Do Unions Shape Political Ideologies at Work?

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August 29, 2023

EEA-ESEM Barcelona 2023

Motivation

- "We fundamentally transformed how we live and how we work in this country [...] because of the victories won by labor." Biden, Sept 8th 2021

- Economists have long studied the direct effects of unions on labor market outcomes Freeman & Medoff 1984, Card 1996, Di Nardo & Lee 2004, Knepper 2020, Farber et al. 2021, Frandsen 2021

- "But unions do not just influence the way the labor market functions; they also have important implications for the political system."
Acemoglu & Robinson 2013

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$$\Downarrow$$

Can unions bring lasting change by shaping political ideologies?

Our Paper

**Do unions mobilize and change the political ideologies
of employees at unionized workplaces?**

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Approach: Compare campaign contributions of employees in establishments that voted for vs. against unionization

- Individuals' contributions are mainly driven by ideological motives
  Ansolabehere et al. 2003, Barber 2016, Bonica 2016, Teso 2022
- Predict vote choices and policy preferences of donors Bonica 2019

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Contributions:

- Causal assessment of the political impact of unions
  - DiD, combined with RDD tests and a new IV strategy (exploiting the random timing of work accidents)
- New level of analysis: unionizing establishment
- New research question: unionization and within-firm dynamics (separate effects on workers and managers)

How Do Workers vs. Managers React?

Workers

- Mobilization
- Information on (Democratic) candidates and policies
- Political capacity (networks & organization)
- Salience of worker issues & distributional conflicts
  → Worker identity

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  $\rightarrow$ Worker identity

Managers

- Salience of worker issues & distributional conflicts
  $\rightarrow$ Manager identity (group threat hypothesis)
- Perspective taking (contact hypothesis)

  $\Rightarrow$ Backlash or alignment of political positions?

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Union Elections

Unionization is decided by workers at the establishment level.

Union certification process NLRB

- Prerequisit: 30% of eligible workers sign a petition expressing interest in union representation
- Secret ballot election at work
- A union wins with a simple majority

If the union wins ...

- Bargaining unit is solely represented by winning union

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Data

Union elections Farber 2016 & NLRB

- Universe of elections, 1985-2010
- Establishment-level

Data

Union elections Farber 2016 & NLRB

- Universe of elections, 1985-2010
- Establishment-level

Campaign contributions DIME

- Transaction-level, 1979-2016
- From: Individuals
- To: Federal & local candidates

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Data

Union elections Farber 2016 & NLRB

- Universe of elections, 1985-2010
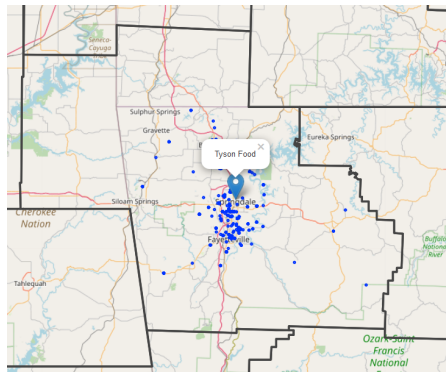- Establishment-level

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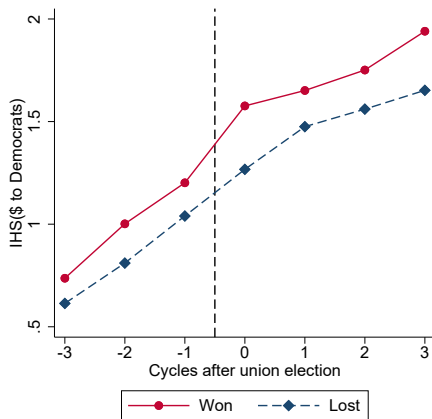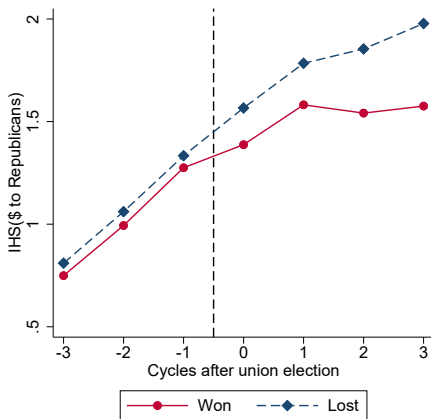- From: Individuals
- To: Federal & local candidates

Linkage

- Exact match of commuting zone
- Fuzzy match of firm name

Example: Tyson Food, Springdale, Arkansas

$\rightarrow$ Matched sample: 6,603 establishments, each over 7 election cycles

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Descriptives by Treatment Status and Event Time

Staggered DiD Design

- **Stacking** Cengiz et al. 2019
  - Align union elections in relative event time $k = \{-3, -2, ..., 3\}$
  - Only compare won and lost union elections held in the same cycle g_i
  - Avoids "forbidden comparisons" of late- and early-treated units
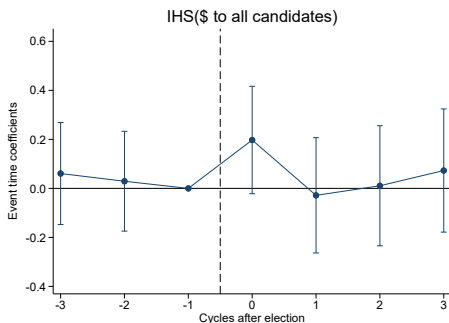   Goodman-Bacon 2021

- **Stacked DiD (static) model**:

$$y_{ik} = \alpha_i + \beta_{kg_i} + \delta_{\text{DiD}} \times \left(\mathbb{1}[k \geq 0] \times \text{Won}_i \right) + \epsilon_{ik} \qquad (1)$$
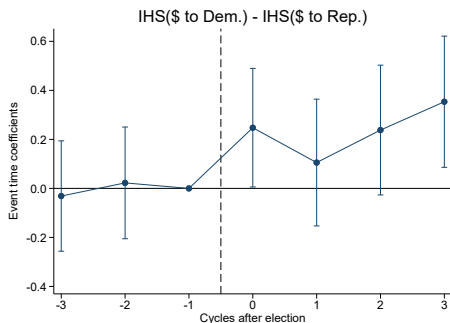
- **Stacked event-study (dynamic) model**:

$$y_{ik} = \alpha_i + \beta_{kg_i} + \sum_{s=-3, s\neq-1}^{s=3} \delta_s \times \left(\mathbb{1}[k = s] \times \text{Won}_i \right) + \epsilon_{ik} \qquad (2)$$

Do Unions Mobilize and Change Political Ideologies?

IHS($ to all candidates)

DiD: 0.0332 (SE: 0.0794)

IHS($ to Dem.) - IHS($ to Rep.)

DiD: 0.239*** (SE: 0.0792)

No impact on mobilization.

Democratic relative to Republican contributions increase by 24 p.p.

Within-Firm Dynamics: Identifying Workers and Managers

Who does not get unionized?

"[...] any individual having authority, in the interest of the employer, to hire, transfer, suspend, lay off, recall, promote, discharge, assign, reward, or discipline other employees, or responsibly to direct them, or to adjust their grievances [...]" NLRA

Within-Firm Dynamics: Identifying Workers and Managers

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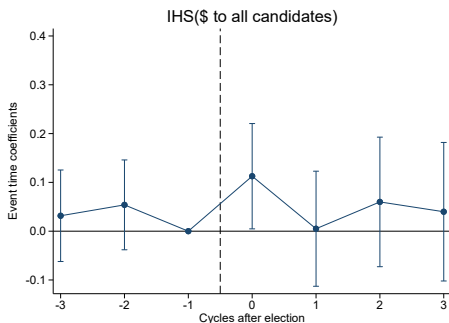
Map free-text occupation descriptions into 6-digit SOC codes

- SOCcer (fuzzy merge)
- O*NET (fuzzy merge)
- Manual review

Who is supervising?

- Occupational task descriptions (O*NET)

Workers

DiD: 0.0259 (SE: 0.0433)
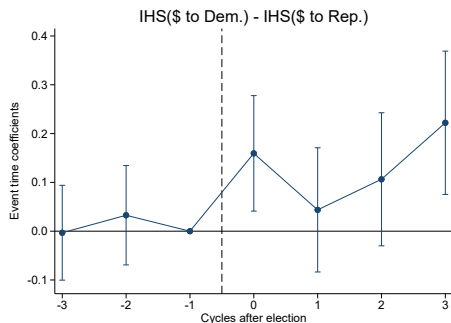
DiD: 0.123*** (SE: 0.0396)

Short-term impact on mobilization.

Democratic relative to Republican contributions increase by 12 p.p.

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Managers

IHS($ to all candidates)

DiD: -0.0192 (SE: 0.0595)

IHS($ to Dem.) - IHS($ to Rep.)
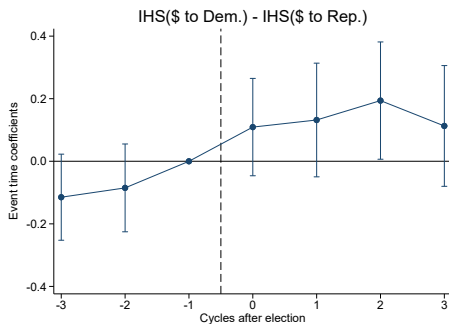
DiD: 0.204*** (SE: 0.0561)

No impact on mobilization.

Democratic relative to Republican contributions increase by 20 p.p.

Further Identification

DiD-RDD

- Pre-trends ✓ But unobserved shocks at time of election?
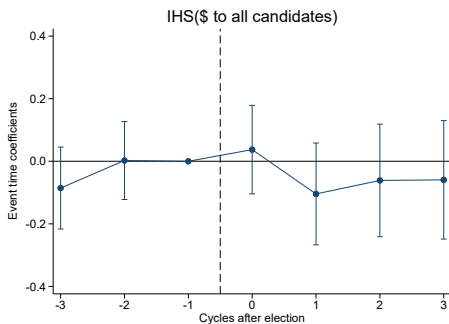 Test for different trends by vote share in losing elections   Results
- Compare close elections   Results

Further Identification

DiD-RDD

- Pre-trends ✓ But unobserved shocks at time of election?
  Test for different trends by vote share in losing elections   Results
- Compare close elections   Results

DiD-IV

- Unions seek to improve workplace safety
- Instrument for union support: spikes in sector-level fatal work
  accidents shortly before the election
  Details   Results

Individual-level vs. Composition Effects

Finding: Workers' and managers' aggregate contributions shift to the left.
$\rightarrow$ Are individuals or is the composition of employees changing?

- Track donors over time

- **Composition effects:** construct post-election establishment aggregates from pre-election contributions of employees matched to establishment after election

- **Individual-level effects:** individual-level DiD for employees matched to same establishment before and after election

- ⟮ Results ⟯

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Heterogeneity & Extensions

Political activities of union organizations

- Under Right-to-Work laws, unions invest less resources in political mobilization activities Feigenbaum et al. 2018
- Smaller effects in states with Right-to-Work laws   Results

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Differentiating recipients

- Liberal Democrats gain, conservative Republicans lose   Results
- Left shift is present at federal and local levels   Results
- Labor PACs gain contributions from workers, company PACs lose contributions from managers   Results

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Conclusion

Do unions mobilize and change political ideologies?

- Novel causal estimates at establishment level
- Unions shift political ideologies of workers and managers to the left. Short-term mobilization effect on workers.

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Structural shifts in unionization and politics

- Decline in union membership rates
- Increasing alignment of low-skilled workers with the political right
  Gethin et al. 2022

Private-Sector Unionization in the U.S.
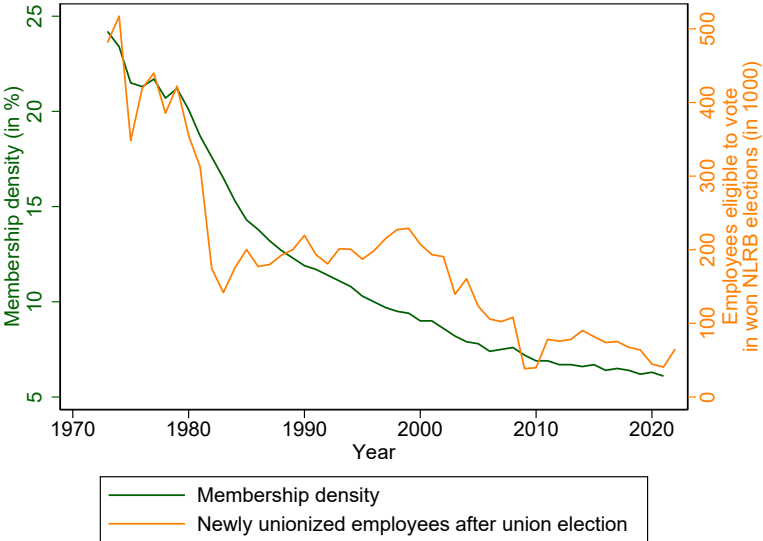
Sources: Hirsch and Macpherson (2022) based on CPS, Farber (2017), NLRB election reports

Literature

- Economic impact of unions in the U.S.
  - Establishment level: few effects on wages and compensation
    Freeman and Kleiner 1990, Di Nardo & Lee 2004, Knepper 2020, Frandsen 2021
  - Aggregate level: large effects on wage inequality and the labor share of income Stansbury and Summers 2020, Farber et al. 2021
  → *Political channel?*

- Political effects of unions
  - Association of individual-level union membership with (Dem.) voting, preferences for redistribution, trade policy preferences, etc.
    Freeman 2003, Mosimann & Pontusson 2016, Ahlquist et al. 2014
  → *Causal relation? Effects on non-members?*

- Shaping political preferences at work
  - The workplace is the most common arena of political discussion, apart from family and friends Hertel-Fernandez 2020
  - Workplace spillovers in political donations from managers to workers
    Babenko et al. 2020, Stuckatz 2022
  - Effects of inter-group contact at work Andersson and Dehdari 2021
  → *Role of labor unions?*

Effects of Political Information Treatments

Coppock (2023) summarizes the results from ~ 25 experimental studies of political information treatments:

Outcome	Effects of persuasive information	Effects of group cues
Policy view	pos. for all groups ("Persuasion in parallel")	pos. for in-group members neg. for out-group members
Affective evaluation of message	pos. for policy proponents neg. for policy opponents	pos. for in-group members neg. for out-group members

$\rightarrow$ Unions provide persuasive information **and** foster group identities.

Example of Spatial Match
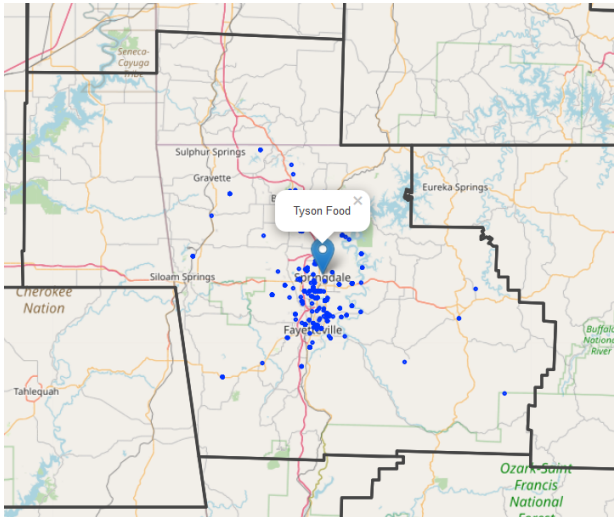
Tyson Food, Springdale, Arkansas

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Building a Firm Panel of Employee Contributions

- Merge donors to employing union-election establishments:
    1. Exact match of commuting zone
    2. Fuzzy match of employer name (automated linkage + manual reviews)
- Merged contributions: \$105.8m spent in 357,436 contributions from 46,719 individuals
- Final sample: **6,063 establishments**, each over **7 election cycles** (3 cycles before to 3 cycles after the union election)

Mean amount contributed to ...		
All candidates	Republicans	Democrats
1181.96	586.98	575.85

Notes: $N = 42,441$ (6,063 establishments, 7 election cycles).

Mean Characteristics of Merged vs. Non-merged Establishments

	Merged	**Not merged**
N	6,063	22,760
Union win (dummy)	.4397	.4405
Union vote share	.4950	.4955
Number of eligible voters	139.27	94.01
Industry: mining	.0397	.0388
Industry: manufacturing	.3338	.3731
Industry: transport	.1785	.1731
Industry: trade	.1397	.1251
Industry: finance	.1008	.0584
Industry: services	.1834	.2192
Years 1985-89	.1618	.2795
Years 1990-94	.1908	.2529
Years 1995-99	.2319	.2261
Years 2000-04	.2547	.1617
Years 2005-10	.1608	.0798

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Descriptives of Main Outcomes

Mean amount contributed to ...		
All candidates	Republicans	Democrats
[A] All employees		
1181.96	586.98	575.85
[B] Workers		
173.42	56.61	112.79
[C] Managers		
594.44	320.66	261.76

Notes: $N = 42,441$ (6,063 establishments, 7 election cycles).

Donor Occupation Distribution (2-digit SOC Codes)

Share of candidate contributions (in %)

Occupation	Share
Military Specific Occ.	0.0
Transportation and Material Moving Occ.	1.5
Production Occ.	0.9
Installation Maintenance and Repair Occ.	0.3
Construction and Extraction Occ.	0.3
Farming, Fishing and Forestry Occ.	0.2
Office and Administrative Support Occ.	2.1
Sales and Related Occ.	2.2
Personal Care and Service Occ.	0.4
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occ.	0.3
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occ.	0.4
Protective Service Occ.	1.0
Healthcare Support Occ.	0.3
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occ.	12.6
Art, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media Occ.	6.5
Educational Instruction and Library Occ.	9.2
Legal Occ.	3.3
Community and Social Service Occ.	1.7
Life, Physical and Social Science Occ.	3.4
Architecture and Engineering Occ.	4.2
Computer and Mathematical Occ.	1.3
Business and Financial Operations Occ.	4.5
Management Occ.	43.6

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Summary of Main Results

	IHS(Amount contributed to ...)			
	All candidates	Dem	Rep	Dem - Rep
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
[A]: All employees				
δ_{DiD}	0.0332	0.0920	-0.147**	0.239***
	(0.0794)	(0.0634)	(0.0654)	(0.0792)
[B]: Workers				
δ_{DiD}	0.0259	0.0728**	-0.0502	0.123***
	(0.0433)	(0.0352)	(0.0317)	(0.0396)
[C]: Managers				
δ_{DiD}	-0.0192	0.0735	-0.130***	0.204***
	(0.0595)	(0.0467)	(0.0490)	(0.0561)

Notes: Only 20% - 80% vote share elections. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

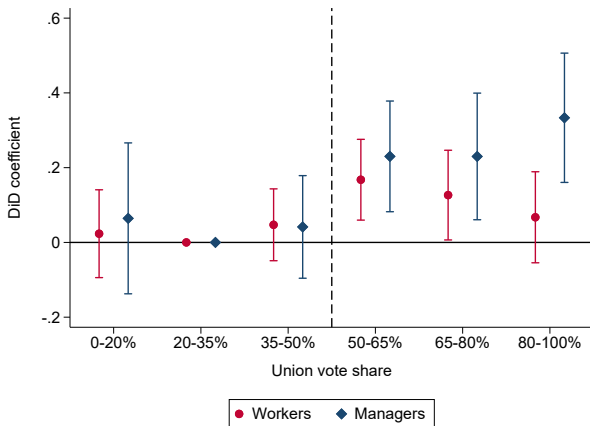# Union Vote Share Distribution
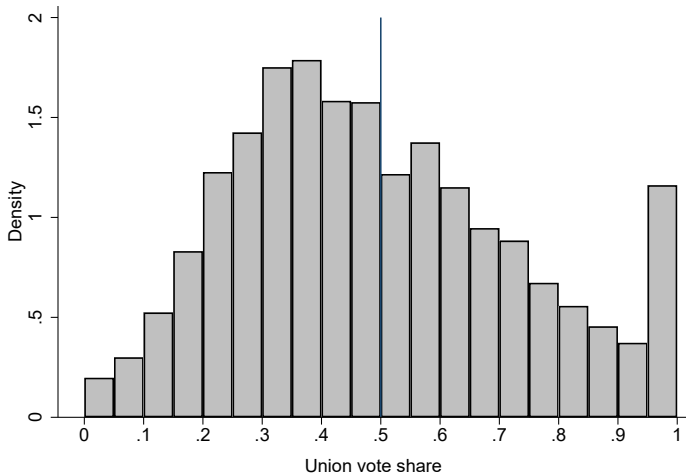
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Pre-election Outcomes
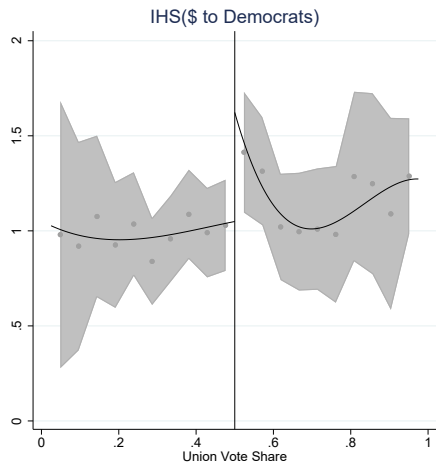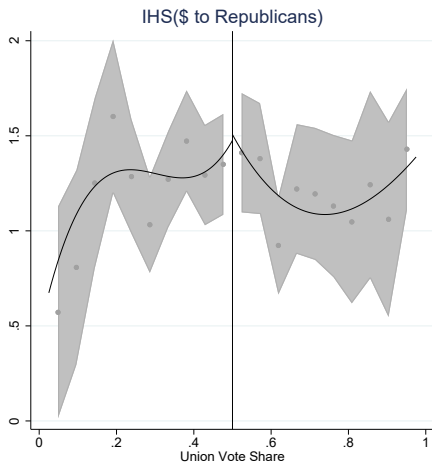
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Vote Share Heterogeneity

$$y_{ik} = \alpha_i + \beta_{kg_i} + \sum_g \delta_g \times \left(\mathbb{1}[k \geq 0] \times \mathbb{1}[V_i \in \nu^g] \right) + \epsilon_{ik}$$

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Vote Margin Sample Restrictions
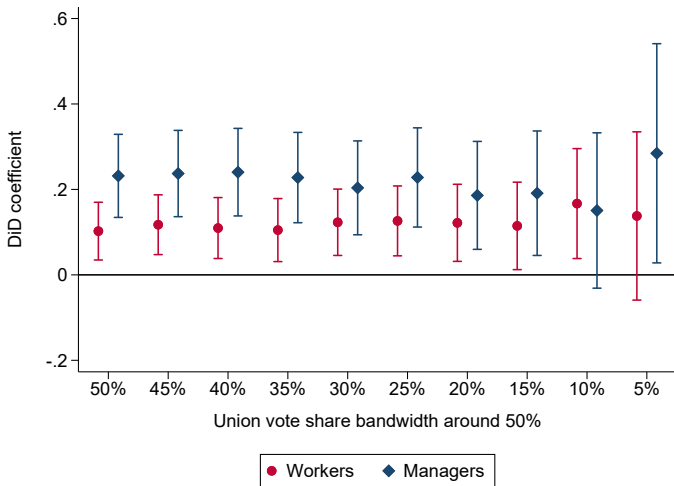
DiD-IV Approach: Idea

- Any unexpected shock between petition and election date that changes union support may serve as an exogenous instrument for union win
- Use **work accidents** as a shock in the salience of work-safety issues that might increase a worker's likelihood to vote pro union
- Timing of accidents is random and unexpected
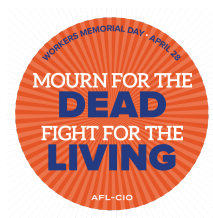
DiD-IV Approach: Instruments

Average Nr. of Fatalities over the Year

Seasonally-Adjusted Nr. of Fatalities over the Year
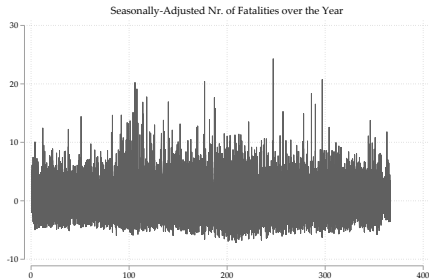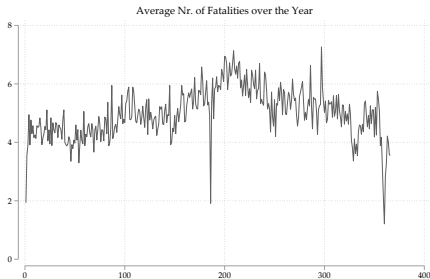
$Accident_{st}$ = # fatal accidents in sector s in 4 weeks before election (seasonally adjusted)

Instruments

- $Accident_{st}$
- $Accident_{st}^2$
- $Accident_{st} \times SectorShareFatalAccidents_s$

DiD-IV Approach: Exclusion Restriction
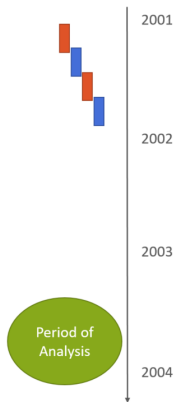
- **Assumption:** shocks in work accidents shortly before the union election affect political behavior only through their impact on the likelihood that the union wins the election

- We only exploit variation in the timing of accidents relative to the union election date and measure outcomes in the next election cycle

2001

2002

2003

2004

Period of Analysis

DiD-IV Approach: Estimation

1st Stage:

$$V_i = \alpha_1 + \alpha_2 A_{st} + \alpha_3 A_{st}^2 + \alpha_4 A_{st} \times FR_s + \alpha_5 FR_s + \alpha_6 X_i + \gamma_t + \mu_m + \epsilon_i$$

2nd Stage:

$$\Delta y_i = \beta_1 + \beta_2 \mathbb{1}[\widehat{V}_i > .5] + \beta_3 FR_s + \beta_4 X_i + \gamma_t + \mu_m + \epsilon_i$$

- $X_i = \{$# of fatal accidents and # of employees at sector-year level, # of eligible voters at establishment level$\}$
- Year FE γ_t and month-of-the-year FE μ_m
- Compute SE by boostrapping

DiD-IV Approach: Results

	IHS(\$ to all candidates)			IHS(\$ to Dem.) $-$ IHS(\$ to Rep.)		
	All (1)	Workers (2)	Managers (3)	All (4)	Workers (5)	Managers (6)
[A]: OLS						
$\mathbb{1}[V_i > .5]$	-0.092	0.038	-0.072	0.227***	0.089**	0.232***
	(0.082)	(0.044)	(0.062)	(0.079)	(0.041)	(0.056)
[B]: 2nd stage						
$\mathbb{1}[\widehat{V}_i > .5]$	0.036	0.086	-0.042	0.334*	0.115	0.260**
	(0.174)	(0.097)	(0.134)	(0.176)	(0.086)	(0.125)
[C]: 1st stage						
A_{st}	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
A_{st}^2	-0.003**	-0.003**	-0.003**	-0.003**	-0.003**	-0.003**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
$A_{st} \times FR_s$	0.223***	0.223***	0.223***	0.223***	0.223***	0.223***
	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.055)
K-P F-stat	16.50	16.50	16.50	16.50	16.50	16.50

Notes: $N = 5,803$ * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

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Composition vs. Individual-level Effects

	Composition effects		Individual-level effects for stayers	
	All candidates (1)	Dem - Rep (2)	All candidates (3)	Dem - Rep (4)
[A]: All employees				
δ_{DiD}	-0.0265 (0.0696)	0.0705 (0.0636)	0.196 (0.135)	0.552*** (0.188)
N	33103	33103	5740	5740
[B]: Workers				
δ_{DiD}	0.0455 (0.0363)	0.0534* (0.0294)	0.624*** (0.233)	0.648** (0.309)
N	33103	33103	2052	2052
[C]: Managers				
δ_{DiD}	-0.0666 (0.0514)	0.0371 (0.0454)	-0.0718 (0.186)	0.532** (0.261)
N	33103	33103	2890	2890

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

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Political Involvement of Union Organizations

	IHS(\$ to all candidates)			IHS(\$ to Dem.) - IHS(\$ to Rep.)		
	All (1)	Workers (2)	Managers (3)	All (4)	Workers (5)	Managers (6)
[A]: State without right-to-work law						
	0.0453	0.0663	-0.0394	0.284***	0.131***	0.218***
	(0.0896)	(0.0499)	(0.0672)	(0.0884)	(0.0456)	(0.0635)
[B]: State with right-to-work law						
δ_{DiD}	-0.0548	-0.119	0.00832	0.0164	0.0700	0.142
	(0.170)	(0.0820)	(0.125)	(0.177)	(0.0769)	(0.117)

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

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Within-Party Ideological Differences

Split candidates in moderate and extreme candidates **by party median CF score**:

	Democrats			Republicans		
	All (1)	Moderate (2)	Liberal (3)	All (4)	Moderate (5)	Conservative (6)
[A]: All employees						
δ_{DiD}	0.0920 (0.0634)	-0.0182 (0.0544)	0.121*** (0.0462)	-0.147** (0.0654)	-0.0686 (0.0547)	-0.153*** (0.0494)
[B]: Workers						
δ_{DiD}	0.0728** (0.0352)	0.0308 (0.0237)	0.0550* (0.0298)	-0.0502 (0.0317)	-0.0155 (0.0225)	-0.0309 (0.0257)
[C]: Managers						
δ_{DiD}	0.0735 (0.0467)	0.0129 (0.0391)	0.0896*** (0.0347)	-0.130*** (0.0490)	-0.0563 (0.0397)	-0.123*** (0.0369)

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

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Federal vs. Local Candidates

	IHS($ to all candidates)			IHS($ to Dem.) - IHS($ to Rep.)		
	All (1)	Workers (2)	Managers (3)	All (4)	Workers (5)	Managers (6)
[A]: All candidates (Baseline)						
δ_{DiD}	0.0332	0.0259	-0.0192	0.239***	0.123***	0.204***
	(0.0794)	(0.0433)	(0.0595)	(0.0792)	(0.0396)	(0.0561)
[B]: Only federal candidates						
δ_{DiD}	0.0476	0.0257	-0.0177	0.207***	0.0982***	0.182***
	(0.0751)	(0.0390)	(0.0535)	(0.0764)	(0.0364)	(0.0519)
[C]: Only local candidates						
δ_{DiD}	-0.0472	0.0241	-0.0337	0.158***	0.0454*	0.130***
	(0.0500)	(0.0285)	(0.0427)	(0.0440)	(0.0245)	(0.0384)

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

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Contributions to PACs

	Party/candidate PACs		Interest-group PACs					
	All	Dem - Rep	All	Corporation	Trade assoc.	Member orga.	Labor orga.	Dem - Rep
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
[A]: All employees								
δ_{DiD}	-0.0255	0.0968**	-0.0824	-0.0929**	-0.0261	-0.00886	0.0168	0.0599
	(0.0522)	(0.0478)	(0.0635)	(0.0409)	(0.0440)	(0.0311)	(0.0109)	(0.0407)
[B]: Workers								
δ_{DiD}	0.0624*	0.00991	0.0876**	-0.0199	0.0211	0.0461**	0.0188***	0.0239
	(0.0320)	(0.0275)	(0.0347)	(0.0205)	(0.0158)	(0.0190)	(0.00709)	(0.0266)
[C]: Managers								
δ_{DiD}	-0.000602	0.102***	-0.0931*	-0.0821**	-0.0259	0.000722	0.00369	0.0810**
	(0.0344)	(0.0315)	(0.0488)	(0.0340)	(0.0331)	(0.0179)	(0.00684)	(0.0324)

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

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Robustness

	\$ to all candidates			\$ to Dem. - \$ to Rep.		
	All (1)	Workers (2)	Managers (3)	All (4)	Workers (5)	Managers (6)
[A]: Baseline						
δ_{DiD}	0.0332	0.0259	-0.0192	0.239***	0.123***	0.204***
	(0.0794)	(0.0433)	(0.0595)	(0.0792)	(0.0396)	(0.0561)
[B]: Borusyak, Jaravel, and Spiess (2021)						
δ_{DiD}	0.0900	0.0420	0.00861	0.236***	0.130***	0.183***
	(0.0747)	(0.0422)	(0.0576)	(0.0742)	(0.0390)	(0.0545)
[C]: Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021)						
δ_{DiD}	0.0152	0.0416	-0.0378	0.243***	0.137***	0.135**
	(0.0827)	(0.0444)	(0.0606)	(0.0871)	(0.0453)	(0.0619)
[D]: Log(Amount+1)						
δ_{DiD}	0.0273	0.0236	-0.0190	0.220***	0.111***	0.186***
	(0.0727)	(0.0393)	(0.0544)	(0.0721)	(0.0358)	(0.0511)
[E]: Alternative worker and manager classification: 90p						
δ_{DiD}		0.0430	-0.0409		0.140***	0.201***
		(0.0458)	(0.0585)		(0.0421)	(0.0546)
[F]: Alternative worker and manager classification: s4						
δ_{DiD}		0.0271	-0.0218		0.131***	0.203***
		(0.0432)	(0.0597)		(0.0394)	(0.0561)
[G]: Alternative worker and manager classification: supervisors as workers						
δ_{DiD}		0.0400	-0.0506		0.163***	0.183***
		(0.0481)	(0.0570)		(0.0448)	(0.0529)

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