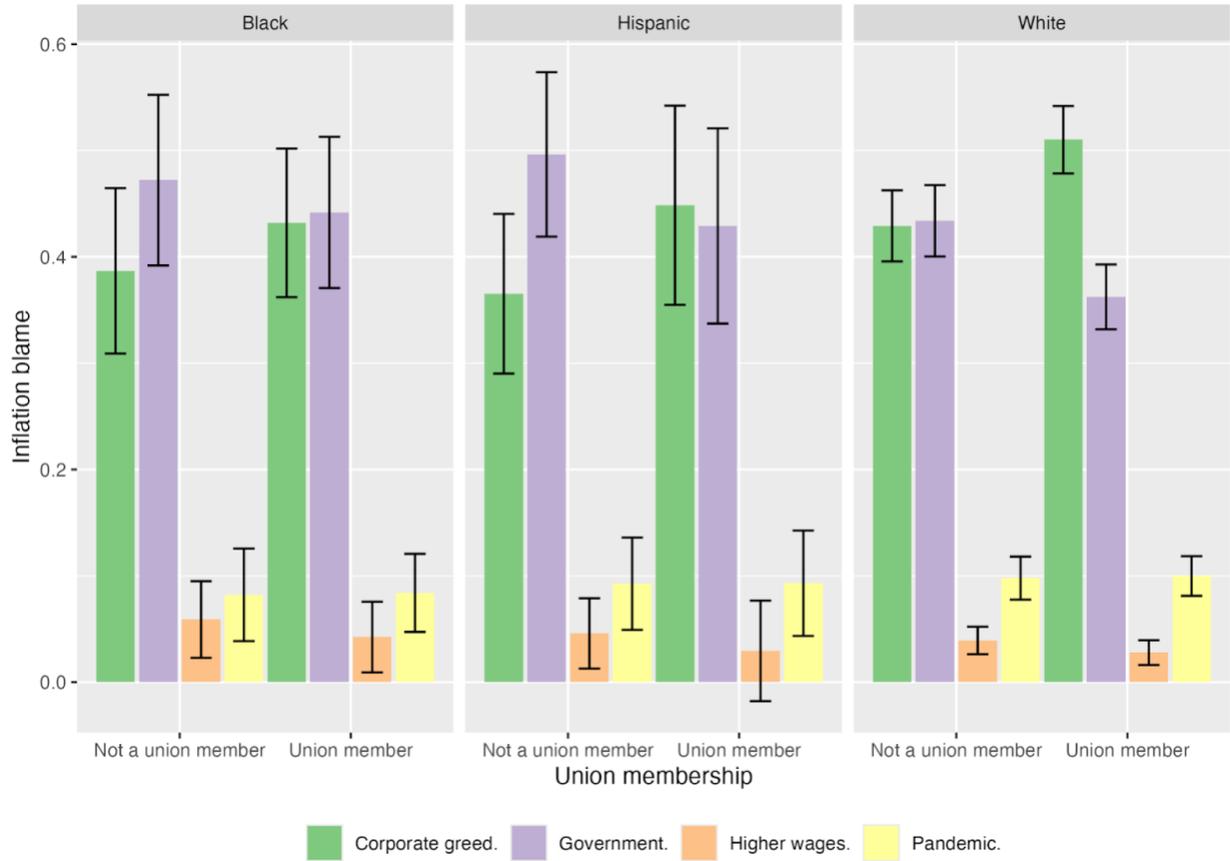
decisions decreased over formal levels of education). And we found that Black union members were slightly more likely to blame government (45.6%) than corporate greed (43.8%), as were union members in the South, where 46.6% of members blamed government decisions and 40.9% blamed corporate greed.



Inflation blame by union membership and college



Inflation blame by union membership and race



Inflation blame by union membership and region

