

*Politics, Race and Labor Organizing in the U.S. States, 1970-2002\*\**

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May 2008

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What factors determine labor unions' success in winning recognition elections? Unions expand their membership through victories in workplace elections but the frequency of such elections has decreased markedly over time. Because fewer elections take place than in the past, winning such contests has become increasingly important for labor's survival. The health of organized labor is significant for a number of reasons but perhaps most importantly, the weakening of this institution is linked to growing income inequality (Card 1992; Freeman 1997). The burgeoning literature on union decline emphasizes organized labor's inability to adequately maintain or substantially build membership and provides multiple explanations for this trend (Goldfield 1987; Cornfield 1991; Clawson and Clawson 1999; Wallerstein and Western 2000; Farber and Western 2001).<sup>1</sup>

Conventional quantitative analyses of unionization emphasize one of several causal frameworks. First, important arguments link macroeconomic changes to declining union membership and unions' inability to grow or even maintain their numbers (Farber 1985; Troy 1990; Chaison and Rose 1991; Farber and Western 2001). Other studies focus on employer resistance to unions. This convincing body of work illustrates the array and effectiveness of tactics employers use to dissuade workers from unionizing (Freeman 1986; Levitt 1993; Freeman and Rogers 1999; Kliner 2001). Yet, others argue that decisions to support a union are based in individual psychology (Brief and Rude 1981; Summers, Betton, and Decotiis 1986; Davy and Shipper 1993). And finally, an increasing number of studies examine unions themselves as ineffectual actors in their

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<sup>1</sup> Organized labor has been in decline for decades. In the 1950s about one-third of all workers were union members. By 2005 that number declined to about 12.5%. Union density has fallen to its lowest level since the depression era. The pattern of union decline has inspired much research and discussion on the causes of unions' weakened state (Farber 1990; Masters 1997; Goldfield 1987; Cornfield 1991; Western 1993; Farber and Western 2001, Lipset 1990; Bronfenbrenner 1997).

efforts to recruit new members (Craft 1991; Bronfenbrenner 1997; Fiorito and Jarley 2003).

Macro-economic changes as well as organization and individual-level factors are clearly important contributors to unions' status. But in terms of winning new members, one should not lose sight of the role of proximate organizing environments. Two aspects of this context are particularly meaningful for labor's ability to win new members: political and racial arrangements. Analyses bereft of racial and political considerations miss an opportunity to track general patterns that have long-influenced U.S. labor relations (Asher and Stephenson 1990; Dubofsky 1994). This study fills these gaps in the literature by attempting to examine such important relationships. I ask how broader political and racial arrangements in union organizing environments affect unions' ability to win elections.

In order to control the levers of economic stability, western nations heavily regulate labor-management relations. This means that politics play a central role in the regulation of labor conflicts. And, parties who are successful in the political arena hold an advantageous position in labor disputes. Some scholars have gained theoretical leverage by conceptualizing labor as a social movement, albeit a rather institutionalized one (Johnston 1994; Clawson and Clawson 1999; Clawson 2003). Drawing on the social movement literature I propose that political opportunities matter for labor organizing outcomes. Political opportunity research has proliferated in recent years (Tarrow 1994; Jenkins and Klandermans 1995; Rucht 1996; Andrews 2001; Van Dyke and Soule 2002; Meyer and Minkoff 2004). Few of these studies address labor. This perspective argues that exogenous political factors explain the effectiveness of movement strategies, the

advancement of particular ideas, and prospects for mobilization (Amenta and Zylan 1991; Almeida and Stearns 1998; McAdam 1999; Jenkins, Jacobs, and Agnone 2003).

Movement successes often hinge on such opportunities. Given that union organizing activities are intensely regulated by the state, studies of the U.S. labor movement should benefit from the insights of this approach.

In addition, there is a body of historical research that contributes much to our understanding of labor-management relations and unionization efforts. Many of these studies provide insight into the role that racial dynamics have played in worker solidarity and union formation (Foner 1982; Arnsen 1993; Stevenson 1993; Sugrue 1996).

Brueggemann (2000), for example, illustrates how employers exploit racial antipathies to foment distrust and divide potential inter-racial labor coalitions. Similarly, another study illustrates how features of organizing campaigns and the particular unions involved can have a deleterious influence on solidarity among racially diverse workers (Brown 1998). Such studies lead to the expectation that racial dynamics should be an important ingredient in unionization outcomes. But, the case-oriented approach of these studies covers only a limited temporal period and may yield idiosyncratic findings.

For these reasons, statistical analyses that gauge the explanatory power of hypotheses drawn from both the literature on labor politics and race and labor activism should be informative. Despite the importance of these factors for union organizing, gaps remain in the literature. It is uncommon to find studies that address how both the political and racial environment affect labor organizing across time and place. I extend the research in this area by following such an approach with a pooled time-series analysis of union election frequencies from 1970 to 2002.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The fundamental problem that labor faces is the problem of organizing new members. I draw primarily from two perspectives to address this issue. First, because organizing is strictly regulated by government officials, political arrangements figure prominently in labor outcomes (Dubofsky 1994). The majority of organizing activity occurs through the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which oversees the entire process from verifying initial worker support to counting the election votes. A second approach exemplified by Brown (1998) emphasizes that racial divisions have hampered efforts to build and maintain worker solidarity. While, I emphasize the role of political and racial arrangements, I also consider the potential influence of economic conditions, employer resistance, and union prevalence across jurisdictions.

### **Political Arrangements and Labor Outcomes**

*Partisanship.* The dominant political parties in the U.S. differ in their philosophy about labor-management relations and macro-economic policy (Alvarez, Garrett, and Lange 1991; Alesina and Rosenthal 1995). While the Republicans have a generally adversarial relationship with organized labor, Democrats have been more receptive to labor's goals (Gerring 1998; Dark 1999). Public anti-labor spectacles, such as President Ronald Reagan's firing of over eleven thousand air traffic controllers in 1981 signals to labor unions as well as the broader community the difficulties labor is likely to face under Republican administrations. Similarly, a number of analyses indicate that conservative politicians have been far more likely to champion economic legislation that benefits the affluent at the expense of the poor (Kirschen 1964; Blank and Blinder 1986; Hibbs 1987). And, when Republicans are in power they tend to advocate tax laws that favor their

wealthy supporters (Jacobs and Waldman 1983; Allen and Campbell 1994). These partisan tendencies may restrict what supporters of labor and the non-affluent can achieve. That is, they limit political opportunities.

The importance of politics is not confined to the national level. Historically, state-level political actors have played an important role in labor disputes. Governors are heavily vested in the economic stability of their respective states. Poor economic performance frequently translates into decreased support at the ballot box. These state managers have thus engaged in strategies to build and support economic infrastructure as well as efforts to regulate labor-management relations (Hansen 1999). And, history has shown that when faced with particularly disruptive labor conflicts, governors have relied on legal maneuvers and in some instances military force to suppress strikes and related protests (Brecher 1997; Beik 2005).

More recently, governors have used political tactics to alter the legal landscape in which these disputes are conducted. In 2005, the Republican Governor of Indiana issued an executive order that eliminated fifteen years of bargaining rights and existing contracts for over 25,000 public workers (DeAgostino 2005). During the same year, the Republican Governor of Missouri used an executive order to rescind bargaining rights and existing contracts for over 34,000 workers. This order targeted state employees who were given the right to unionize and bargain under an executive order issued by Missouri's Democratic Governor in 2001 (Tanner 2005). Conversely, Oregon's Democratic Governor Kulongoski has a different perspective on organized labor. In 2006 he personally delivered a letter, signed by Oregon's Congressional delegation, to the National Labor Relations Board urging them to hold hearings on proposed legislation

that could weaken a variety of worker protections. He stated that “My efforts to protect Oregon’s middle class and create a strong and fair economy are dependent upon a healthy labor movement in our country. Oregonians deserve to be heard in decisions that could weaken worker rights and core labor protections” (Kulongoski 2007).

From the episodes discussed above it is clear that partisan political shifts may affect labor organizing and member retention in both structural and symbolic ways. The governors of Indiana and Missouri generated structural-legal changes through executive orders while Oregon’s governor sent a clearly supportive *signal* to organized labor. Actual policy changes may also be signals because they send a message to groups about how receptive the government will be to their cause. What is more, given the ideological differences about labor relations between the two dominant political parties, simple shifts in partisan power may also serve as important opportunity signals. Implicitly drawing on similar insights, Cooke (1983) reminds us that in communities in which the public perceives unions as having little political clout, efforts to gain new members will be restricted. These political considerations suggest that *when Republicans are in office labor should have a more difficult time gaining members.*

***Restrictive Legal Framework.*** Existing legal parameters may also help explain labor successes and failures in the states. In the post World War II era, employers hoped to curtail the expansion of union membership. A significant part of this strategy involved popularizing anti-union messages and pushing for legal changes that would strengthen employers’ bargaining position (Moore 1998). Prominent employer organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers coordinated national campaigns to promote legal restrictions on unions (Fones-Wolf 1994). The

Right-to-Work laws resulting from these efforts were and continue to be an important legal impediment to building union membership.

It is traditional that union contracts require all covered workers to formally join the union. But, in states with Right-to-Work laws such a requirement is illegal. Rather, workers are allowed to receive the benefits of membership without bearing any of the associated costs. Some argue that the passage of Right-to-Work laws has a large psychological influence because the presence of such legislation damages unions' credibility. The instance of Right-to-Work's defeat in Missouri is a case in point since after the legislation was defeated, labor organizing increased dramatically (Ellwood and Fine 1983: 32). *I expect that unions will be less likely to gain membership through elections where Right-to-Work laws exist.*

***Citizens' Political Ideology.*** Conservative individuals resist organized labor because they view collective bargaining as an offense against the free market (Barzel 1997). In this view, the rules and regulations that unions impose on firms are seen as an excessive burden to business because they interfere with the free market and property rights. Similarly, many conservatives argue that union shop contracts, which require union membership as a condition of employment, violate workers' rights as they are "coerced" into joining the ranks of organized labor (Sexton 1991; Gall 1998). This suggests that in more conservative regions it will be difficult for unions to build support and political arrangements will not favor unions. Liberals, conversely, are much more likely to support labor's agenda. From this discussion *I hypothesize that where conservative ideology is strongest, labor will be less successful in recruiting new members.*



## **Minority Threat and Labor Outcomes**

***Racial Threat.*** Racial cleavages are among the most important social divisions in the United States (Myrdal 1944; Omi and Winant 1994; Goldfield 1997). Racial animus should reduce labors' capacity to win workplace elections because it disrupts worker solidarity (Bonacich 1976; Foner 1982; Roediger 1999). A number of studies illustrate employers' manipulation of this division to break prospective and existing labor coalitions (Asher and Stephenson 1990; Brown 2000). Pronounced racial divisions that obscure workers' shared grievances and ambitions make it easier for employers to defeat organized labor. While overt workplace and other discrimination has arguably declined, racial antipathy lives on in diverse forms with important consequences (Pager and Quillian 2005; Bonilla-Silva 2001; Royster 2003).<sup>2</sup>

Some racial inequality analysts conclude that substantial progress has been made over time. Farley (1997), for example, argues that the trajectory of inequality for African Americans has been mixed albeit with some areas of substantial promise. His analyses reveal minority gains in education, earnings, and occupational status. Yet, he concedes that significant challenges remain with regard to unemployment, family well-being, and poverty (also see Heckman 1998). Schuman et al. (2001) found that over 90 percent of white survey respondents stated that white and non-white applicants should be considered equally by employers. A number of other recent surveys suggest marked declines in mass racial antipathy (Sniderman 1997; Schuman 1997).

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<sup>2</sup> Racial cleavages have implications that reach far beyond the workplace. Analyses of the role of race in policy outcomes, for example, speak to the broader and enduring affect of racial perceptions. Studies that examine social policy illustrate that when minority groups are perceived as the primary beneficiaries such policies are less likely to be enacted into law (Quadagno 1990) or are ultimately less generous (Zylan and Soule 2000; Lieberman 1998). Similar studies indicate that taxation is less progressive in states with greater proportions of African Americans (Jacobs and Waldman 1983).

But, Pager and Quilian (2005) generate important insights by not taking survey responses at face value. Instead, they match telephone survey data from employers with audit studies of employment seekers. The survey data suggest a high degree of employer willingness to hire from all racial categories. In contrast, they find that actual hiring practices heavily favor white applicants. The authors caution against believing that more liberal attitudes on surveys will produce less discrimination.

Many labor unions have a history of racial discrimination. Efforts to preserve white racial privilege in unions are well documented (Gould 1977; Foner 1982). Unions frequently discriminated against minorities by organizing them in separate locals. And, sometimes unions' constitutional provisions contained clearly discriminatory clauses (Asher and Stephenson 1990). Roediger (2003:168) notes that although there is an historical record of discourse among labor leaders about the need for black-white alliances, early labor history illustrates that "Race riots and hate strikes versus Black workers were far more common than biracial labor struggles." And Marshall (1972: 295) emphasizes the resonance of race in labor disputes by indicating that "The extent to which Negroes were used as strikebreakers probably has been exaggerated ... and while white workers also were used to break strikes ... Negroes, seeming far more conspicuous, were far more resented."

The sizeable body of theory, historical study, and quantitative analyses in this area suggest that racial divisions are likely to undermine worker solidarity. Some unions have recognized the need to explicitly recruit and build alliances with minorities. And, workers sometimes could resist racially-divisive managerial tactics. This was the case in New Orleans during the 1890s when black and white port workers defied employers'

attempts to sew racial divisions by agreeing to share their work (Rosenberg 1988). But such coalitions were often difficult to create (Foner 1982; Gall 1988). The legacy of race relations at the Alabama Red Mountain mine during the 1940s and 1950s provides a particularly interesting case. White workers made repeated attempts to oust blacks from union leadership positions. But, because of equal representation clauses, they were unsuccessful. They responded by signing a petition to recognize a competing union. In particular, they sought a union that promised to cater to their racial interests (Jensen 1954). The opposing union won the ensuing election but thereafter black workers refused to join and were unable to regain their influence in the iron ore mines (Huntley 1990).<sup>3</sup>

Over time labor has pursued a more inclusive strategy in terms of race relations.<sup>4</sup> But such deep-rooted divisions in the broader population are not easily overcome. And, even if they were driven from formal labor organizations, this would not mean that racial resentments have been driven from the workplace. Some race scholars maintain the existence of a post-civil rights era brand of race relations. This approach, often referred to as “the new racism,” argues that racist attitudes have become more sophisticated, covert, and seemingly nonracial or colorblind (Tuch and Martin 1997; Krysan 2000). And work based on in-depth interviews (Bonilla-Silva 2001) as well as participant observation (Hartigan 1999) speaks volumes about the enduring importance of race and the subtleties of race-oriented perceptions and behaviors. Such contemporary animosities

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<sup>3</sup> But there are episodes of interracial working-class solidarity. For example, see Zeitlin and Weyher (2001) in the *American Journal of Sociology*.

<sup>4</sup> The civil rights movement increased the pressure on unions to end their racially exclusive practices. This was particularly the case for skilled construction unions, which often relied on referrals from other workers in determining who to hire (Gould 1977). Beck (1980) argues that labor unions have traditionally been part of a “white man’s movement.” Many unions have a “white protectionist” history and were in conflict with organizations such as the NAACP as late as the 1960s. But, by the 1970s, unions began to accept minorities at rates comparable to whites (Schutt 1987).

are not as explicit as those of earlier eras, but they nevertheless remain in more nuanced forms and as part of broader social, economic, and political relations (Omi and Winant 1994). The “new racism” studies are consistent with Pager and Quillian’s (2005) findings that employers say one thing and do another. Judging from this body of work, we have every reason to believe that racial divisions continue to be important.

Given the prior discussion, racial threat theory is pertinent here because it provides important insight into worker relations and taps into group struggles to climb social and economic hierarchies (Blalock 1967; Quillian 1995). Bobo and Hutchings (1996) explain that racial threat is a complex phenomena that operates through individual notions of self-interest, group position, prejudice, and ideas about stratification. This approach suggests that increases in minority populations will generate conflict with dominant groups and thus thwart the potential for worker solidarity. Because they are viewed as unwelcome economic competitors, increases in racial minority populations may spur hostile reactions from majority whites (Taylor 1998). Olzak (1989), for example, shows that expansions in racial minority populations in urban labor markets are associated with increased levels of race-based conflict. This legacy of racial conflict suggests that *the increased presence of African Americans should harm worker solidarity and will be associated with declines in the frequency of union recognition elections.*

## METHODS

**Research Design.** I use a pooled time-series approach to explain the frequency of labor union victories in workplace elections from 1970 to 2002. I use state-level explanatory variables, save for one predictor, which I discuss below. As is standard with this type of

design, my predictors are lagged by one year to allow sufficient time for relationships to be completed. Lagging variables also helps eliminate potential simultaneity problems. I also include an AR(1) term to control serial correlation. And I use STATA's robust correction for heteroskedasticity. This strategy enables me to move beyond case-oriented or cross-sectional designs and explore more general patterns across both time and place.

***Dependent Variable and Estimation.*** The dependent variable in this analysis is the annual number of recognition election victories by labor unions in each state between 1970 and 2002. I use population-averaged estimation which is a form of random-effects (Liang and Zeger 1986; Pendergast et al. 1996; Prentice and Zhao 1991). Because most of the variation in union election victories is across states (see Table 1) random-effects modeling is appropriate. Panel analysis has multiple benefits. Multicollinearity is less likely in panel designs than in standard time series because it captures both over-time and cross-sectional variation. The cross-sectional component adds variability, or more information, which in turn produces more consistent parameter estimates (Kennedy 2003; Baltagi 2005). And finally, a random effects approach can account for both time-varying and time-invariant indicators.

I use a count model because analyses of the proportion of union election victories can be misleading. For example, in 1991, unions in Washington won 60% of their elections compared to only 45% in 1975. This suggests that unions fared better in 1991. But, in 1991 this greater proportion amounted to only 57 wins versus 103 victories in 1975. Similar scenarios can be found throughout the data on unionization in the states. Colorado unions won 57% of the time in 1998 but this consisted of only 12 elections.

And, Colorado unions won only 45% of the time in 1977 and ended up with a more favorable 65 victories.

***Explanatory Variables.*** The political-legal environment is gauged with several indicators. Republican strength is measured with a dummy variable denoting whether a Republican Governor is in office. The existence of Right-to-Work laws is also a dummy coded 1 if they are present. I also include a measure for the percentage of votes in each state for the last Republican Presidential candidate. And finally, I tap citizen ideology with an index developed by political scientists (Berry et al. 1998). This index is based on the ideological ratings of Congress members constructed by COPE and the Americans for Democratic Action. Each group generates an annual conservatism-liberalism rating based on the members' voting record. Berry et al. then estimate citizen ideology for each state congressional district using the ideology score for the incumbents and an estimated score for their opponent in the prior election. Scores are weighted by the vote margins for each district and averaged for each state. The highest scores indicate more liberal states (see Soule and Olzak 2004).

I consider the economic environment by including measures of the official unemployment rate and the percentage of workers employed in manufacturing. Employer resistance is measured by the percentage of small firms with nineteen or fewer employees and the number of unfair labor practice charges filed against employers. These charges are known as section 8(a)(3) violations and involve employer efforts to discourage union support. The unfair labor practice data are from *The Annual Report of the National Labor Relations Board* for various years and the small enterprise data are from *County Business Patterns*.

I assess labor prevalence with measures of the percentage of the workforce belonging to unions and I control for the number of recognition elections held in each state. A national measure of the number of strikes involving one thousand or more workers taps labor militancy. I use the national measure because a complete and consistently measured state-level time-series indicator is not available for this item. And, following studies in crime control (Jacobs and Carmichael 2002) and political sociology (Jacobs and Tope 2007) minority threat is assessed with a measure of the percentage of the state population that is African-American. To control for regional variation I include eight of the nine census regions as dummy indicators with New England as the reference category.

***Random-Effects Panel Analyses of Union Election Victories.*** Table 2 presents the random effects panel analysis findings about the determinants of union election victories. Model 1 introduces a simple specification that includes measures of the unemployment rate, the percentage of workers employed in manufacturing, the percentage of unionized workers, and whether a state has Right-to-Work laws, as well as controls for region. In this brief model, higher unemployment levels are associated with fewer recognition election victories while the percentage employed in manufacturing and the percent unionized are positively related to union victories just as we would expect. A restrictive legal environment, measured by the presence of Right-to-Work laws, is associated with fewer victories.

Model 2 adds indicators for the percentage of African-Americans living in the state as well as the proportion of small enterprises, and controls for the number of recognition elections held. The significance patterns from Model 1 persist. Neither the

number of recognition elections nor the presence of small businesses affect union victory rates. Most importantly, however, the size of the black population and its quadratic transformation are significant. The presence of some African-Americans is positively associated with union victories. But when the population reaches a particular threshold, the presence of racial minorities has a negative influence on union victory rates. This suggests that historical accounts and theoretical arguments about how racial divisions affect worker unity are accurate. I defer reporting the threshold until discussion of the final model.

The results from Model 3 are similar to prior models because all prior significant effects persist. Here, I add a more comprehensive set of political measures, as well as unfair labor practices. The presence of a Republican governor, as expected, has a negative influence on union victories. Citizen ideology operates in the anticipated direction – a more liberal population experiences more union wins. But, the citizen ideology indicator never reaches significance. And, contrary to expectations, increases in unfair labor practice filings are associated with more union victories rather than less. But, Roomkin (1981) and Kleiner (1984) find a similar pattern for unfair labor practices (ULPs). Roomkin shows that both unions and employers file more ULP charges as more elections are held. He argues that this pattern is part of the litigious nature of labor disputes. Legal advisors for both businesses and labor unions advocate aggressive counter claims and the adversaries oblige. In short, legal charges yield more legal charges. Kleiner (1984) draws a complementary conclusion. He finds that many firms are repeat offenders and suggests that the meager penalties incurred by illegalities do not



discourage such activity. Perhaps the role of ULPs is more nuanced than I am able to capture in this analysis.

Models 4 and 5 are nearly identical. In Model 4 I retain all previously discussed measures save for citizen ideology. But, I add the number of major strikes involving one thousand or more workers in each state. Increases in strikes are positively related to union election victories. And, the frequency of union elections becomes significant but the direction and significance patterns of the other predictors remain unchanged. Model 5 presents the complete model including both strikes and citizen ideology. The patterns from model 4 persist. Overall, the results show that my explanatory framework is supported. Theories and measures based on political and racial arrangements help account for union victories in recognition elections. The presence of Republican governors and Right-to-Work laws dampen the likelihood of union victories. Similarly, growth in the black population generates sufficient resentment to interfere with union recognition victories. Research on union support indicates that minorities are more likely than other groups to join (Lipset 1986; Cornfield and Kim 1994; Freeman and Rogers 1999). So, it is not particularly remarkable that initial growth in the black population contributes to more union elections. It is noteworthy, however, that after this group expands past 19% of the population, the incidence of union election victories declines significantly. It is likely that the increased conspicuousness of this group contributes to episodes of white resistance and associated declines in worker solidarity. These results persist despite a generous list of controls.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Aside from indicators included in the model, I used another measure for political arrangements across states. I ran models that included an indicator of citizens' self-identification as liberal or conservative by McIver, Erickson, and Wright (2001). This predictor never approached significance and did not affect the significance patterns of the other measures. I also experimented with several interaction terms in order to

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

*Findings.* I found evidence that growth in African-American populations can adversely affect unions' ability to win new members. Minority group presence poses difficulties for unionization in two interrelated ways. First, the heightened visibility of minority group members may stimulate racial animus in coworkers. These resentments may be based on real or perceived threats to one groups' dominant social, economic, or political position. This is reflected in an example from Minchin's (1998) study of interracial unionism in the southern U.S. Reflecting on the challenges of uniting a multiracial workforce, a union organizer said: "I think that there was this fear of competition, that the black worker would take their job from them, and then there was this attitude that they were ... superior to the black worker, and they just, they didn't want to work with them ... I think it was a fear of competition and just a superiority complex" (112). And, more broadly, Minchin notes that in the 1960s and 1970s, virtually every major textile company was involved in racial discrimination lawsuits.

Second, because racial caste maintenance reinforces some groups' superior position, employers are able to instigate race-based fear and conflict. There are ample instances of employers' exploitation of racial cleavages to disrupt unionization. For example, in the *Bush Hog, Inc.* case, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) found that employers used racial appeals to discourage union support. One worker reported that the employer told him that "if the Union went in ... we would have to work with Negroes." And, the employer hung a poster in a highly visible area that showed an

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gage the joint influence of political environment and employer resistance. I interacted republican governor with unfair labor practices, unfair labor practices with Right-to-Work, and Right-to-Work with small business. None of the interactions approached significance or substantially altered the model.

African American man smoking a cigar. The caption on the poster read “Us and that Union are going to change things around here” (Bush Hog, Inc. 1961). In the *United Packinghouse v. NLRB* case, a federal court declared that racism contributes to docility and demobilization among workers (United Packinghouse v. NLRB 1969; also see Frymer 2005:380). And, recent episodes at North Carolina’s Smithfield foods, the largest hog slaughterhouse in the world, provide a contemporary case in point. NLRB and federal court hearings found that the employer exploited racial cleavages to divide workers and discourage union support during two organizing drives in the 1990s. Smithfield was found guilty of over thirty violations of the National Labor Relations Act (LeDuff 2000). Despite our advances in some aspects of racial inequality, racial cleavages endure.<sup>6</sup>

Economic findings were also informative. Increases in unemployment reduce the likelihood of unionization. This is consistent with the ample literature on unions and slack labor markets. When unemployment is high, employers are likely to pursue cost control measures by resisting unions. In addition, workers’ fear of job loss limits their willingness to engage in labor activism. Yet, regions with higher union membership levels are associated with a significantly greater incidence of union election victories. And jurisdictions with greater proportions of workers in manufacturing have a positive association with union wins. This suggests that traditional union strongholds continue to be potentially fruitful regions for union growth.

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<sup>6</sup> One thing that influences union growth is the degree to which workers feel that they benefit by joining. Studies indicate that minorities are now more likely to join than whites. This suggests that to some degree, unions have shed their image of a white man’s organization (Lipset 1986; Freeman and Rogers 1994). And, there is some positive movement on the solidarity front if we consider recent west-coast labor activism. California has become an important proving ground for interracial and interethnic solidarity. In Los Angeles, for example, the Service Employees International Union has successfully organized diverse groups including numerous immigrants. But, social cleavages among workers remain and they constitute a major challenge for labor’s future.

Importantly, the results also show that politics matters for labor organizing. While it is accurate that the original 1935 Wagner Act explicitly supported labor organizing, partisan ideologies have interfered with this goal. Specifically, I find that Republican governors contribute to fewer union election wins. This is consistent with my expectations, given the partisan ideological inclinations of Republican political leaders and their largely contentious relationship with organized labor. It is unlikely that Republicans will have large prolabor constituencies. And, a strong labor presence may seem contradictory to the probusiness economic environment Republicans desire. They are therefore more likely to pursue policies that limit labor's capacity to act. In addition, Republicans are more inclined to promote economic growth in traditionally nonunion areas such as small businesses, and services (Grant and Wallace 1994). Political decisions based on this partisan outlook therefore limit the opportunities of organized labor.

#### *Broader Implications*

This study focuses on important relationships that are often overlooked in quantitative analyses of labor organizing. Much of the foundational literature that addresses either political or racial issues is historical or case-oriented. Quantitative labor studies that use theoretical perspectives from both race and politics are uncommon (but see Brown and Boswell 1995). My state-level approach is useful for examining such patterns.

My central claims, drawn from theories of racial threat and political partisanship, are supported. Even while controlling for a host of other explanatory factors, these indicators remain significant. What does this suggest about the contemporary challenges of labor organizing? Numerous labor scholars argue that unions must fundamentally rethink their approach to organizing (Turner et al. 2001; Bronfenbrenner 1997). And, it

appears that there is general consensus among labor leaders that much introspection is in order. Yet, focusing only on the internal arrangements and operations of organized labor is inadequate. It is, of course, not possible to dismiss broad macroeconomic changes nor unions' own organizing strategies. And, as my results show, one should also not overlook the fact that other aspects of the labor organizing context matter.

Offe and Weisenthal (1985) emphasize that a substantial power differential exists between workers and businesses. To compensate for this disparity, they argue, workers must have high levels of interaction and cohesion. Disruptions or cleavages that harm the potential for solidarity are thus fundamental impediments to worker power. And racial divisions have often been an Achilles heel that harms worker solidarity. Labor's future rests, in part, on its capacity to overcome such deep-rooted animosities.

At the 2005 AFL-CIO Constitutional Convention, John Sweeney argued that "Organizing and politics go hand in hand" (Sweeney 2005). Shortly thereafter, several large unions seceded from the AFL-CIO. This dispute revolved largely around disagreements about resource allocation. The breakaway unions argued that more funds should be directed toward organizing rather than electoral politics. But, as my results show, Sweeney makes a valid point. Labor cannot survive without both organizing efforts *and* political action. While more organizing is surely necessary, union leaders and others have convincingly argued that the political-legal framework that regulates labor-management relations is broken (Forbath 1991; Geoghegan 2004). Hence, the political sphere must be a target of labor's larger agenda. And electoral politics must therefore be a cornerstone of union revival.

The labor movement is struggling to reinvigorate itself. In a time when many workers are faced with an increasingly tenuous economic outlook and rising inequality, it is important to examine the institution that has probably been the strongest supporter of workers and the least affluent. Such analyses should be important because they speak to issues of power and inequality, which have traditionally been at the core of our discipline.

**Table 2a. Coefficients from Random Effects Panel Models Predicting the Frequency of Union Representation Victories 1970-2002.**

	<u>Model 1</u>			<u>Model 2</u>			<u>Model 3</u>		
	Coef.		Std. Error	Coef.		Std. Error	Coef.		Std. Error
<i>Economic Environment</i>									
Unemployment	-0.089	*	0.047	-0.096	*	0.057	-0.113	*	0.057
% Employed in Manufacturing	0.008	***	0.002	0.010	***	0.003	0.010	***	0.003
<i>Labor Prevalence</i>									
Percent Unionized	0.026	***	0.006	0.032	***	0.007	0.037	***	0.006
Number of Union Elections				0.000		0.000	0.000		0.000
Major Strikes									
<i>Political-Legal Environment</i>									
Right to Work Laws	-0.274	*	0.138	-0.325	**	0.142	-0.298	*	0.146
Republican Governor							-0.057	*	0.030
Citizen Ideology							0.001		0.002
<i>Racial Composition</i>									
Percent Black				0.165	***	0.040	0.145	***	0.033
Percent Black <sup>2</sup>				-0.004	***	0.001	-0.004	***	0.001
<i>Employer Resistance</i>									
Small Enterprises				1.677		2.078	1.351		2.184
Unfair Labor Practices							0.000	***	0.000
<i>Census Regions</i> <sup>†</sup>									
East South Central	0.671		0.477	0.035		0.456	0.182		0.380
East North Central	1.410	***	0.472	0.761		0.481	0.612		0.412
Middle Atlantic	1.766	***	0.475	0.950	**	0.505	0.708		0.431
Pacific	1.343	**	0.757	1.210	**	0.641	0.855	*	0.502
South Atlantic	0.750		0.504	1.210		0.511	0.073		0.427
West North Central	0.515		0.536	0.578		0.473	0.611		0.413
West South Central	0.893		0.560	0.203		0.555	0.324		0.466
Mountain	0.057		0.503	0.313		0.445	0.386		0.388
Constant	2.488		0.456	0.278		2.034	0.391		2.026
Chi Square Test	166.85	***		355.91	***		720.18	***	

Note: N=1550. Variables are lagged by one year. \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$  (One-tailed tests)

<sup>†</sup>New England is the comparison group

**Table 2b. Coefficients from Random Effects Panel Models Predicting the Frequency of Union Representation Victories 1970-2002.**

	<u>Model 4</u>			<u>Model 5</u>		
	Coef.		Std. Error	Coef.		Std. Error
<i>Economic Environment</i>						
Unemployment	-0.143	**	0.057	-0.151	**	0.056
% Employed in Manufacturing	0.009	**	0.004	0.009	**	0.004
<i>Labor Prevalence</i>						
Percent Unionized	0.038	***	0.007	0.037	***	0.007
Number of Union Elections	0.001	**	0.000	0.001	**	0.000
Major Strikes	0.001	***	0.000	0.002	***	0.000
<i>Political-Legal Environment</i>						
Right to Work Laws	-0.264	*	0.153	-0.246	*	0.154
Republican Governor	-0.082	**	0.030	-0.082	**	0.031
Citizen Ideology				0.003		0.002
<i>Racial Composition</i>						
Percent Black	0.119	***	0.025	0.117	***	0.025
Percent Black <sup>2</sup>	-0.003	***	0.001	-0.003	***	0.001
<i>Employer Resistance</i>						
Small Enterprises	-2.839		2.677	-3.128		2.694
Unfair Labor Practices	0.000	***	0.000	0.001	***	0.000
<i>Census Regions</i>						
East South Central	0.284		0.332	0.372		0.300
East North Central	0.432		0.372	0.466		0.341
Middle Atlantic	0.488		0.366	0.492		0.345
Pacific	0.588		0.405	0.614		0.377
South Atlantic	0.155		0.371	0.231		0.341
West North Central	0.618	*	0.365	0.671	*	0.340
West South Central	0.342		0.395	0.442		0.366
Mountain	0.398		0.349	0.483		0.321
Constant	3.932		2.452	3.991		2.395
Chi Square	1412.040	***		1461.570	***	

Note: N=1550. Variables are lagged by one year. \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$  (One-tailed tests)

†New England is the comparison group