*Australian Journal of Political Science,*
*Vol. 41, No. 4, December, pp. 537–552*

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

# How Do Unionists Vote? Estimating the Causal Impact of Union Membership on Voting Behaviour from 1966 to 2004

ANDREW LEIGH

*Australian National University*

This paper explores the voting patterns of trade union members in Australian elections conducted between 1966 and 2004 and finds that, on average, 63% of trade union members vote for the Australian Labor Party. Despite the fact that union membership declined from around half of the workforce in the early 1980s to a quarter of the workforce in the early 2000s, unionists have not become more pro-Labor. Analysing unionists' voting behaviour by gender, it is found that male unionists were more pro-Labor than female unionists in the 1960s, but that the reverse is true today. Recognising that union membership may be endogenous with respect to political ideology, this study instruments for union membership and concludes that the observed association between union membership and voting reflects a causal relationship.

## Introduction

Over the past two decades, union membership in Australia has fallen from approximately half of the workforce to a quarter of the workforce. Yet unions still retain an important place in Australian politics. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), to which most Australian unions are affiliated, is one of the major lobby groups in Australian politics. One of the major parties in Australian politics, the Australian Labor Party (ALP), is heavily dominated by the union movement.

Yet while much attention has been paid to the role of unions in Australian politics, little attention has been directed to the voting behaviour of union members. Understanding more about unionists' voting patterns can provide us with a fuller picture of how unions operate, and the extent to which the political preferences of union leaders differ from those of their members.

By estimating voting patterns over 11 elections, this paper provides an insight on how the voting patterns of unionists have changed over nearly 40 years. Using such a large sample makes it possible to separately analyse voting patterns of men and women, as well as to explore the factors that lead some unionists to vote for the

Andrew Leigh is a Fellow in the Social Policy Evaluation, Analysis and Research Centre, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University. Thanks are due to Mark Bahnisch, David Charnock, Sinclair Davidson, Murray Goot and Andrew Norton for valuable comments and suggestions on an earlier draft. Responsibility for any remaining errors lies solely with the author.

ISSN 1036-1146 print; ISSN 1363-030X online/06/040537-16 
DOI: 10.1080/10361140600959767

Coalition. To take account of the possible endogeneity of union membership with respect to voting, two instrumental variable strategies are employed.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section discusses the existing literature and provides some background on union membership in Australia. The third section presents empirical results, and the final section concludes.

## Background

Closely allied with the union movement since its formation in 1891, unions retain a strong role within the ALP.[1] Those unions that are affiliated to the ALP have a formal role in the party's decision-making process, and control 50% of the votes at the party's federal conference. Of Labor's 88 federal politicians in the 41st parliament, 30 were former party and union officials (Grattan 2005). In 2003–04, the union movement donated $7 m to the Labor Party, around 15% of its total fundraising over this period (AEC 2005; AAP 2005), while the Coalition parties received no donations from unions.[2] In having close ties to the Australian union movement, the ALP is similar to Continental European social democratic parties, which cooperate closely with the national trade union movements in their respective countries.[3]

Yet some have argued that the close ties between the union movement and the ALP have frayed over recent decades. Jaensch (1989) argues that the 1950s Labor Party 'was labourist ... essentially protective of labour and labour's interests', but that the relationship changed with the prices and wages accord in the 1980s. While the organisational ties between federal Labor and the ACTU were strong during this period, there is a view that unions at this time came to be treated by Labor more as a pressure group than an integral part of the organisation (Phillimore 2000; Briggs 2002; Griffin and Svensen 2002, cited in Griffin, Nyland and O'Rourke 2004).

One issue upon which the union movement and the Labor Party have historically differed is trade. Three of Australia's largest tariff cuts—in 1973, 1988 and 1991—were implemented by federal Labor governments, and all were strongly opposed by the union movement at the time (Leigh 2002). The ALP has also recently resisted a push by the union movement to include labour standards in trade agreements (Griffin, Nyland and O'Rourke 2004). Another point of difference between the party and sections of the union movement has been environmental policy. In the final week of the 2004 election campaign, Coalition Prime Minister John Howard was cheered by a crowd of Tasmanian timber workers—many of them members of the Construction,

[1]The origins of the Labor Party were in New South Wales, where the party was formed as the Labor Electoral League by the NSW Trades and Labour Council (McMullin 1991, 11). However, as McMullin notes, 'In Labor's early years in NSW, protectionists, free traders, single taxers and socialists jostled for control of the party, and the same kind of process occurred, with significant variations, in each colony' (1991, 43).

[2]The Website <www.democracy4sale.org>, operated by the NSW Greens, tabulates AEC data on donations into donor categories. Over the period 1998–2004, only one union gave to the federal branch of either the Liberal Party or the National Party: a $4000 donation by the Police Federation to the federal National Party in 2002–03. The other non-Labor parties to benefit from union donations were the Australian Democrats and the Greens, who received five-figure donations in various years from the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union.

[3]As Scott (2003) points out, the distinction between 'labour' and 'social democratic' parties may be less important in practice than the divide between these parties and the US Democrats, which does not have the same close relationship with the AFL/CIO.

Forestry, Mining and Energy Union—as he announced a package that would ensure no job losses in their industry.

Another factor that might have affected the voting behaviour of union members is the decline in union membership that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s. Figure 1 shows union membership over the period from 1966 to 2004. Between 1966 and 1986, union membership fluctuated between 45% and 52% of the workforce, before collapsing during the late 1980s and 1990s. In 2004, just 23% of the Australian workforce were members of a trade union.

As a check on the election surveys used in this paper, I also calculate for each survey the fraction of employees who are union members. These figures are shown with black squares in Figure 1, and correspond reasonably well with the official data.

At the same time as union membership has collapsed, there is also some suggestive evidence that the proportion of union members whose unions are affiliated to the Labor Party has fallen over time. While data on the fraction of unionists belonging to affiliated unions are scant, Rawson has estimated that about 60% of unionists belonged to ALP-affiliated unions in the mid-1980s, and the figure was 'considerably higher' in earlier decades (Rawson 1986, quoted in Griffin, Nyland and O'Rourke 2004).

Only a few Australian studies have estimated the relationship between union membership and voting. Using data from the 1993 and 1996 election studies, Charnock (1997b) estimated the effect of union membership (in a regression including 32

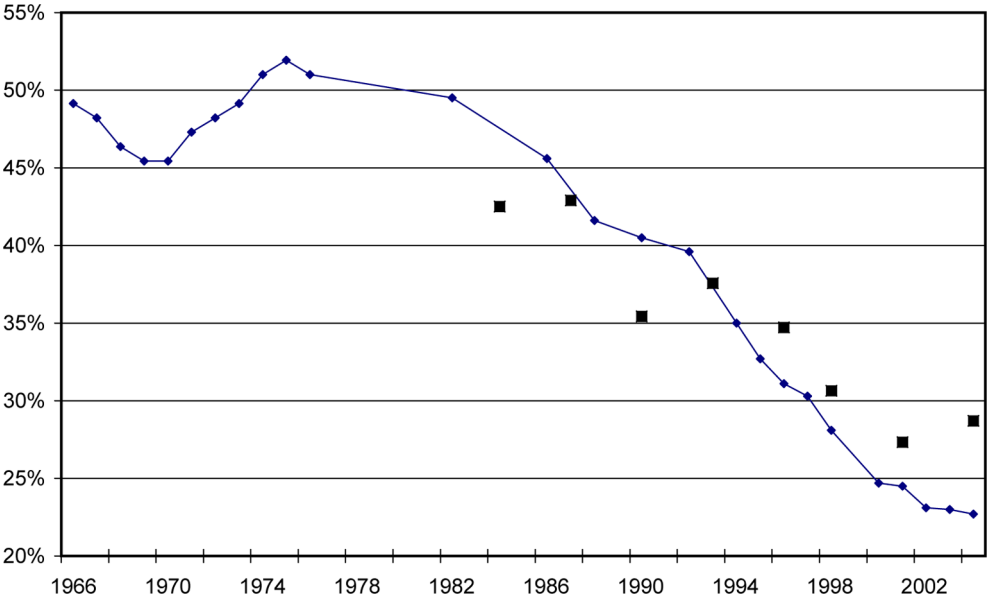


**Figure 1.** Share of employees in a union (1966–2004). *Note*: union membership rates from 1976 onwards are derived from employee surveys—generally regarded as the most accurate source. For earlier years, we only have estimates from union surveys. These are invariably higher, since they include people who belong to multiple unions, and those who are no longer financial members. In 1976, the estimate in the employee surveys was 7.8% higher than the estimate in the union surveys. To make the two series comparable, I therefore scale down the union survey number for 1911–75 by 7.8%. *Source*: ABS 6323.0, 6325.0, 6310.0. Black squares represent union membership as a share of the workforce, estimated from election surveys. Since employment status was not asked of all respondents in the surveys that followed the 1966 and 1969 elections, the estimates for these years are not shown.

other demographic and behavioural variables), and found that union members were 18–19% more likely to vote for the ALP. Manning (2006) found similar voting patterns among unionists in the 1987 and 2004 elections. Leithner (1997) explored the interaction between union membership and gender in the 1993 election, and found a gender voting gap only among unionists. Leigh (2005) observed the same pattern in 10 elections over the period 1966–2001, but urged caution on placing a causal interpretation on the finding, on the basis that union membership is not necessarily exogenous to partisan preference.

What is known about the voting behaviour of union members in other countries? In the United States, Freeman (2003) found that union members (and those in a union household) were 9–16% more likely to vote Democratic in house and presidential elections.[4] Adding additional covariates to the model had little impact on the marginal effect of union membership. Comparing voting behaviour in Australia, Britain and Canada, Bélanger (2003) found that the marginal effect of being a union member was larger in Australia than the other two countries. Other studies to have analysed the relationship between voting behaviour and union membership include Juravich and Shergold (1988); Uhlaner (1989); Delaney, Masters and Schwochau (1990); Crewe, Fox and Day (1995); Clark and Masters (2001); and Citrin, Schickler and Sides (2003). Without exception, these studies assume that union membership is exogenous with respect to voting behaviour—in other words, that union membership affects political preferences, rather than the other way around. I return to this issue below.

## Empirical Results

In analysing voting behaviour and union membership, I use 11 post-election surveys for elections held between 1966 and 2004. Two of these surveys—1987 and 1990—do not contain information on income, and are hence excluded from the multiple regression analysis. In most years, the union membership question was of the type, 'Are you a member of a trade union?', but in 1990 and 1993, the question also allowed respondents to select the option 'staff association'. I code those in staff associations as non-union members (see the Data Appendix for details).

I code respondents as 1 if they said that they voted for the Labor Party, and 0 if they voted for the Liberal–National Coalition. Respondents who said that they cast a first preference vote for any other party are coded as missing. Because the Australian electoral system allows for preferential voting, one would ideally like to take account of the second preferences of those who did not vote first for one of the major parties, but this question was unfortunately not asked in the earlier election surveys. To compensate for this, I present results based on first preference votes in the regression analyses, but show two-party preferred vote results (where available) in the charts.

More information on the surveys and particular variables is set out in the Data Appendix. Summary statistics are provided in Table 1.

The fraction of the sample who are members of a trade union is depicted in Figure 2. Across all surveys, an average of 28% of voters are members of a trade union. Note that Figure 2 looks at *voters*, while Figure 1 shows the proportion of *employees* in a union. According to the election surveys, the fraction of men in a

[4]CNN exit polls for the 2004 presidential election suggested a union voting gap at the top of this range (16%). Among non-union members, 45% voted for Democratic candidate John Kerry, while 61% of union members did so. See <http://us.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/>.

**Table 1.** Summary statistics

| Variable | Mean | SD | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| Voted Labor (first preference) | 0.471 | 0.499 | 17,786 |
| Voted Labor (two-party preferred) | 0.465 | 0.499 | 8577 |
| Union member | 0.281 | 0.449 | 17,786 |
| Age | 46.103 | 16.165 | 17,326 |
| Years of education | 12.159 | 1.855 | 17,240 |
| Born overseas | 0.220 | 0.414 | 17,641 |
| Female | 0.490 | 0.500 | 17,744 |
| Married | 0.722 | 0.448 | 17,647 |
| Divorced | 0.063 | 0.243 | 17,647 |

*Note*: Household income is not included, since it is coded by quintiles.

union steadily declined, while the fraction of women in a union grew until the early 1980s (driven by rising female labour force participation), and then declined somewhat during the 1990s.

The voting patterns of trade unionists are depicted in Figure 3. Across the 11 elections, 63% of union members voted for the Labor Party. In instances where the survey also recorded both the two-party preferred vote, the fraction supporting the Labor Party is very similar (note that the primary vote analysis includes only those who voted for either Labor or the Coalition).[5] In the aggregate data, there is little evidence of any strong time trend in the voting patterns of trade union members.

However, when the data are broken down by gender, a more nuanced pattern emerges. Figures 4 and 5 show the fraction of union members voting Labor in the various elections. Over the entire period, 57% of female union members voted Labor, while 67% of male union members did so. However, in recent years these two groups appear to have converged. Indeed, the 2004 election saw a larger fraction of female unionists vote Labor (61%), than male unionists (57%).

I now turn to a multiple regression analysis, estimating the relationship between union membership and voting Labor across nine elections (1987 and 1990 are excluded since respondents in these years were not asked their income). Column (1) of Table 2 shows the relationship between union membership and voting Labor, with only election fixed effects. Union members are 23% more likely to vote Labor. In column (2) I add a vector of plausibly exogenous demographic controls—five age dummies, five income quintiles, four education categories, whether the respondent was born overseas, gender and marital status—and find that this makes no substantial difference to the union membership coefficient (indeed, the union membership coefficient is slightly larger). Similar results obtain if the sample is restricted to the 2004 election (columns (3) and (4)).[6]

[5]The primary vote and the two-party preferred vote results are similar because the voting patterns of unionists and non-unionists are similar with regard to minor parties. For example, in the 2004 election, the full distribution of first preference votes among non-unionists (unionists) was: Liberal 48.6% (33.2%), National 4.0% (1.8%), Labor 29.7% (49.6%), Democrats 3.0% (3.1%), Greens 5.8% (4.9%), One Nation 1.8% (2.1%), Another party/Independent 2.6% (1.3%), Did not vote 4.4% (4.1%).

[6]Employment status is not included as a control in the regressions, since it is unavailable for the 1966 and 1969 election surveys (which asked only about the employment status of the head of household). However, for the years when the respondent's employment status is available, including it as a control makes little difference to the union coefficient.

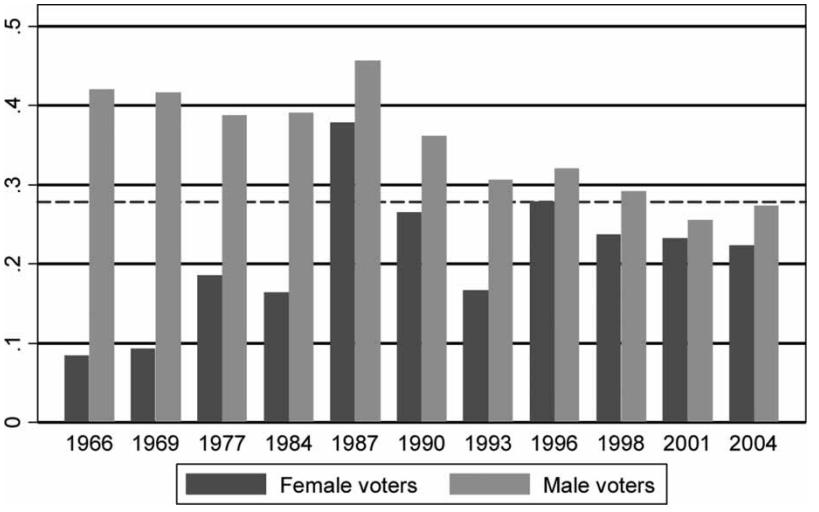


**Figure 2.** What fraction of voters are union members? *Note*: the dashed line denotes the average over all surveys.

Among union members, what factors are associated with voting Labor? To answer this question, Table 3 restricts the sample to union members only, and explores the effect of demographic characteristics on the voting decision of unionists. From the pooled sample (column (1)), it appears that those union members who are more likely to vote Labor are those who are male, middle aged, have lower household incomes, and are less educated. Restricting the sample to 2004 only (column (2)), most of these effects become statistically insignificant, owing to the much smaller sample size. The only effect that remains significant in 2004 is the propensity of more affluent union members to vote for the Coalition.

Up to this point, I have estimated the association between union membership and voting. However, there is no a priori reason to interpret this association in a causal fashion. It is possible that one's political preferences affect union membership, or that both are affected by some third factor. To illustrate this point, one need only look to a parallel literature—estimating factors affecting the decision to join a union, where some studies have estimated the impact that having a Left-wing political orientation has on one's decision to join a union.[7]

The problem of identifying causation is not unique to the question of union membership and voting. Indeed, it will arise in any instance where researchers are estimating the relationship between two attitudinal values. For example, researchers have tested whether Australians' voting patterns are affected by self-identified class (McAllister 1992; Goot 1994; Charnock 1997a), post-materialist values (Gow 1990; Western and Tranter 2001) and attitudes to leadership (Marks 1993).

Such studies typically assumed that the presence of an association between voting and class/values/attitudes indicates that class/values/attitudes have a causal effect

[7]In the Australian context see, for example, Peetz (1998, 56–64). But as Riley (1997, 277) points out in her review of the British literature on the factors that affect union membership: 'An employee's ideological convictions are frequently surveyed as researchers suspect that ideological convictions function as a direct motivator of the joining decision. However, the causal relationships between these independent variables have not been established.'

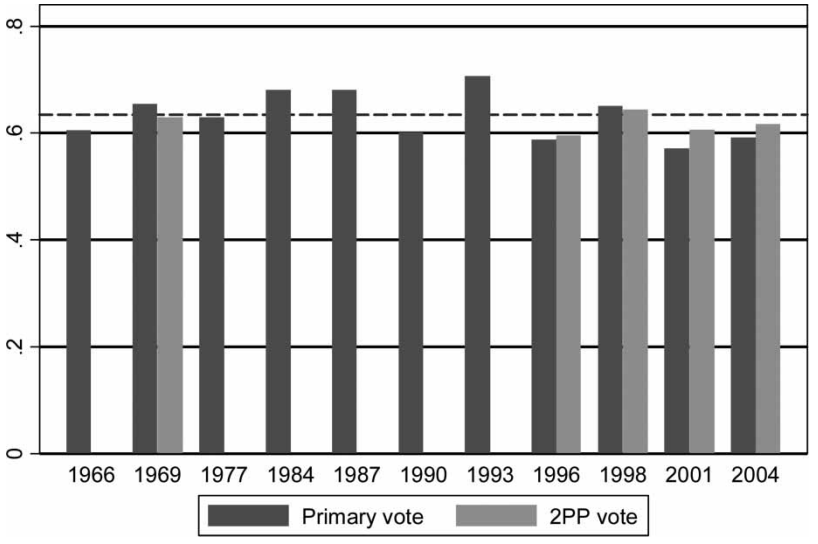


**Figure 3.** What fraction of union members vote Labor?

on the voting decision. But, of course, correlation does not prove causation. Indeed, it is perfectly plausible that the causal relationship operates in the opposite direction—that a person's political inclination is what determines their self-identified class, attitude to post-materialist values or beliefs about leadership. Alternatively, it might be the case that voting and attitudes are determined jointly by some other third factor that is not observable to the statistician.

One way to address this endogeneity problem is to include in the regression only variables that are plausibly exogenous to the voting decision. Covariates such as gender, age, education and income are unlikely to be determined by one's political preferences, and hence an association between these variables and partisan preferences

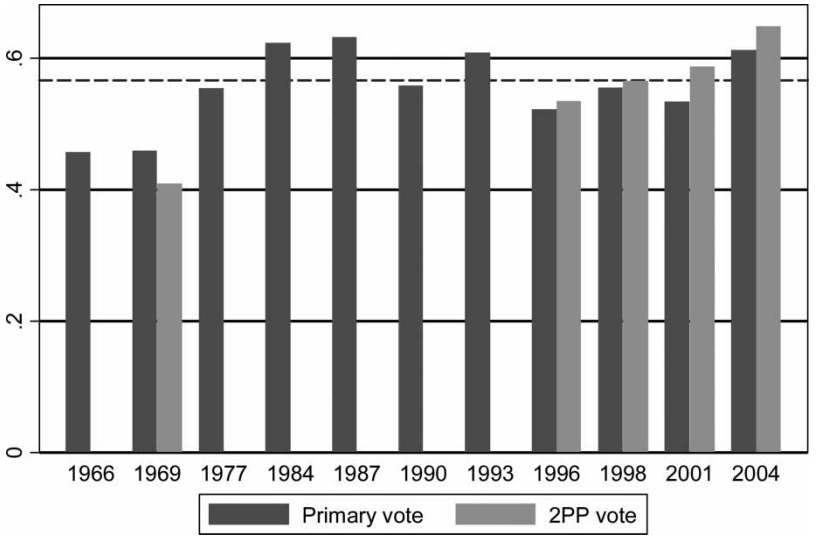


**Figure 4.** What fraction of female union members vote Labor?

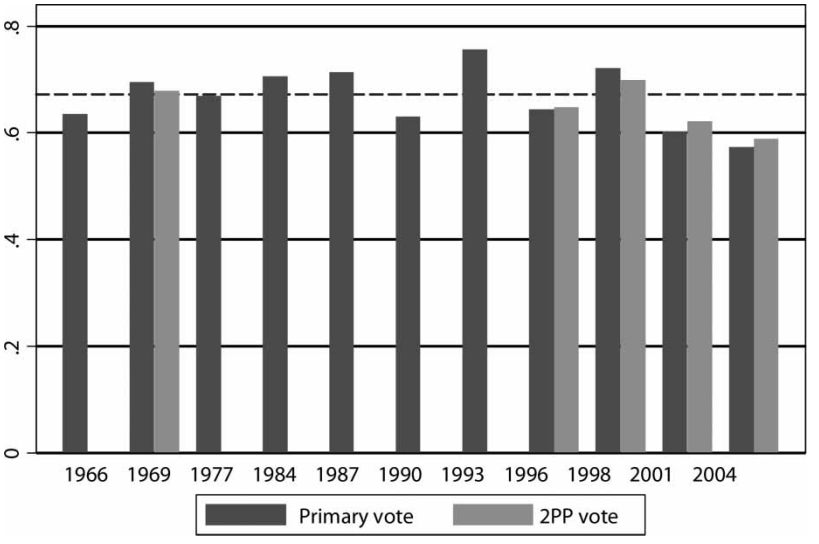


**Figure 5.** What fraction of male union members vote Labor?

can usually be assumed to be causal. While this has the virtue of simplicity, it has the disadvantage of severely restricting the variables that can be included in a voting equation.

Another approach, particularly useful in the case where the independent variable is not plausibly exogenous, is to use an instrumental variable. A good instrument must meet two criteria: it must be correlated with the independent variable of interest (in this case, union membership), and it must be uncorrelated with the dependent variable (in this case, voting behaviour), except through its effect on union membership.

Here, I use two instruments to estimate the causal effect of union membership on voting. The first instrument is whether union membership is compulsory in the respondent's workplace. The assumption underlying this instrument is that an individual's decision to join a workplace where union membership is compulsory is not a function of their ideology, but rather their aptitude and the expected returns from employment in that occupation. Thus working for a company where union membership is compulsory should only affect voting behaviour through the channel of union membership.

The second instrument is the unionisation rate in the respondent's occupation. Again, the assumption underlying this instrument is that occupational choice is not driven by the unionisation rate in a given occupation, but by the person's ability. However, the decision to work in a more heavily unionised occupation will increase the probability that the person will join a union.

Since I am still instrumenting with a choice variable, neither of these instruments will be perfectly exogenous with respect to the voting decision. However, both have the advantage that occupational choice is plausibly more exogenous to voting behaviour than the decision to join a union.[8]

[8]Another possible instrument would have been to use the timing of laws banning compulsory unionisation in different states during the early 1990s. However, the first stage of this regression was not significant.

**Table 2.** Union membership and voting. Dependent variable: 1 if voted Labor, 0 if voted Coalition

| | (1)<br>1966–2004 | (2)<br>1966–2004 | (3)<br>2004 only | (4)<br>2004 only |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Union member | 0.232*** | 0.236*** | 0.225*** | 0.242*** |
| | [0.010] | [0.010] | [0.034] | [0.035] |
| Aged 30–39 | | 0.003 | | −0.025 |
| | | [0.016] | | [0.060] |
| Aged 40–49 | | −0.019 | | 0.023 |
| | | [0.016] | | [0.058] |
| Aged 50–59 | | −0.081*** | | 0.006 |
| | | [0.017] | | [0.058] |
| Aged 60 or over | | −0.139*** | | −0.153*** |
| | | [0.016] | | [0.055] |
| Income quintile 2 | | −0.082*** | | −0.143*** |
| | | [0.014] | | [0.046] |
| Income quintile 3 | | −0.120*** | | −0.183*** |
| | | [0.015] | | [0.048] |
| Income quintile 4 | | −0.161*** | | −0.200*** |
| | | [0.015] | | [0.048] |
| Income quintile 5 | | −0.226*** | | −0.250*** |
| | | [0.015] | | [0.048] |
| High school only | | −0.079*** | | −0.04 |
| | | [0.015] | | [0.056] |
| Diploma/trade | | −0.063*** | | −0.091** |
| | | [0.012] | | [0.042] |
| University degree | | −0.01 | | 0.031 |
| | | [0.017] | | [0.052] |
| Born overseas | | 0.053*** | | 0.044 |
| | | [0.012] | | [0.038] |
| Female | | −0.044*** | | 0.003 |
| | | [0.010] | | [0.032] |
| Married | | −0.028** | | −0.02 |
| | | [0.013] | | [0.043] |
| Divorced | | −0.021 | | −0.103* |
| | | [0.022] | | [0.060] |
| Election FE? | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| Observations | 12,761 | 12,761 | 1091 | 1091 |
| Pseudo-$R^2$ | 0.04 | 0.06 | 0.03 | 0.06 |
| Observed prob. | 0.47 | 0.47 | 0.42 | 0.42 |

*Notes*: Coefficients are marginal effects from a probit model. *, ** and *** denote statistical significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% levels, respectively. Robust standard errors are bracketed. Excluded categories are as follows: age—those aged 18–29; income—first quintile; education—high school dropouts.

The first instrumental variable (IV) strategy is implemented using surveys covering the 1966, 1969 and 1977 elections. Subsequent election surveys did not ask respondents whether union membership was compulsory in their workplace, probably because compulsory unionisation had largely disappeared by the early 1990s (see Peetz 1998, 87–103). The second uses the 1998, 2001 and 2004 election surveys, which had a common occupational coding system. Unionisation rates in each occupation are estimated using the 1998 election survey, and are then used to instrument for union membership in the 2001 and 2004 surveys. To ensure sufficient sample size in each cell, I use broad occupation codes and drop occupations with fewer than five respondents. This leaves 36 occupations for which unionisation rates can be

**Table 3.** What determines how union members vote? Dependent variable: 1 if voted Labor, 0 if voted Coalition. Sample restricted to union members

| | (1) 1966–2004 | (2) 2004 |
|---|---|---|
| Aged 30–39 | 0.068** | −0.097 |
| | [0.027] | [0.150] |
| Aged 40–49 | 0.068** | 0.001 |
| | [0.027] | [0.134] |
| Aged 50–59 | −0.021 | −0.109 |
| | [0.030] | [0.137] |
| Aged 60 or over | −0.070** | −0.236 |
| | [0.035] | [0.145] |
| Income quintile 2 | −0.086*** | −0.269** |
| | [0.032] | [0.109] |
| Income quintile 3 | −0.121*** | −0.386*** |
| | [0.035] | [0.110] |
| Income quintile 4 | −0.154*** | −0.345*** |
| | [0.034] | [0.114] |
| Income quintile 5 | −0.189*** | −0.333*** |
| | [0.036] | [0.126] |
| High school only | −0.080*** | −0.07 |
| | [0.030] | [0.134] |
| Diploma/trade | −0.055** | −0.004 |
| | [0.022] | [0.092] |
| University degree | 0.033 | 0.123 |
| | [0.029] | [0.099] |
| Born overseas | 0.014 | −0.052 |
| | [0.020] | [0.080] |
| Female | −0.139*** | −0.002 |
| | [0.019] | [0.065] |
| Married | −0.012 | −0.051 |
| | [0.023] | [0.092] |
| Divorced | −0.019 | −0.123 |
| | [0.040] | [0.130] |
| Election FE? | Yes | No |
| Observations | 3528 | 276 |
| Pseudo-$R^2$ | 0.03 | 0.05 |
| Observed prob. | 0.63 | 0.58 |

*Notes*: Coefficients are marginal effects from a probit model. *, ** and *** denote statistical significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% levels, respectively. Robust standard errors are bracketed. Excluded categories are as follows: age—those aged 18–29; income—first quintile; education—high school dropouts.

estimated. Unionisation rates in these 36 occupations range from zero to 59%, with a mean of 27%.

Table 4 shows the results of these two specifications. For simplicity, I use a linear probability model. In both cases, I therefore first show the OLS estimates, to confirm that the coefficient on the union membership dummy is not noticeably different from the probit models. In column (1) the union membership coefficient is 0.219 (the probit marginal effect for these elections is 0.227), while in column (3) the union membership coefficient is 0.215 (the corresponding probit marginal effect is 0.223).

In both IV strategies, the first-stage regressions are highly statistically significant, and the partial $R^2$ values of the excluded instruments are sufficiently large that neither

**Table 4.** Instrumenting for unionisation. Dependent variable: 1 if voted Labor, 0 if voted Coalition

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Instrument (years) | | | |
| | Compulsory unionisation (1966–77) | | Unionisation rate in occupation (2001–04) | |
| | OLS | IV | OLS | IV |
| Union member | 0.219*** | 0.218*** | 0.215*** | 0.446*** |
| | [0.018] | [0.024] | [0.024] | [0.117] |
| Aged 30–39 | −0.021 | −0.021 | −0.033 | −0.053 |
| | [0.024] | [0.024] | [0.040] | [0.042] |
| Aged 40–49 | 0.012 | 0.012 | −0.014 | −0.05 |
| | [0.024] | [0.024] | [0.039] | [0.043] |
| Aged 50–59 | −0.046* | −0.046* | −0.066* | −0.106** |
| | [0.025] | [0.025] | [0.040] | [0.045] |
| Aged 60 or over | −0.066*** | −0.066*** | −0.216*** | −0.258*** |
| | [0.025] | [0.026] | [0.040] | [0.045] |
| Income quintile 2 | −0.049** | −0.049** | −0.136*** | −0.138*** |
| | [0.023] | [0.023] | [0.035] | [0.035] |
| Income quintile 3 | −0.122*** | −0.122*** | −0.203*** | −0.220*** |
| | [0.028] | [0.028] | [0.037] | [0.038] |
| Income quintile 4 | −0.169*** | −0.169*** | −0.233*** | −0.267*** |
| | [0.025] | [0.025] | [0.037] | [0.040] |
| Income quintile 5 | −0.257*** | −0.257*** | −0.290*** | −0.303*** |
| | [0.025] | [0.025] | [0.038] | [0.039] |
| High school only | −0.093*** | −0.093*** | −0.042 | −0.062 |
| | [0.020] | [0.020] | [0.039] | [0.041] |
| Diploma/trade | −0.074*** | −0.074*** | −0.052* | −0.068** |
| | [0.020] | [0.020] | [0.028] | [0.030] |
| University degree | −0.041 | −0.041 | 0.054 | 0.028 |
| | [0.036] | [0.035] | [0.035] | [0.038] |
| Born overseas | −0.013 | −0.012 | 0.091*** | 0.089*** |
| | [0.019] | [0.019] | [0.026] | [0.026] |
| Female | −0.064*** | −0.064*** | 0.009 | 0.012 |
| | [0.016] | [0.017] | [0.021] | [0.022] |
| Married | 0.01 | 0.009 | −0.027 | −0.018 |
| | [0.020] | [0.020] | [0.030] | [0.031] |
| Divorced | 0.015 | 0.015 | −0.080* | −0.081* |
| | [0.048] | [0.048] | [0.045] | [0.046] |
| Election FE? | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 4145 | 4145 | 2125 | 2125 |
| $R^2$ | 0.09 | | 0.08 | |
| Partial $R^2$ of excluded instruments | | 0.5188 | | 0.0426 |
| Test of excluded instruments | | $F(1,4126) = 8261.00$ [$P = 0.0000$] | | $F(1,2107) = 88.05$ [$P = 0.0000$] |

*Notes*: *, ** and *** denote statistical significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% levels, respectively. Robust standard errors are bracketed. Excluded categories are as follows: age—those aged 18–29; income—first quintile; education—high school dropouts. Instrument in column (2) is whether union membership is compulsory in the respondent's workplace. Instrument in column (4) is the mean unionisation rate in the respondent's occupation (as calculated from the 1998 election survey).

appear to suffer from the so-called 'weak instruments' problem (Bound, Jaeger and Baker 1995). Using compulsory unionisation as an instrument, the coefficient is almost precisely the same as in the IV specification, suggesting that the marginal effect on the voting behaviour of those forced to join a union is the same as the average union effect. Using mean unionisation rates, the coefficient on union membership is considerably higher than in the OLS specification, suggesting that the marginal effect on voting behaviour of joining a highly unionised occupation is larger than the average effect of unionisation on voting. One plausible interpretation of this is that having more unionised co-workers might have a direct effect on one's voting decision. If so, this would suggest that compulsory unionisation laws are a better instrument than unionisation rates, and indicate that the results in column (2) should be preferred over those in column (4).

## Conclusion

This paper uses 11 post-election surveys covering elections from 1966 to 2004 to estimate the effect of union membership on voting behaviour. I find that around two-thirds of union members vote Labor, and around one-third vote for the Coalition. In probit regressions, union membership increases the chance that the respondent will vote Labor by around 23%. In comparative terms this is a large effect: approximately twice the magnitude of the effect found by Freeman (2003) for the United States.

The union voting effect does not appear to have changed significantly over time, nor does the effect of union membership change when controls are added for age, education, household income, marital status and whether the respondent was born overseas. The marginal effect of union membership was larger for men in the earlier surveys, but in the 2004 election survey the union effect appears to be larger for women. Among unionists, I investigate the factors that distinguish the two-thirds who vote Labor from the one-third who vote for the Coalition. Union members who are male, middle aged, have lower household incomes, and are less educated are more likely to vote Labor than other unionists.

To estimate the causal effect of union membership, two IV strategies are employed—using compulsory union laws and average unionisation rates across occupations to identify the impact of unionisation. The intuition behind the choice of instruments is that occupational choice is more plausibly exogenous with respect to political ideology than the decision to join a union. The results of both IV strategies suggest that the marginal effect estimated from a probit model is not upwardly biased.

Given the foregoing results, it is possible to see what the voting patterns in recent elections would look like if the unionisation rate had remained at 50% of the workforce, its approximate level in the period 1973–82. To calculate this, I multiply the point estimate of the effect of union membership on the Labor vote (+23%) by the change in the unionisation rate as a fraction of employees, by the share of voters who are employees.[9] These calculations are set out below:

1996 election:

Actual result: Coalition by 3.6%
Union effect on Labor vote: $0.23^{*}(0.5-0.31)^{*}0.55 = 2.4\%$

[9]Employment rates are calculated from Australian Bureau of Statistics Labour Force Statistics, as the participation rate minus the unemployment rate. The rate for the population aged 15+ is assumed to be the same as that for the voting-age population.

1998 election:

Actual result: Coalition win (but 2PP voteshare only 49%)
Union effect on Labor vote: 0.23*(0.5–0.28)*0.56 = 2.8%

2001 election:

Actual result: Coalition by 1.0%
Union effect on Labor vote: 0.23*(0.5–0.24)*0.56 = 3.3%

2004 election:

Actual result: Coalition by 2.7%
Union effect on Labor vote: 0.23*(0.5–0.23)*0.58 = 3.6%.

These results suggest a significant electoral loss to Labor from declining union membership. All else being equal, if half the workforce had remained unionised, Labor would probably have been victorious in the 1998, 2001 and 2004 federal elections. The decline in union membership adversely affects the ALP, and changing patterns of union membership would seem at least partly to explain Labor's poor performance in recent federal elections.

## References


AAP. 2005. 'ALP Donations up to $46 m under Latham.' *Sydney Morning Herald* 1 February.

AEC [Australian Electoral Commission]. 2005. *Annual Disclosure Returns 2003–04*. Canberra: AEC. <www.aec.gov.au>. Consulted 25 September 2006.

Bélanger, E. 2003. 'Anti-partyism and Third-party Vote Choice: A Comparison of Canada, Britain and Australia.' Paper presented at the European Consortium for Political Research Joint Sessions of Workshops, Edinburgh. 28 March–2 April.

Bound, J., D.A. Jaeger and R.M. Baker. 1995. 'Problems with Instrumental Variables Estimation when the Correlation between the Instruments and the Endogenous Explanatory Variable is Weak.' *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 90(430): 443–50.

Briggs, C. 2002. 'The Paradox of ACTU Hegemony.' *Labour and Industry* 12(3): 77–102.

Charnock, D. 1997a. 'Class and Voting in the 1996 Australian Federal Election.' *Electoral Studies* 16: 281–300.

Charnock, D. 1997b. 'Spatial Variations, Contextual and Social Structural Influences on Voting for the ALP at the 1996 Federal Election: Conclusions from Multilevel Analyses.' *Australian Journal of Political Science* 32(2): 237–54.

Citrin, J., E. Schickler and J. Sides. 2003. 'What if Everyone Voted? Simulating the Impact of Increased Turnout in Senate Elections.' *American Journal of Political Science* 47(1): 75–90.

Clark, P. and M.F. Masters. 2001. 'Competing Interest Groups and Union Members' Voting.' *Social Science Quarterly* 82(1): 105–16.

Crewe, I., A.D. Fox and N. Day. 1995. *The British Electorate, 1963–1992: A Compendium of Data from the British Election Studies*, rev. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Delaney, J.T., M.F. Masters and S. Schwochau. 1990. 'Union Membership and Voting for COPE-endorsed Candidates.' *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 43(5): 621–35.

Freeman, R.B. 2003. *What Do Unions Do . . . To Voting?* NBER Working Paper 9992. Cambridge, MA: NBER.

Goot, M. 1994. 'Class Voting, Issue Voting and Electoral Volatility.' In *Developments in Australian Politics*, eds J. Brett, J. Gillespie and M. Goot. Melbourne: Macmillan.

Goot, M. 2000. 'More "Relaxed and Comfortable": Public Opinion on Immigration under Howard.' *People and Place* 8(3): 46–60.

Gow, D. 1990. 'Economic Voting and Postmaterialist Values.' In *The Greening of Australian Politics: The 1990 Federal Election*, eds C. Bean, I. McAllister and J. Warhurst. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

Grattan, M. 2005. 'Demise of the Artisan Politician.' *The Age* 30 October.

Griffin, G., C. Nyland and A. O'Rourke. 2004. 'Trade Unions, the Australian Labor Party and the Trade–Labour Rights Debate.' *Australian Journal of Political Science* 39(1): 89–107.

Griffin, G. and S. Svensen. 2002. 'Unions in Australia: Struggling to Survive.' In *Changing Prospects for Trade Unionism*, eds P. Fairbrother and G. Griffin. London and New York: Continuum.

Jaensch, D. 1989. *The Hawke–Keating Hijack. The ALP in Transition*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Juravich, T. and P.R. Shergold. 1988. 'The Impact of Unions on the Voting Behavior of their Members.' *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 41(3): 374–85.
Leigh, A. 2002. 'Trade Liberalisation and the Australian Labor Party.' *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 48(4): 487–508.
Leigh, A. 2005. 'Economic Voting and Electoral Behavior: How do Individual, Local and National Factors Affect the Partisan Choice?' *Economics and Politics* 17(2): 265–96.
Leithner, C. 1997. 'A Gender Gap in Australia? Commonwealth Elections 1910–96.' *Australian Journal of Political Science* 32(1): 29–47.
Manning, H. 2006. 'Voters and Voting.' In *Government, Politics, Power and Public Policy in Australia*, eds A. Parkin, J. Summers and D. Woodward. Melbourne: Longman.
Marks, G. 1993. 'Partisanship and the Vote in Australia: Changes over Time 1967–1990.' *Political Behaviour* 15(2): 137–66.
McAllister, I. 1992. *Political Behaviour: Citizens, Parties and Elites in Australia*. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.
McMullin, R. 1991. *The Light on the Hill: The Australian Labor Party 1891–1991*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
Peetz, D. 1998. *Unions in a Contrary World: The Future of the Australian Trade Union Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Phillimore, J. 2000. 'The Limits of Supply-side Social Democracy: Australian Labor, 1983–96.' *Politics and Society* 28(4): 557–87.
Rawson, D. 1986. *Unions and Unionists in Australia*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
Riley, N.-M. 1997. 'Determinants of Union Membership: A Review.' *Labour* 11(2): 265–301.
Scott, A. 2003. 'Putting the Australian Labor Party in International Perspective.' Refereed paper presented to the Australasian Political Studies Association Conference, University of Tasmania, Hobart. 29 September–1 October.
Uhlaner, C. 1989. 'Rational Turnout: The Neglected Role of Groups.' *American Journal of Political Science* 33(2): 390–422.
Western, M. and B. Tranter. 2001. 'Postmaterialist and Economic Voting in Australia, 1990–98.' *Australian Journal of Political Science* 36(3): 439–58.

## Data Appendix

The surveys used in this paper are listed in Table A1. These were chosen on the basis that they included questions on which party the respondent voted for in the previous election, plus a set of demographic variables, including trade union membership. The 1987 and 1990 *Australian Election Studies* did not ask respondents any questions about income, and are hence excluded from the multiple regression analyses. (For 1987, Leigh 2005 uses the *1987–88 National Social Science Survey*, but it is not used here on the basis that its trade union membership question has an unusual wording.) The surveys covering the 1966 and 1969 elections were conducted face to face. All other election surveys were of the mail-out type.

Generally speaking, comparisons of the demographics in the Australian Election Studies (AES) and the National Social Science Surveys suggest that the two surveys were similarly representative of the population. However, as Goot (2000, 48) has shown, tertiary-educated respondents were over-represented in the AES—perhaps because it was conducted by mail. Neither set of surveys appeared to suffer from a noticeably greater degree of pro-winner bias than the other (see Leigh 2005). I would be happy to supply any researchers with the Stata routine used to create the data set.

Coding of variables was straightforward in most cases. Some notes on particular variables appear below:

### *Education*

Educational attainment was coded into four categories: high school dropouts, high school graduates, some college or a trade qualification, and college degree (more detailed information on education existed in some, but not all, surveys).

*Income*

Except in 1984, income was divided into bands. There were 8 income categories in 1966, 1969, and 1977; 14 in 1993 and 1996; and 16 in 1998, 2001 and 2004. Respondents in each range were coded as having family income at the midpoint of the range, or 1.15 times the upper limit in the case of those in the top category. Lastly, it should be noted that, as a consequence of this categorisation and the underlying distribution of incomes, no respondents in 1966 fell into the third income quintile.

*Age*

The voting age in Australia was 21 until 1973, when it was lowered to 18. In most cases, the survey was restricted to those who were eligible to vote, but in the few cases where respondents reported an age that would have made them ineligible to cast a ballot, they were dropped from the sample.

*Trade union membership*

The trade union membership question was worded almost precisely the same in all surveys except 1990 and 1993. In these two years, the question allowed the respondent to select either 'trade union' or 'staff association'. In Leigh (2005), these were coded together, but since the central focus of this paper is on trade union membership, I take a more cautious approach, and code those in staff associations as non-union members.

*Occupation*

The 1998, 2001 and 2004 election surveys use the ASCO2 occupational coding system. Occupation codes for student, not in the labour force, not applicable, inadequately described, and missing are all coded as missing. The occupation 'Other Labourers and Related Workers' is coded inconsistently (93 in 1998; 99 in 2001 and 2004), so is made consistent in all years.

*Weights*

Only the 1993 survey is weighted. For all other surveys, each individual is assigned a weight of 1. The weights are then recoded so as to balance the sample across elections, by ensuring that the sum of the weights for each election is 2000.

**Table A1.** Elections in sample

| Election | Study |
|---|---|
| 1966 | D. Aitkin, M. Kahan and D. Stokes. 1967. *Australian National Political Attitudes* (ICPSR Study no. 7282). Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research |
| 1969 | D. Aitkin, M. Kahan and D. Stokes. 1969. *Australian National Political Attitudes* (ICPSR Study no. 7393). Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research |
| 1977 | D. Aitkin. 1979. *Macquarie University Australian Political Attitudes Survey* (ASSDA no. 9). Canberra: Australian National University, Social Science Data Archives |
| 1984 | J. Kelley, R. Cushing and B. Headey. 1984. *Australian National Social Science Survey* (ICPSR Study no. 9084). Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research |
| 1987 | I. McAllister and A. Mughan. 1987. *Australian Election Survey* (SSDA Study no. D0445). Canberra: Australian National University, Social Science Data Archives |
| 1990 | D. Gow, R. Jones, I. McAllister and E. Papadakis. 1990. *Australian Election Study* (SSDA Study no. 570). Canberra: Australian National University, Social Science Data Archives |
| 1993 | R. Jones, I. McAllister, D. Denemark and D. Gow. 1993. *Australian Election Study* (SSDA Study no. 763). Canberra: Australian National University, Social Science Data Archives |
| 1996 | R. Jones, I. McAllister and D. Gow. 1996. *Australian Election Study* (SSDA Study no. 943). Canberra: Australian National University, Social Science Data Archives |
| 1998 | C. Bean, D. Gow and I. McAllister. 1998. *Australian Election Study* (SSDA Study no. 1001). Canberra: Australian National University, Social Science Data Archives |
| 2001 | C. Bean, D. Gow and I. McAllister. 2001. *Australian Election Study* (SSDA Study no. 1048). Canberra: Australian National University, Social Science Data Archives |
| 2004 | C. Bean, I. McAllister, R. Gibson and D. Gow. 2004. *Australian Election Study* (SSDA Study no. 1079). Canberra: Australian National University, Social Science Data Archives |