



DemoSoc Working Paper

Paper Number 2011--42

Political Mobilisation and Models of Trade Unionism: Southern Europe in Comparative Perspective

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June, 2011

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Abstract

The relationship between union membership and political mobilisation has been studied under many perspectives, but quantitative cross-national analyses have been hampered by the absence of international comparable survey data until the first round of the European Social Survey (ESS-2002) was made available. Using different national samples from this survey in four moments of time (2002, 2004 and 2006), our paper provides evidence of cross-country divergence in the empirical association between political mobilisation and trade union membership. Cross-national differences in union members' political mobilization, we argue, can be explained by the existence of models of unionism that in turn differ with respect to two decisive factors: the institutionalisation of trade union activity and the opportunities left-wing parties have available for gaining access to executive power.

Keywords

Trade Union Membership, Political Participation, Comparative Politics, Industrial Relations

Acknowledgements

This research was done under the auspices of the project SEC2002-03364 ("Ciudadanos y democracia en Europa: Análisis comparado de los datos de la primera ola de la Encuesta Social Europea") of the Spanish Plan of Research & Development (Plan I+D-I). We are grateful to Marco Hauptheimer (Cornell University) and Hans-Jürgen Nagel (Universitat Pompeu Fabra) for their comments on politics and union mobilisation in Germany in the last two decades. We are also grateful to the attendants to the EQUALSOC / TRALEG Workshop on 'The Demise of Collective Organization in Europe', held at the AIAS (University of Amsterdam) on July 2009, for their.

Introduction

The relationship between union membership and political mobilisation has been studied under many perspectives, but quantitative cross-national analyses have been hampered by the absence of international comparable survey data until the first round of the European Social Survey (ESS-2002) was made available. Using different national samples from this survey in four moments of time (2002, 2004 and 2006), our paper provides evidence of cross-country divergence in the empirical association between political mobilisation and trade union membership. Cross-national differences in union members' political mobilization, we argue, can be explained by the existence of models of unionism that in turn differ with respect to two decisive factors: the institutionalisation of trade union activity and the opportunities left-wing parties have available for gaining access to executive power.

As regards the institutionalisation of trade union activity, in some countries trade unions have historically participated in tripartite institutions that regulate industrial relations and/or different aspects of the welfare states. Vocational training, on-the-job training, unemployment subsidies and pensions were some of the issues at stake. In countries with a Voluntarist system of industrial relations, trade unions were unsuccessful in getting the same degree of involvement in the regulation of these issues, but they still felt entitled to bargain over bread-and-butter issues, and they historically managed to create *institutions* that guaranteed the existence of collective bargaining at this level, even if they were never legally recognised.

Countries with low institutionalisation of trade union activity, like the Voluntarist and Southern European ones, still differ in the opportunities available to left-wing parties for gaining access to power. This difference might also have an impact on the main strategies used by trade unionists to promote their interests.

The present paper is structured as follows: after reviewing theories that explain how interest groups choose more or less public strategies of political influence, we suggest the existence of different 'models of trade unionism'. We then conduct an empirical analysis on the association between union membership and political membership. Finally the results are discussed and possible theoretical implications are provided.

1. Theoretical framework

By stating that political participation could not be satisfactorily explained just resorting to individual traits, Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) established a point of departure for the analysis of the relationship between "voluntary associations", political mobilisation and participation. People participate in politics for a variety of personal reasons, but, as Rosenstone and Hansen demonstrated, they do so also in response to mobilisation strategies of political agents. "*Mobilization* is the process by which candidates, parties, activists and groups induce other people to participate" (Ibid, 25). Yet, Rosenstone and Hansen did not pay much attention to the possibility that different ways of political

participation could be sensibly grouped into different modes, thereby allowing political agents a choice of different lines along to which mobilise members and sympathisers. Beyers did so.

According to Beyers, ‘voice’ and ‘access’ are the two possible strategies interest groups can choose to influence policy makers (Beyers 2004). ‘Access’ is the “exchange of policy-relevant information with public officials through formal or informal networks”; ‘voice’ refers to “public political strategies, such as media campaigns and protests” (Beyers 2004, 213). ‘Voice’ can be considered an *indirect* way of influencing policy-making: “established interest associations turn to voice strategies only occasionally, for instance if policy-makers do not listen to their wishes” (Ibid, 215-216). ‘Voice’ vs. ‘access’ distinction is roughly similar to the distinction between *representational* and *extra-representational* “modes of political participation”, derived by Teorell, Torcal and Montero (2007) from an analysis of 13 societies. The *representational* mode of political participation would include “a wider set of activities (...) directed towards the formal channels of representation available in liberal democracies: the political parties and the elected representatives” (341). It would include voting and contacting electoral representatives. Similar to Beyers’ voice, *extra-representational* mode of political participation would be directed toward firms, mass media or public opinion. Demonstrations, signing petitions, boycotting products and using banners or stickers are explicitly included here. Unlike Beyers’, Teorell et al.’s analysis permits to assign particular types of political participation to each mode.

More realistically, a combination of ‘voice’ and ‘access’ may occur. Yet, the choice between them would strongly depend on the *type* of interest to be promoted. Several studies on American interest groups distinguish between *specific* and *diffuse* interests (Gais and Walker 1991; Kollman 1998). The former are well delimited and promoted through a direct exchange of information with policy-makers. Business or trade unions-related interests are often cited as examples of *specific* interest. *Diffuse* interests, on the contrary, “lack a well-delineated and –in socioeconomic terms– concentrated constituency” (Beyers 2004, 216). Social movements are usually shown as examples of diffuse interests: “The diffuseness of their cause and the fragmented nature of their constituencies, combined with their inability to produce selective incentives, make these interests less visible and more difficult to mobilize” (Ibid, 216). This weakness would be compensated by more public strategies of mobilisation (Kollman 1998; Della Porta and Diani 1999; Gais and Walker 1991).

Beyers’ distinction between ‘voice’ and ‘access’, along with the presentation of business and unions’ interests as paradigms of *specific* interest, stem from an analysis of the American reality. Trade unions there have been traditionally detached from the more direct, national political arena. The idea that trade unions promote their interests by lobbying policy makers, rather than through public demonstrations and mobilisation of public opinion in their favour, may surprise trade union officials in some European countries.

The theoretical formulation of political mobilisation so far reviewed underestimates an institutional component that might be key in the election of the available strategies. In

comparison with the interests of other groups, workers' interests look rather specific. But this has not been enough for trade unions to be *always* inclined towards strategies of 'access'. A preliminary exploration of the association between political participation and trade union membership in Europe can only confirm Beyers's argument for some national cases. For instance, in Southern Europe, union membership is still closely associated with strategies of 'voice', which are quite indirect in their influence over policy-makers and in which the *precision* of the information to be transmitted may be substantially less.

Why might there be such a deviance from Beyers' model here? A preliminary answer might be twofold: a weaker institutionalisation of trade union activity¹; and the reduced ability of Communist Parties, traditionally associated with some unions, to be represented in government. Under these conditions, we expect trade unions to be more inclined toward strikes and public demonstrations and, in general, to 'voice' strategies of political mobilisation. Moreover, we expect to find a certain graduation in the political participation of trade union members, as the model of unionism they belong to move from a low degree of institutionalisation of trade union activity *and* a reduced access of left-wing parties to cabinet to a high degree of institutionalisation of trade union activity *and* full access of left-wing parties to cabinet; that is, from one extreme to the other. We would thus expect the Continental model of unionism to be somewhere in the middle, between the Nordic and the Southern European models of unionism, as regards their union members' preferences for 'voice' strategies, rather than 'access' ones.

Institutionalisation of trade union activity may take place at three different levels. First, there is the involvement of unions with the employers' organisations and/or state representatives in bi-partite or tri-partite institutions for the regulation of employment relations and/or social policies in general. Second, the higher the centralisation of collective bargaining, the more institutionalised the role of trade unions is. Among other things, centralised collective bargaining usually entails a high degree of acceptance of the role of trade unions both by employers and the state. Finally, the presence of *institutional channels* for the representation of trade unions at the workplace level should be considered.

As regards the second condition, the political character of union membership may also derive from the weak possibilities for some political parties to obtain office. To the extent that left-wing parties are not likely to attain this kind of representation, they can use their closeness to trade unions to mobilise voters, to promote their members' and sympathisers' interests and, ultimately, to obtain the institutional representation they lack.

¹ According to the more sociological concept of 'institution' used here, "institutions consist of cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behaviour. Institutions are transported by various carriers –cultures, structures and routines – and they operate at multiple levels of jurisdiction" (Scott 1995, 33). Although not legally recognised, British 'shop stewards' would be thus considered an institution.

2. Models of trade unionism

An analysis of trade unionism in Europe shows cross-national regularities that allow us to talk of four basic *models of unionism*: ‘Nordic’, ‘Continental’, ‘Voluntarist’ and ‘Southern European’. They differ in the degree of institutionalisation of trade union activity *and* the accessibility to parliamentary and executive power of some left-wing parties.

Nordic model

Trade union confederations in Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland) are fairly similar (Kjellberg 1998, 74-77). A single trade union confederation usually enjoys a high membership rate in all of them. In the past there was an association in the past between social-democratic parties and trade union confederations, of the like that it is found in Southern European countries. Quite early in the recent modern history of these countries, though, agreements between trade unions and employers’ associations guaranteed ‘social peace’ in exchange for recognition of a single trade union confederation as a legitimate workers’ representation of workers at different levels for the whole state². Later on, all these countries went through a long period of political dominance by Social Democratic parties³. The association between Social Democracy and trade union confederations throughout this period yielded a high degree of institutionalisation of trade union activity.

This degree of institutionalisation is first revealed by trade union participation both in the ruling of industrial relations at the national level and in the management of important shares of the budget on social expenditure. This is the case of the *Ghent system*, a voluntary but publicly supported unemployment insurance system administered “by unions or union-dominated funds”. Currently, this system exists in Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland (Boeri et al 2001, 22). The power derived from *Ghent system* might be as important as representation in bi-partite (and/or tri-partite) institutions of conciliation and arbitration. Bi-partite or tri-partite institutions of conciliation and arbitration are salient in the process of collective bargaining, as means of avoiding or resolving a stalling of this process. These institutions may be also aimed at regulating labour relations.

Second, the high level of institutionalisation of trade union activity in this group of countries is revealed by the centralisation of collective bargaining. Countries in the

² In Sweden, the ‘*Saltsjöbaden agreement*’ (1938) soon established that, in return for the absence of strikes and the prerogative of employers in running their companies, different social policies would be issued to the benefit of trade unions’ members (Kjellberg 2000). In Denmark, the ‘September Compromise’ (1899) between the main employers’ association and the main trade union confederation also guaranteed industrial peace and employers’ prerogative to manage their companies in return for quite an explicit recognition of the main trade union confederation and of its role in yearly collective bargaining (Scheuer 1998). In Norway, a similar deal was reached in 1935. Finland is the only country where such an agreement took relatively longer to be reached.

³ See Ebbinghaus and Scheuer (2000) for the Danish case; Kjellberg (2000) for Sweden. Finland again was the only country where such a long period of Social-Democratic government was not so clear (Dolvik and Stokke 1998, 180).

Nordic model are well-known for this, even if collective bargaining centralisation has slightly diminished recently⁴. A strong centralisation of collective bargaining requires a parallel centralisation of the political actors who participate in this process.

Third, trade union activity at the workplace level in these four countries does not just consist of the existence of trade union delegates; it also includes co-determination; that is, workers' participation in supervisory or management boards. Denmark, Norway and, more recently, Finland share this characteristic of co-determination with Germany (Dolvik and Stokke 1998, 175). Unlike Germany and other central-European countries, though, workers' representation in the management or supervisory board is reserved to union representatives (Kjellberg 1998, 104-115).

Table 1. Collective bargaining centralisation in Europe (2003)

Country	Freq.
Germany	0.54
Austria	0.71
Belgium	0.61
Denmark	0.54
Spain	0.38
Finland	0.57
France	0.17
Greece	0.39
The Netherlands	0.58
Ireland	0.64
Italy	0.34
Luxembourg	0.33
Norway	-
Portugal	0.30
United Kingdom	0.13
Sweden	0.56
Total	42,359

Source: European Commission (2004)

As regards political access to cabinet, political parties traditionally associated to trade unions in the Nordic model not only have had real possibilities of access to office along the XXth. century, but have realised these possibilities, as prolonged periods of social-democratic governments demonstrate in most of them. To the left of social-democracy, even Communist parties could gain access to coalition governments in Finland (Ebbinghaus 2000), or support parliamentary majorities in Denmark (Ebbinghaus and Scheuer 2000). Communist Parties, though, have not represented a sizeable amount of the left-wing, as is the case of Southern Europe (see below).

Continental model

Belgium, Netherlands, Austria⁵ and Germany belong to the Continental model, which is surely more heterogeneous and more contentious than the others. Employers'

⁴ Such a decrease in collective bargaining centralisation has happened in Denmark (Scheuer 1998, 161-166) and to a greater extent in Sweden, where collective bargaining centralisation was eroded in the 1980s as a result of an increase in international competition in many key sectors (Pontusson and Swenson 1996). Far from this trend, collective bargaining in Norway has increased in the 1990s (Dolvik and Stokke 1998, 130-135).

associations and trade unions have never been here as centralised and cohesive as in the Nordic model. They have always represented more diverse interests, sensitivities and ideologies within their respective national working classes, often divided along religious or ideological lines. These divisions were reflected in the initial existence of different trade union confederations. The level of trade union membership has never reached levels found in the Nordic model either.

The end of the post-war period also resulted here in a relatively long period of Social-Democratic government. This period guaranteed the participation of trade unions in institutions that regulate labour relations at the national level. Quite revealingly, the ideological and religious divides of the beginning of the century in Austria became then less salient, and were finally subsumed as factions *within* the main trade union confederation (Ebbinghaus 2000). In Germany, after the divisions of the trade union movement in the 1930s, the DGB, of mainly social-democratic political orientation, became, by far, the main trade union confederation of the country. The only ideological division within the German trade union movement after the Second World War was incarnated in a minor trade union confederation, close to Christian Democracy (Fürstemberg 1998; Jacobi, et al. 1998). In the Netherlands, the pre-war ideological division waned in the 1950s (Visser 1998). Only in Belgium did the ideological division remain salient.

In the countries of the Continental Model, the institutionalisation of trade union activity has never reached the level of the Nordic Model, but it has not been as low as in the Voluntarist or Mediterranean Models either (see below). However, as mentioned above, there is more intra-model diversity in this regard than in the other three models. As regards trade union participation in bi-partite or tri-partite institutions for the regulation of labour relations, employment or social policies, it is well-known to be high in Austria, one of the most-celebrated cases of Neo-Corporatism (Katzenstein 1985). Similar levels of participation have been reached in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. The Netherlands has even been regarded as an example of social dialogue with three agents, especially in regards to the economic and social council, which has great influence over policy-making. Trade union participation is also prominent in the Dutch public employment agencies and, to a lesser extent, in the management of social security funds (Visser 1998, 300-301).

As regards collective bargaining, the countries of the Continental model range from high levels of collective bargaining centralisation (Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands) to medium, predominantly at the sector level, with company-level agreements for some large companies (Germany). Finally, trade union activity at the workplace level is characteristically dual: on the one hand, works councils typically represent the whole workforce in a given company or workplace, regardless of trade union membership; on the other hand, trade union delegates represent union members at the company or workplace level. Often considered initially as a threat to trade union

⁵ Among the countries that we have included in this group, Austria is possible the one closer to the Nordic Model. Siaroff groups Austria along with the Nordic countries in what he labels as ‘Austro-Scandinavian Corporatism’ (Siaroff, 1999)

activity at the workplace level, works councils have usually been co-opted by trade union branches.

Left-wing parties associated to trade unions have not been as able to gain access to office in the Continental model as their Nordic counterparts did, and for not so prolonged periods. Yet, their access in the post-war period was long enough to facilitate the level of institutionalisation of trade union activity we have described so far. Left wing parties in the countries belonging to the Continental model might thus be placed between the ones in the Nordic countries and the ones in the Southern European model of unionism. After the II World War, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) had to wait till 1966 to gain access to office. It then entered into a 'Great Coalition' with the Christian Democratic CDU-CSU. It lasted till 1969; from then to 1982 had the majority (Fürstenberg, 1998). In Austria, the presence of social-democracy in office was even longer in the post-war period: "except for four years, the SPÖ was in government for the entire Second Republic" till 1999, when the right got access to government again (Ebbinghaus 2000: 80). In the case of Belgium, the parties associated to both Socialist and Catholic unions some times formed part of governing coalitions (less often in the case of the Socialist Workers Party). Finally, in The Netherlands, the Labour Party often got access to government in the post-war period. In sum, although the countries in the Continental model of unionism did not show such a prolonged period of social-democratic governments as in the Nordic model, they often got access to government, and for periods long enough to establish a level or institutionalization of industrial relations higher than in the Southern European model.

Voluntarist Model

In Europe, the Voluntarist model is represented by Britain; less so by Ireland. This model represents one of the lowest levels of institutionalisation of trade union activity in the political and social life of the country. First, trade unions do not participate in the bi-partite or tri-partite institutions regulating labour relations, employment and/or social policies, although experiences of this sort were unsuccessfully attempted in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s⁶ (Edwards, et al. 1992, 8-9). Second, like most Anglo-Saxon countries, Britain and Ireland are characterised by decentralised systems of collective bargaining. Finally, although trade union activity at the workplace level is not legally recognised, it does exist. Without legal assistance, in a political culture characterised by non-intervention of the state, a network of 'shop stewards' progressively developed in Britain, from the times of Industrial Revolution until today. 'Shop stewards', natural representatives of small constituencies of workers at the shop floor level, soon became true institutions at the workplace and company level. They were exported to other Anglo-Saxon countries. As a result, trade unions in Britain attained a stronger *organisational power* than in Southern European countries. In sum, although countries of the Voluntarist model seem to have an even lower level of institutionalisation of trade union activity at the workplace level than Southern

⁶ Trade union agreements with employers' associations at the national level are more common in Ireland. Trade union presence in institutions of consultation and mediation is also remarkable here (Von Prondzynski 1998).

European countries, this shortcoming is compensated by a higher organisational strength that gives them a greater capability of recruitment and organisation.

All these traits of the British trade union movement were associated with an agenda fairly circumscribed to ‘bread and butter issues’, far away from more ambitious political or social claims. Moreover, the core of collective bargaining in the Voluntarist model does not take place at the sector level, like in Germany, but at the workplace or company level.

However, the restraints from claims at a higher political and social level for trade unions within this model also have to do with the consolidation of a left-wing party that has clear access to the parliamentary arena and executive power regardless of its link to trade unions. Closely linked in its origin to the Trade Union Confederation (TUC), the Labour Party does not require today the mobilisation of trade union rank-and-file in order to compensate its organisational weakness, or in order to be elected into office. Neither the British Labour Party nor the American Democratic Party, close as they were historically to trade union confederations in their respective countries, need such a mobilisation and the maintenance of such a link.

Southern European Model

Three relatively young democracies (Greece, Portugal and Spain) fit this model along with France and Italy. These latter countries share with Greece, Portugal and Spain *both* a low degree of institutionalisation of trade union activity *and* a difficulty for left-wing parties to access executive power.

In the first place, the salience of ideological and religious divides within the trade union movement is a common feature to all the countries considered in the Southern European model. French and Italian trade unionisms undoubtedly share this feature with Portuguese or Spanish trade unionism⁷. In addition, trade union confederations in these countries are weak organisations, with low membership rates⁸. In spite of frequent support from the state (or precisely because of that), trade unions have never attained the organisational strength of British trade unions.

After the end of the authoritarian regimes, both Portuguese and Spanish trade union movements were dominated by a single, roughly organised trade union confederation, in turn clearly dominated by the Communist Party: Workers’ Commissions [CCOO, *Comisiones Obreras*] in Spain and the General Workers’ Confederation [CGTP, *Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses*] in Portugal. Both confederations had demonstrated their success in co-opting the institutions for workers’ representations during the previous authoritarian regimes (Fishman, 1990). Both had aspirations to become *the* only workers’ representation in the country, once democracy arrived. This aspiration was soon contested by other trade union confederations with different political and, to a lesser extent, religious affiliation. The main competitor was

⁷ Greece, with just one trade union confederation, constitutes a deviant case.

⁸ Italy is an exception, with union membership rates substantially higher than the other countries of the group.

associated with social-democratic parties. The name of this trade union confederation was identical in Spain and Portugal: the General Workers Union [*Unión General de Trabajadores* in Spain and *União Geral de Trabalhadores* in Portugal]. In Spain, CCOO and UGT still compete nowadays for the representation of the whole working class, to a much greater extent than in Portugal (Martínez Lucio 1998; Barreto and Naumann 1998).

The origin of trade unionism in Italy and France is slightly different, but the result is quite similar. In both countries, the Communist Party came out of the war strengthened and legitimised among French and Italian workers, due to its support for the Resistance against the Nazi occupation. A strong trade union confederation, supported by the Communist Party, appeared then in both countries: the French *Confédération General du Travail* (CGT) and the Italian *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL). In the decades following the Second World War, other trade union confederations, with different political orientations, split from the CGT and CGIL, moving closer to Social-Democratic parties and supporting their interests in the broader political arena. This was the case of *Force Ouvrière* (FO) and *Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail* (CFDT) in France. Both trade unions were close to the French Socialist Party. It was also the case of the *Confédération Française du Travail Chrétien* (CFTC), of a Social-Christian orientation. Similarly, the Italian *Confederazione Italiana dei Sindacati Lavoratori* (CISL) was founded in close proximity to Christian Democracy, a political party more important in Italy than in France (Goestchy 1998; Regalia and Regini 1998).

With the exception of the Voluntarist model, institutional channels for trade union activity have not been developed in these four countries as much as in the other three models of unionism. This may be the result of the absence of a prolonged period of Social-Democratic government. It may also be the result of a stronger fear of unions by both governments and employers. Both actors have traditionally been reluctant to institutionalise unions' and workers' voice in the political, economic, and labour relations realms.

First, trade union participation in tri-partite or bi-partite institutions within the Southern European model for the regulation of industrial relations has been less frequent and less effective than in the Continental and Nordic models. Trade unions in the Southern European model have not achieved a permanent representation in many institutions of this sort⁹. Quite paradoxically, though, trade union confederations have often been called to participate in different reforms of the labour market or the welfare state, in order to legitimize them, but this intervention has never been institutionalised.

⁹ The statist tradition in France has not favoured the participation of trade unions or employers' associations in the regulation of employment relations. The state has traditionally reserved for itself a considerable regulatory power in this field (Van Ruysseveldt and Visser 1996, 84-90). In Italy, the long political dominance of Christian Democracy after World War II did not favour trade union participation in the regulation of employment relations either. Yet, trade unions here did achieve access to the regulation of the *Cassa Integrazione Guadagni*, the institution that administers unemployment subsidies and pensions. In Spain and Portugal, trade unions got representation in consultative bodies with far less importance, like the Spanish Economic and Social Council (*Consejo Económico y Social*). This council only has an advisory role in social and employment matters.

Thus, it is not strange that many negotiations for labour market or welfare state reforms have been sprinkled by labour unrest, to the extent that such peaks of labour conflict have finally characterised the trajectory of these systems of industrial relations. At the same time, such peaks of mobilisation have surely generated a tradition of trade union participation in the political sphere. But such participation has always been through these more public and open means ('voice'), unlike in other countries belonging to different models of trade unionism.

As regards collective bargaining, it has been historically rather decentralised, without reaching the level of decentralisation of the Voluntarist model¹⁰. In moments of crisis during the last quarter of the 20th century, agreements were reached at the national level between the main employers' associations and the main trade union confederations, making many believe a centralisation of collective bargaining was taking place. This "aspiring corporatism" would take place "in countries where problems in the labour market were part of a wider problem of overall social stability and anxiety about civic unrest: Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece and to some extent France" (Crouch 1996, 365-367). Once the crisis was solved, though, governments and employers alike return to the norm of a more decentralised collective bargaining, which reduces unions influence and power¹¹.

Finally, employers and governments have also been traditionally reluctant to institutionalise trade union activity at the workplace level. Both in France and Italy, workers' representation at the company level had been quite vague before the late 1960s, not granting many rights either to the workforce as a whole or to trade unions in particular. Both countries went through a major peak of labour unrest then. The burst of labour conflict at this moment was the only way to achieve the degree of institutionalisation that trade union activity can exhibit today. In fact, it may be seen as both the undesired result of such a low level of institutionalisation and the attempt to move beyond this point. In Italy, institutionalisation of trade union activity at the company and workplace level arrived with the Statuto dei Lavoratori, issued in 1970 (Regalia and Regini 1998, 465-469). In France, official trade union representation was also made legal in 1968 (Van Ruyseveldt and Visser 1996, 113-114). After mobilisations of the late 1960s, workers' representation became dual. This is also the moment when collective bargaining began to acquire a full sense. This dual representation (works council and trade union delegates) was also finally established in Portugal and Spain after the arrival of democracy. But, in spite of a higher institutionalisation of trade union activity at the company and workplace level achieved in the 1970s, union sections and works councils have not been fully effective

¹⁰ The predominant level of collective bargaining in most countries of the Southern European model has been the industry (sector) level, with important exceptions for large companies. In addition, the effectiveness of the agreements are low; they are theoretically (but not actually) applied to all the companies in a given sector. In Spain, for instance, the predominant level of collective bargaining is the sector *and* the province, with company-level bargaining for large companies (Migueluez and Rebollo 1999; Martínez Lucio 1998). In France, Italy and Spain, the state *extends* collective agreements to all the companies in a sector for which relevant actors have struck a deal, even if union membership rates in the sector are actually low.

¹¹ See Astudillo (1998) and Gillespie (1990), for a more detailed account of this process for the Spanish case.

in channelling union activity at this level. First, with the exception of Spain, works councils have not been granted much power; second, works councils have only been effective where union membership among the workforce is substantial. In many cases, works councils exist only nominally¹². In sum, unlike in the Voluntarist model, trade unions in this model have not found in the company and/or the workplace level the domain to fully flex their muscle; on the contrary, the political arena remains the most salient level of development for their activity. This happens not through ‘access’ mechanisms, though, but through ‘voice’ mechanisms. The insufficient institutionalisation of trade union activity at the national level has often motivated unions to resort to ‘voice’, like strikes or demonstrations, as indirect means (open, public) to exert pressure on companies and public authorities.

A final element is key to understanding the Southern European model of trade unionism. Unlike countries in the Voluntarist model, also with a low level of institutionalisation of trade union activity, important left-wing parties (Communist ones) have historically lacked the opportunity of accessing governmental power. This may have worked as an incentive for some unions associated with Communist Parties to continue with the ‘voice’ strategy. In Italy, for instance, the political sphere has been traditionally monopolised by Christian Democracy, from the outset of the II World War up to 1990s; in France, the Socialist Workers Party did gain access to government, but the Communist Party only did so in coalition with the Socialist Party for a two-year period; in Portugal, after the access of the conservative Socialist Party to government, the influence of the Portuguese Communist Party progressively waned and their access to power was progressively restricted. In Spain, in spite of the importance of the Communist Party at the arrival of democracy, their electoral opportunities were quite restricted. The coalition United Left (*Izquierda Unida*), heir of the Spanish Communist Party, has been systematically prevented from gaining access to power by an electoral system that systematically penalised it (Ruiz-Rufino 2006). The lack of governmental opportunities of an important part of the left may have led it to seek strategies of ‘voice’, in order to survive and promote their members’ and supporters’ interests¹³.

¹² In France, “where workplace union organization is ineffectual, statutory workplace institutions tend to have little impact, and representatives lack legitimacy in the eyes of employees” (Goetschy 1998, 385; see also Hege and Dufour 1995). In Spain, “given the unions’ concern with ‘representative’ status, and their lack of financial resources nationally [compensated precisely through this ‘representative’ status, attained at the union elections] the principal objective of the major confederations has often been to maximize their representatives in the four-yearly elections, rather than to ensure the existing committees operatively” (Martinez Lucio 1992, 510). In Portugal, the *comissoes de trabalhadores*, spontaneously set up during the 1974 Revolution, were formally recognised in 1979, but they only received minor power: “‘supervision of management’ (a dead letter in practice)” and “‘participation in the administration of welfare matters within the firm” (Barreto and Naumann 1998, 409).

¹³ The effect of the relegation of the French and Italian Communist Party over their systems of industrial relations in the post-war period has already been analysed in depth by Lange et al. (1982).

3. Hypothesis

There are two hypothetical reasons to find a correlation between union affiliation and political mobilisation (see below). The first of them is that unions, as other organizations, can save some of the costs associated with certain political activities. These costs range from the lack of information to organisational issues. In this case, union membership could be the cause of a higher level of political mobilisation.

However, we claim that models of trade unionism determine the nature and strength of this correlation. The four models described above differ systematically in the degree of institutionalisation of union activity and the political opportunities of neighbouring parties:

Table 2. Level of institutionalization and political opportunities across models

<i>Union model</i>	<i>Institutionalisation</i>	<i>Political Opportunities</i>
<i>Voluntarist</i>	Low	High
Continental	Intermediate	High
Nordic	High	High
South Europe	Low	Low

This variation justifies our expectation of finding an unequal propensity to participate politically among union members within different European countries. Our argument is that the correlation between union membership and political mobilization could be causal -and stronger- when there are low levels of institutionalization and the parties politically close to unions are not given the chance of addressing certain demands -in other words, when these parties have low levels of political opportunities- According to our description above, union membership in Southern Europe may represent an extra stimuli for political mobilization. We claim that does not happen in the rest of our cases: in no other model institutionalization and political opportunities are jointly low.

4. Data and variables

We use data from fifteen nationally-representative samples from the European Social Survey-first wave (ESS-2002). The questionnaire and the sampling procedures were identical in 21 European countries and Israel, which makes the ESS an appropriate tool for conducting cross-national comparative studies.

We will use data from Germany, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, the Netherlands, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, the UK and Sweden. The following table (3) describes each national sample size.

Table 3. National sample sizes in ESS-2002

	<i>N 2003</i>	<i>N 2004</i>	<i>N 2006</i>
Austria	2,216	2,205	2,346
Belgium	1,873	1,773	1,798
Denmark	1,491	1,479	1,478
Finland	1,998	2,019	1,892
France	1,503	1,806	1,986
Germany	2,914	2,853	2,902
Great Britain	2,048	1,892	2,389
Greece	2,551	2,404	-
Ireland	1,996	2,23	1,761
Italy	1,203	1,527	-
Luxembourg	1,526	1,63	-
Netherlands	2,357	1,875	1,883
Norway	2,033	1,757	1,748
Portugal	1,5	2,049	2,213
Spain	1,723	1,65	1,87
Sweden	1,991	1,943	1,923

Source: ESS-2002, 2004 and 2006

To explore the empirical association between union-membership and individual political participation, we have selected four dependent variables that summarise different strategies of political participation.

- Signing a petition in an organised campaign.
- Taking part in authorised demonstrations.
- Boycotting or not using certain products
- Using (or tearing) banners or stickers.

All these are dummy variables equal to one when the respondent used the specific strategy in the last twelve months and 0 otherwise. Recall from the introduction that we are mainly interested in extra-representational models of political participation and not on representational ones –those that use the channel of representation available- (Teorell, Torcal and Montero, 2007) which would imply high levels of political opportunity to neighbouring parties.¹⁴

The union membership is also modelled using a dummy variable. Its value is 1 if the respondent has been a union member in the last year and 0 if this is not the case. As widely known, the rates of union membership differ greatly across European countries, as well as the weight of unemployed and inactive in their members

¹⁴ So as to avoid endogeneity, we do not look at the kind of vote that the individual casts.

Table 4. Union member in the last 12 months

	<i>% of union members 2003</i>	<i>%Union members 2004</i>	<i>% union members 2006</i>	<i>% unemployed</i>	<i>% inactive</i>
Austria	6.85	6.13	7.72	2.35	46.88
Belgium	6.29	6.34	7.84	8.7	44.15
Denmark	9.49	9.49	10.97	4.31	49.43
Finland	10.09	10.73	11.94	5.64	35.47
France	2.49	3.07	3.90	2.8	46.6
Germany	8.86	8.36	9.27	9.42	55.12
Great Britain	7.22	6.11	9.36	2.93	50.09
Greece	3.14	3.27	x	3.43	40.59
Holland	6.47	4.69	4.85	3.00	62.25
Ireland	6.51	7.32	6.58	3.26	47.86
Italy	2.70	2.74	x	2.09	36.87
Luxembourg	3.74	5.12	x	1.29	45.88
Netherlands	10.77	9.32	9.24	2.72	48.69
Portugal	1.82	2.97	2.89	6.14	44.02
Spain	1.83	2.21	2.61	4.09	33.09
Sweden	11.72	12.13	12.83	4.2	33.41

Source: ESS-different waves.

Note: percentages are weighted.

As can be seen (Table 4), union membership is clearly less frequent in Southern Europe (Spain, France, Greece, Italy and Portugal) than in the rest of the cases. On the contrary, the Scandinavian countries present high levels of affiliation. Our analysis excludes unemployed or inactive members of trade unions since we are interested in the sort of political mobilization that union members could use to improve their working conditions. The level of union institutionalization is in this sense less relevant to explain the political mobilization of inactive -or unemployed- members of unions.

The models presented in the next pages measure the net effect of present (or past) union-membership, controlling for the standard list of individual-level controls used in the specialised literature, namely sex (1 female), formal education (1 no education, 2 primary, 3 lower secondary, 4 upper secondary, 5 non university/post-secondary, 6 university), self-placement in the left-right scale (0-7), the respondents' age and his satisfaction at the place of work (0 dissatisfied, 10 satisfied).

5. Results

5.1. The country level analysis

The next table summarises the logistic regression estimates calculated for the trade-union membership dummy in a series of regression models specified to include education, sex, age, ideology and satisfaction at the work place. Note that adding this last variable restricts our analysis to active workers. This is justified not only because

these are the most likely segment of the population that mobilize themselves, but also because, as proved in table 4, union membership among unemployed and inactive groups is unevenly distributed across countries. Note that an equation is estimated for each country. Table 5 only displays statistically significant coefficients.

Table 5. Logit coefficients: Net impact of trade-unionism on political participation

	Petitions	Demonstrations	Boycott	Banners
<i>Continental Europe</i>				
Belgium	0.18**	0.30**		0.62***
Austria	0.38***		0.21**	0.51***
Germany	0.29***	0.55***		
Luxembourg	0.37**	0.36**		0.34*
Netherlands	0.38***	0.67***	0.35***	0.52***
<i>South Europe</i>				
Spain	0.81***	0.63***	0.47**	0.54***
Greece	1.06***	0.84***	0.81***	1.09***
Portugal	0.58**	0.57**	0.48**	0.39*
France	0.71***	1.07***	0.40***	0.80***
Italy	0.56***	0.71***	0.34**	0.77***
<i>Scandinavia</i>				
Sweden	0.39***	-0.25*	0.37***	-0.18*
Norway				
Finland	0.24*		-0.21*	
Denmark	0.22**	-0.49**		-0.30*
<i>Voluntarist</i>				
Great Britain	0.36**	0.61***	0.30***	0.52***
Ireland	0.41**	0.49**	0.46***	

p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Figures reflect the net impact of trade-unionism in the last 12 months controlling for sex, education, age, ideology and satisfaction at the workplace. The models were weighted.

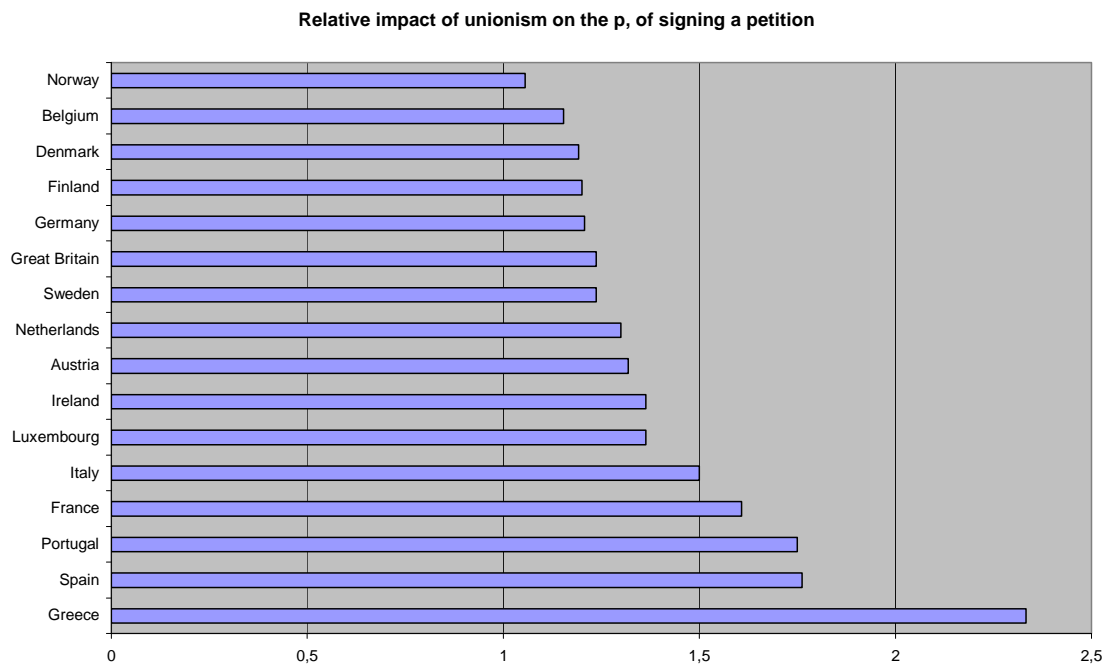
The models confirm the existence of noticeable differences across countries in the impact of trade-unionism on the likelihood of political participation in any of the indicators selected for this study.

In the models estimated for signing petitions, two countries in the continental model - Germany and the Netherlands- reveal a positive impact of being a union member on the likelihood of signing petitions. Three countries in Southern Europe –Spain, Greece and Italy- share this propensity.

This is only a partial confirmation of our argument. Yet, in order to ease the interpretation of these results we have translated the logit coefficient into a probability estimation that measures the impact of being a union member (see the first graph below) using the STATA *Spost* simulation programme¹⁵. Because a given behaviour could be more frequent in a certain country for reasons that are out of the scope of our analysis, we decided to provide a relative measure of the unionism. The relative measure is a ratio between the probability of not being affiliated and that of being

¹⁵ http://www.indiana.edu/~jlsoc/spost_install.htm

member of a trade-union effect [relative propensity to sign a petition= $p_{\text{signing a petition}}/(1-p_{\text{signing a petition}})$].

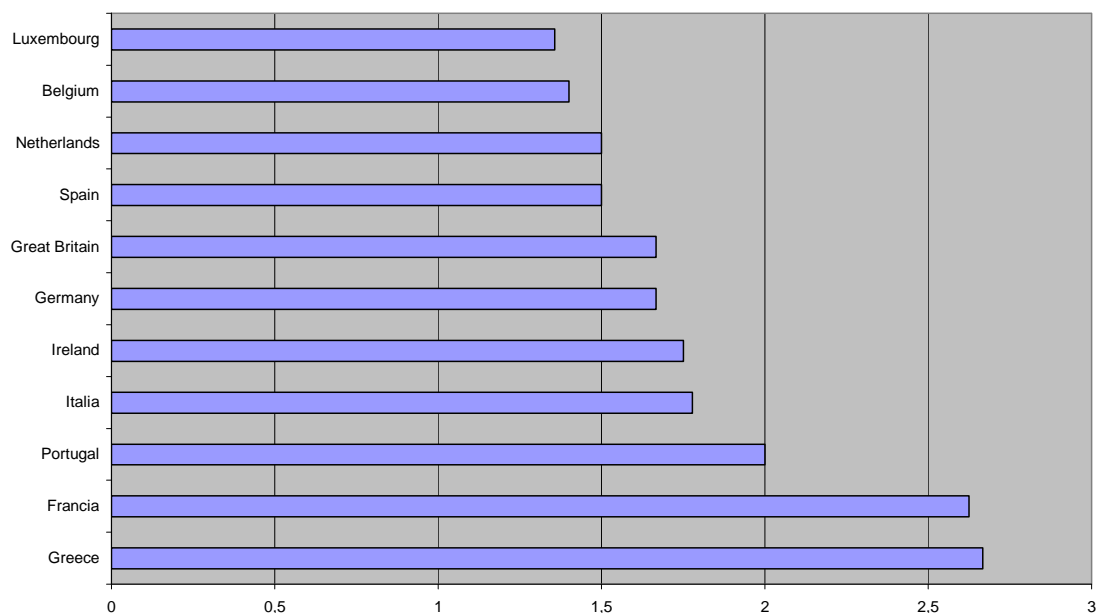


As expected, the first graph reveals that the impact of being a union member is larger in any one of the countries included in the Southern European model of unionism than in Germany and or Netherlands, which in our argument belong to a union tradition that is not shaped by the combination of low levels of institutionalization and political opportunities.

Looking at the impact of unionism on the likelihood of demonstrating, which is probably the most appropriate dependent variable in our analysis, Portugal, Spain, Greece, France and Italy present a positive and significant effect of our main independent variable, which occurs also in regards to Belgium and Germany. The relative impact of union membership is clearly larger in Portugal, Italy, Greece and France than in Germany and Belgium¹⁶.

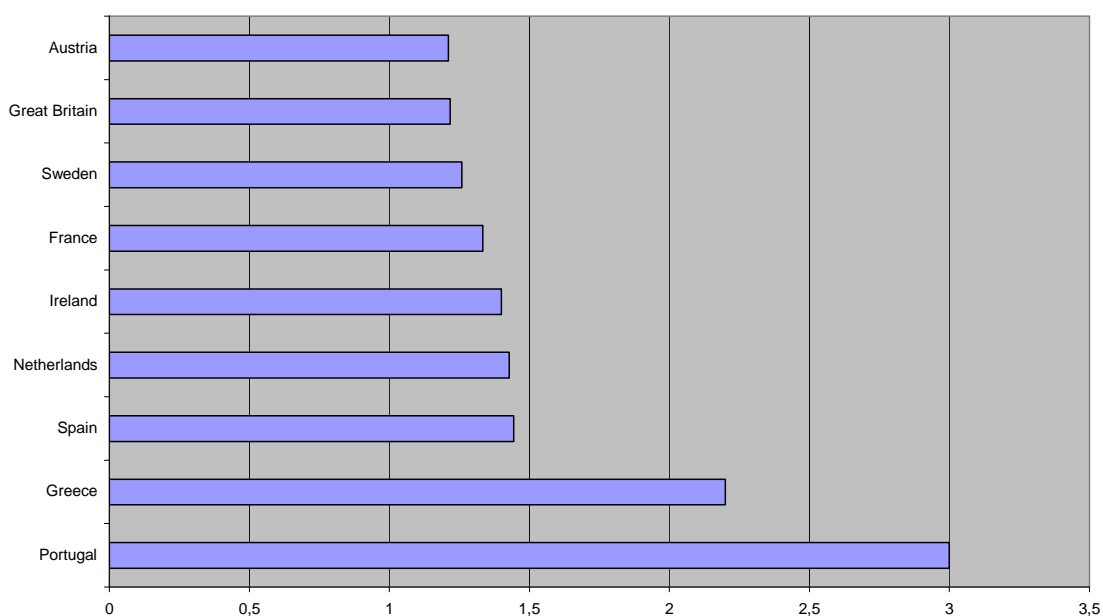
¹⁶ If we split the German sample into East and West this significant impact of unionism on demonstrating becomes restricted to the West Germans, who, as is also the case for the rest of the Western workers, have afforded the cost of the reunification

Graph 2. Relative impact of unionismo on the p. of demonstrating

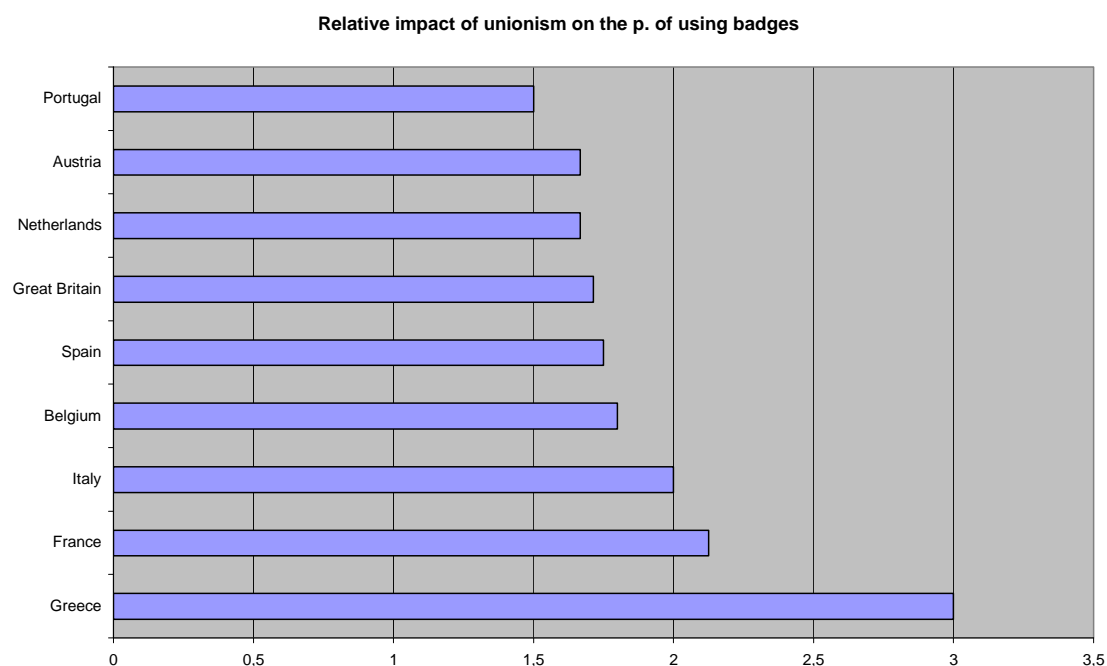


The results of boycott indicator also fit partially into our general hypothesis. In this case, only two Southern European countries reveal positive and significant estimates for union-membership –Portugal and Greece. Yet, there are no exceptions to the predicted in countries belonging to models that lack at the time institutionalization and political opportunities.

Relative impact of unionism on the p. of boycott



The results drawn from the models where the use of banners and stickers is the dependent variable also confirm our broad hypothesis in a very partial way. Greece, Italy and France fit in our prediction of a significant association between affiliation and political participation, but also Belgium and Sweden, although the relative impact is larger in the first three cases.



In conclusion, this country-level analysis has quite confirmed our hypothesis of an unequal effect of union membership on political participation. Portugal, for example, does behave as predicted in a single dependent variable (demonstrating). In their analysis of political participation in 13 countries, Teorell, Torcal and Montero (2007) also observed the deviant character of Portugal, where “all the extra-representational activities are linked to party activity”. This is argued to be due to the fact that “most political mobilisation in Portugal during and after the transition from authoritarian rule took place through the major political parties” (351).

In general, the continental countries present a significant impact of union membership on most of the indicators of political mobilisation; but if we look at the relative impact (ratio of the probability of acting as a union member over non-union members), the Southern European countries show a stronger impact of union membership.

We now turn to a joint test of our hypothesis in a single multilevel regression for each of these five indicators of political mobilisation.

5.2. A multilevel analysis of the effect of the union model on political mobilisation

To test the robustness of our argument, we have also studied the net effect of union membership in different countries. We have estimated five multilevel regressions (random intercept) for the sixteen national samples used in the previous section. The multilevel estimation allows us to disentangle the effect of individual and country level factors, including the effect of wider variables such as the union models described in the theoretical sections of this paper.

Multilevel regression adds to the standard OLS the separate exploration of variation at the individual and the group (country) level. If the standard OLS regression has the following specification and only includes a single residual (R_{ij})

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} x_{ij} + R_{ij}$$

the multilevel regression allows us to introduce as many random effects as we need into the model. The simplest multilevel model only includes an extra level associated with the intercept, which represents the average value of a randomly chosen group. Thus, the intercept has a fixed term that captures the average value of the groups (γ_{00}) and a random term that models the variation across groups (U_{0j})

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + U_{0j}$$

Thus, the model will have the following specification, in which both R_{ij} (unexplained individual residual) and U_{0j} (unexplained group residual) are random effects.

$$Y_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + U_{0j} + R_{ij}$$

This is the final specification of the models that we shall estimate:

$$Y_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + U_{0j} + \beta_{1j} x_{ij} + R_{ij}$$

The random intercept model leaves all the controls and independent variables as fixed effects, so we assume that there is no group-specific impact of any of these variables. These fixed effects (β_{1j}) are to be interpreted as standard coefficients in OLS or maximum likelihood regressions.

As we did for the logistic regressions in the previous section, the models here estimate the net impact of union membership, controlling for age, sex, education, ideology and satisfaction at the workplace.

We have also built four dummy variables that collapse the samples of each set of countries belonging to the same model of trade unionism. As such, this strategy does not add anything to our argument. For this reason, we have also created interactions of union models with union membership in order to test the wider union-model specific

slope¹⁷ In the analysis we only introduce three models and keep the Southern European model as the reference category because as it have mentioned, it is the one in which we expect a differential impact of tradeunionism.

Table 6. Multilevel regression estimates¹⁸

		<i>Demonstration</i>	<i>Petition</i>	<i>Boycott</i>	<i>Badges</i>
Union member		0.799***	0.800***	0.516***	0.714***
Controls	Sex	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.06
		-0.111***	0.200***	0.202***	0.105***
	Age	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.03
		-0.022***	-0.010***	-0.001*	-0.012***
	Years in education	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
		0.076***	0.094***	0.119***	0.054***
Left right scale	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
	-0.239***	-0.096***	-0.123***	-0.115***	
Trade unión models	Central Europe	-0.369	0.707*	0.486	-0.293
	Anglosaxon	0.36	0.33	0.31	0.24
	Scandinavia	-0.887	0.977*	0.489	0.138
		0.49	0.44	0.40	0.31
		-0.510	1.159***	1.224***	0.935***
		0.39	0.35	0.33	0.25
Interactions	Central Europe*Union member	-0.431***	-0.421***	-0.387***	-0.329***
	Scandinavia*union member	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.08
	Anglosaxon*union member	-0.879***	-0.677***	-0.441***	-0.798***
		0.09	0.06	0.07	0.08
ESS round	Round 1	-0.213	-0.365***	-0.043	-0.263**
	Round 2	0.11	0.07	0.08	0.10
		0.306***	0.121***	0.106***	-0.043
		0.04	0.02	0.03	0.04
Constant		0.225***	-0.002	0.066*	-0.095**
		0.04	0.02	0.03	0.04
		-1.362***	-2.299***	-3.278****	-2.255***
		0.27	0.24	0.22	0.18
N		70,058	70,058	69,935	70,058
N. of countries		16	16	16	16
Chi ²		2636.34***	3364.31***	2960.78***	1175.40***
σ(u)		0.572	0.518	0.479	0.365
ρ		0.090	0.075	0.065	0.039

legend: β & standard error

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

The four models in the table above add some support to our expectations. Two interactive terms are significant in the model run for the likelihood of participating in demonstrations, with the Southern European model as the reference category, and the

¹⁷ So as to enlarge the sample used in the interactions we have relaxed the time limit to union membership.

¹⁸ The following models have been estimated using the xtlogit command in STATA 9.0.

three of them hold negative signs meaning that in any case union members from these three models are less likely of demonstrating than those in the reference category. The conclusions drawn from the model run for the likelihood of signing petitions are fully in agreement with our basic hypothesis, given that all interactions are statistically significant, even if the three interactive terms present negative estimates in comparison to the Southern European model. The likelihood of Continental and Scandinavian union members is less to participate in organised boycotts to products than Southern European ones (and once more the sign associated to the Voluntarist interaction is negative). This is the very same result found in the model that estimates the likelihood of using stickers and banners. Yet, once again bear in mind that the interactions which are not significant hold negative signs, with Southern Europe as the reference category. This means that even if we cannot fully confirm from an orthodox statistical point of view the difference existing between the likelihood of the union members in Southern European countries and those in Voluntarist ones, the empirical evidence suggest that, in the sample, union members in countries belonging to the first tradition could be also more likely to participate through these strategies than the rest.

6. Discussion

According to some views of political mobilisation, given the ‘specific’ character of the interests traditionally defended by trade unions, their members would be more likely to resort to political strategies of ‘access’; that is, to use direct channels of communication with policy-makers in order to transmit to them an accurate description of their claims. In contrast, other interest groups whose interests could be labelled as ‘diffuse’ (e.g., social movements) would choose more public, open strategies of political mobilisation, labelled as ‘voice’.

This picture suits the American reality, but it has not been tested cross-nationally. The European Social Survey allows for such a test. The findings derived from the analysis of ESS data made here suggests that there are models of trade unionism in Europe for which union membership is *not* associated to strategies of mobilisation that could lead to political participation labelled as ‘voice’. Yet, union membership in the countries of the Southern European model of unionism seems to be clearly associated with these strategies of ‘voice’. This association is outstandingly clear in the case of demonstrations; it is fairly clear in the case of signing petitions and using banners or stickers; and it is not so clear in the case of boycotting. It should be noted that the association between union membership and these three kinds of political participation associated with ‘voice’ is positive and statistically significant for countries in the Southern European model, whereas this is not the case for countries in the other three models. Moreover, the *relative* impact of union membership over participating in demonstrations, signing petitions or joining boycotts is particularly high in countries of the Southern European model, relative to the cases where such an association is occasionally statistically significant for countries of other models.

We have argued that the existence of different levels of institutionalisation of trade union activity and different opportunities of left-wing parties to access executive power may explain the deviant role of Southern Europe. Hypothetically, the very low level of institutionalisation of trade union activity, along with the lack of access to office of some left-wing parties, might have led union leaders to mobilise support through *extra-representational* modes of political participation (voice), rather than through *representational* ones (access); that is, through contacting political representatives and voting. Both direct and indirect mobilisation (through social networks) by union leaders in Southern Europe would be directed at promoting interests through the former types of political participation. We should bear in mind that “family, friends, neighbours”, the types of social networks Rosenstone and Hansen (1993, 27-30) had in mind, are especially important in Southern Europe.

The relationship between the institutionalisation of trade union activity and political participation here hypothesised is not *linear*; on the contrary, the decreasing level of institutionalisation, as we move from one ‘model of unionism’ to another, does not seem to be as important as the *particularly low level* of institutionalisation found in the Southern European model. In other words, there seems to be a *threshold effect* that only a proper, more rigorous analysis could detect. Moreover, such a low level of institutionalisation might be necessary, but not sufficient, for generating the kind of association between union membership and ‘voice’ that we have found in the Southern European model. Also important and worth including is the level of opportunity left parties have to attain positions in the government.

The limitations of the argument should also be stressed. First, we do not have in our data the *mechanisms* that would explain the relationship between *types* of political participation and union membership. The European Social Survey provides an excellent opportunity to explore such a relationship, but it does not include anything that captures as broad phenomena as *institutionalisation of trade union activity* or *opportunities of political parties to access power*. ‘Models of unionism’ have thus been used here as reasonable theoretical explanations of regularities found among our data. A rigorous establishment of the causal connection between union membership, mobilisation, institutionalisation of trade union activity and opportunities of access to government by leftist parties and, finally, union members’ political participation would require a rich international survey, possibly made *ex-professo* for answering these questions. As far as we know, this data do not yet exist.

Second, the argument does not consider the association between trade union membership and types of political mobilisation in a dynamic perspective. The particular association found in the Southern European might be more unstable than in the other three models. First, ‘voice’ strategies could finally attain one of their objectives: the institutionalisation of trade union activity. In such case, we may expect that ‘access’ replaces ‘voice’. Quite meaningfully, the labour mobilisation of the late 1960s and 1970s in France and Italy, and the result of a slightly higher institutionalisation of trade union activity, would have led the way to decreasing labour unrest. Moreover, after the establishment of a clearer channel of workers’ representation at the workplace in Italy, there was an attempt to unify the different trade union confederations. Such an attempt (*Federazione CGIL-CSIL-UIL*) did not

come through, as it was dissolved in 1984, when an agreement with the government for keeping down inflation and moderating wages was contested by one of the members of the new federation (Visser 2000, 385). In a similar vein, the slight institutionalisation of trade union activity that came after the period of 'social dialogue' in Spain has also brought about a lower level of labour unrest (Astudillo 1998) as well as a progressive approach between the two main trade union confederations, which survived a period of strong confrontation at the beginning of the Spain's democracy.

As regards access of left-wing political parties to power, the chronic lack of opportunities in this respect might progressively weaken them, not only in front of voters, but also in front of the trade unions that were initially close to them. The importance of the Spanish and French Communist Parties has decreased in these last decades. In parallel, at least in Spain, a distancing of the trade union confederation once closely associated to the Spanish Communist Party in the past has been observed, as a way of not losing legitimacy among potential voters and supporters and leaving doors open for bargaining with incumbent parties.

7. References

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