

Why are union members more willing to strike and protest than non-union members? Evidence from Argentina and Chile

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Abstract

Empirical studies have shown that union members are more likely to participate in collective actions than nonunion members. However, we still know little about the mechanisms that explain why this occurs. In this article, we aim to fill this gap in the literature. Using data from the World Values Survey for Argentina and Chile (2006–2018), we employed the Karlson–Holm–Breen mediation analysis to analyze the degree to which the relationship between union membership and participation in demonstrations and strikes is explained by union members' higher levels of politicization and stronger left-wing orientation, as hypothesized in previous studies. We found that in the two countries these two mediators explain more than 30% of the relationship between union membership and participation in demonstrations. We also found that these two mediators explain around 20% of the relationship between union membership and strike participation in Argentina, and nearly 40% of such relationship in Chile. At the end of the article, we offer some explanations for these findings and show how they contribute to the literature on trade unions, class politics, and industrial relations.

Keywords

Union membership, strikes, industrial relations, collective action, mediation analysis, Latin America

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Introduction

Research has demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between membership in unions and collective action participation. Compared to nonunionized workers, union members are not only more likely to participate in conventional political actions (e.g., voting and joining political parties), but they are also more likely to participate in non-conventional political actions such as protests, demonstrations, and strikes (Kerrissey and Schofer, 2018; Rosenfeld, 2010; Terriquez, 2011; Turner et al., 2020). Based on this evidence, scholars argue that, despite their weakness, unions continue to be fundamental for understanding workers' political attitudes and their willingness to act collectively (Kerrissey and Schofer, 2018; Rosenfeld, 2010; Turner et al., 2020).

Although the evidence supporting this argument is extensive, we still know little about *why* union members are more willing to act collectively than nonunion members. Recent research has hypothesized that this is because unions reinforce workers' class consciousness (Fantasia, 1988; Wright, 1997) and increase workers' propensity to participate in democratic politics (Terriquez, 2011; Verba et al., 1995). Common to these hypotheses, it is the idea that union members are more politically active because they are more left-leaning and more politicized than nonunion members (Hadziabdic and Baccaro, 2020; Kerrissey and Schofer, 2013; Ringqvist, 2021). However, empirical assessments of this type of relationships are still scarce.

In this article, we aim to fill this gap in the literature by examining the mechanisms that link union membership to collective action. Using data from the World Values Survey (WVS) for Argentina and Chile (2006–2018), we employ the Karlson–Holm–Breen (KHB) method of mediation analysis (Breen et al., 2013) to analyze the degree to which the relationship between union membership and participation in demonstrations and strikes is explained by union members' higher levels of politicization and stronger left-wing orientation. We found that in the two countries politicization and left-wing orientation explain more than 30% of the relationship between union membership and participation in demonstrations. Likewise, we found that these two mediators explain around 20% of the relationship between union membership and strike participation in Argentina, and nearly 40% of such relationship in Chile. We argue that these divergences are a result of differences in the type of party–union linkages upon which the Argentine and Chilean movements are built (which shapes, among other things, unions' political identities and policy influence), differences in the institutions that regulate collective bargaining—a centralized industrial relations (IR) system in Argentina and a decentralized system in Chile, as well as variations related to more recent processes within the Argentine and Chilean labour movements (e.g., the growth of more politicized strikes in Chile and the decline of them in Argentina). At the end of the article, we show how our analyses contribute to the literature on trade unions and class politics.

Trade unions, political attitudes, and collective action

Membership in unions is associated with significant effects on workers' attitudes. Within the workplace, union members tend to be less satisfied with their jobs and be less

committed to the organization's goals and values than nonunionized workers (Hammer and Avgar, 2005; Laroche, 2016).

Union membership also shapes workers' sociopolitical orientations outside the workplace (Hadziabdic and Baccaro, 2020). Compared to their nonunionized counterparts, unionized workers are more likely to be more committed to the democratic system, to favor environmental protection, to be interested in politics, and to have a left-wing political orientation (e.g., more likely to endorse redistributive policies and support left parties) (Freeman, 2003; Hadziabdic and Baccaro, 2020; Ringqvist, 2021; Turner et al., 2020). Furthermore, compared to nonunion workers, unionized workers are more likely to participate in conventional political actions such as voting and joining political parties (Bryson et al., 2015; D'Art and Turner, 2007; Freeman, 2003; Rosenfeld, 2010; Turner et al., 2020). Union membership also influences workers' participation in nonconventional political actions: unionized workers are significantly more likely to boycott, protest, and strike than nonunionized workers (Kerrissey and Schofer, 2018; Turner et al., 2020).

The existing literature has proposed several nonmutually exclusive explanations to account for the effects of union membership on political participation—most notably on workers' involvement in collective political actions. Marxist-inspired scholars emphasize how unions facilitate working-class collective action by reinforcing working-class consciousness and solidarity (Dixon et al., 2004; Fantasia, 1988; Hyman, 1989; Wright, 1997). Other scholars point out that union membership is associated with political activism because unions increase workers' pro-democratic attitudes—for example, their propensity to participate in politics—by providing workers with political skills and identities that enable them to become politically active (Putnam, 2000; Terriquez, 2011; Verba et al., 1995).

Common to these explanations, it is the argument that union members are more politically active because they are more left-leaning and politicized than nonunion members (Hadziabdic and Baccaro, 2020; Kerrissey and Schofer, 2013; Ringqvist, 2021). More specifically, unions reinforce workers' left-wing political orientations, thereby increasing their propensity to vote for progressive parties, mobilize, and participate in politics to oppose the status quo (Kerrissey and Schofer, 2013; Wright, 1997). Likewise, unions usually act as “schools of democracy” and, in doing so, increase workers' political awareness (Hadziabdic and Baccaro, 2020; Terriquez, 2011; Verba et al., 1995). This can occur either directly (e.g., by mobilizing workers to vote) or indirectly by acting as information providers and by enhancing their interest in politics (Freeman, 2003; Kerrissey and Schofer, 2013; Putnam, 2000; Rosenfeld, 2010; Turner et al., 2020).

Consistent with this argument, Kerrissey and Schofer (2013) show that union members are more willing to participate in politics than nonunion members because they have stronger left-wing political orientations. Moreover, Kerrissey and Schofer (2013: 919–920) speculate that differences in workers' political orientation (i.e., union members being more prone to identify with the left) may be more important in explaining the political participation gap between union and nonunion members than the differences in their levels of political/organizational skills (which they measure by confidence in public speaking). In a similar way, Ringqvist (2021) finds that individual political

orientation mediates the relationship between union membership and willingness to support environmental protection. Ringqvist's data show that nearly 40% of the "union effect" is explained by political orientation.

Most of these findings are based on cross-sectional data which do not distinguish between "selection" and "treatment" effects, that is, between individual factors that, on the one hand, motivate workers to join a union and account for their dissimilar political preferences (e.g., left-wing orientations) and, on the other, the attitudinal transformation that occurs *after* becoming a union member (Hadziabdic and Baccaro, 2020; Kim and Margalit, 2017). Thus, it is still unclear whether unions *cause* political effects or reinforce the political attitudes of workers who are already more politicized prior to joining a union.

The existing cross-sectional research has used different strategies to address the concerns about endogeneity and self-selection bias—for example, including controls to eliminate self-selection effects, using instrumental variables or developing comparisons between IR systems in which union membership is voluntary and quasi-compulsory (Hadziabdic and Baccaro, 2020; Kerrissey and Schofer, 2013; Kim and Margalit, 2017). These strategies do not totally rule out the possibility of endogeneity issues arising from unobservable variables. However, they suggest that, unlike other types of associations, membership in unions is explained more by exogenous factors (e.g., firm size and the existence of a unionized workplace) than by ideological reasons (D'Art and Turner, 2007: 109; Kerrissey and Schofer, 2013: 918). Consistent with this evidence, Kim and Margalit (2017: 738) establish that self-selection explains at most less than a quarter of the observed difference between union members and nonunion members. Furthermore, in one of the few longitudinal studies existing to date, Hadziabdic and Baccaro (2020) show that union membership produces "maturation effects"—that is, it strengthens workers' politicization—which, once they are assimilated by workers, are unlikely to disappear after leaving the union.

Cross-national variation in the relationship between union membership and collective action

In the last few decades, scholars have drawn on the literature on IR and power resources (Brandl and Traxler, 2010; Kenworthy, 2003; Korpi, 2018) to study whether the relationship between union membership and collective action varies by country. Focusing mostly on industrialized countries, these scholars have demonstrated that in centralized IR regimes (i.e., IR systems typical of corporatist or coordinated market economies), union members are less prone to participate in collective actions (e.g., protesting or striking) than in decentralized regimes—that is, "pluralist" IR systems typical of liberal market economies (Kerrissey and Schofer, 2018; Turner et al., 2020). According to these analysts, in centralized IR systems union activity is more institutionalized and unions are more powerful. Thus, unions have more capacities to influence the policy-making process without the need to resort to disruptive actions (Kerrissey and Schofer, 2018).

Union members' propensity to participate in collective actions is also shaped by the nature of the party–union linkages upon which the labour movements are built. During

the formative period of unions, these linkages gave rise to ideologies and political cultures that do not easily change, because they often create strong path dependence (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2018: 194). This explains why, when labour unions formed out of alliances with socialist parties, workers are more class-conscious, have more polarized political interests (e.g., are more likely to support state redistribution), and are more likely to act collectively to pursue their class interests than when unions developed out of less ideological parties or parties that were less interested in emphasizing class politics (Svallfors, 2006; Wright, 1997).

In Latin America, labour movements were built upon two qualitatively different type of party–union alliances forged in the early-/mid-twentieth century. In countries such as Argentina and Mexico, labour unions were formed through cross-class, state–corporatist arrangements established from above by populist parties that controlled the state and mobilized workers by politicizing sociocultural (and largely nonideological) cleavages (e.g., between the rich/the educated and the poor/the uneducated) (De la Garza, 2011; Drake, 1996; Ostiguy, 1997). By contrast, in countries such as Chile and Uruguay, labour movements developed through alliances with leftist (Marxist) parties that usually were in the opposition, and that pursued social change by emphasizing class-based politics. As a result, unlike in Argentina or Mexico, in Uruguay or Chile throughout the twentieth century political conflicts closely resembled the left/right ideological cleavages observed in Europe (Drake, 1996).

Differences aside, empirical research shows that when unions establish alliances with electorally successful parties, these alliances provide unions with important political power resources (most notably, unions' routine involvement in policy formulation) that play a key role in defining unions' propensity to mobilize (Allern and Bale, 2017; Charalambous and Ioannou, 2017; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2018). When the linkages between ruling parties and unions are strong, unions are more reluctant to engage in mass mobilization (Charalambous and Ioannou, 2017). Conversely, when the party–union links weaken, unions' policy influence decreases even when the ruling party or coalition is on the left, and unions' propensity to resort to collective action (e.g., to call for general strikes) increases substantially (Allern et al., 2017; Charalambous and Ioannou, 2017; Hamann et al., 2013).

Unions and collective action in Argentina and Chile

Labour unions from the period of labour incorporation (1930s–1940s) to the end of military dictatorships (1980s)

Argentina and Chile are good cases for analysis because they represent two contrasting examples of IR and labour politics in Latin America. In the two countries, unions were legally recognized and incorporated into the political system in the early-/mid-twentieth century. However, the IR institutions and the political alliances upon which the Argentine and Chilean labour unions grew and developed were substantially different.

In Argentina, unions developed through a state–corporatist alliance with Peronism, the political movement led by the minister of labour (1943–1955) and later President of

Argentina (1946–1952) Juan D. Perón. In the 1940s and 1950s, Perón not only legalized labour unions, but also enacted laws that centralized collective bargaining at the sectoral level and that established a quasi-monopoly of union representation (*personería gremial*). These regulations also granted unions control over welfare funds and programs (*obras sociales*), providing unions with economic resources through social service agencies that they managed for their members (Bensusán, 2016; Cook, 2007).

Compared to Argentine unions, Chilean unions grew and developed in less favorable institutional conditions. Chile's 1931 labour code not only prohibited public-sector employees from joining unions, but it also discouraged sectoral bargaining by forbidding blue-collar unions (*sindicatos industriales*) from forming federations for collective bargaining purposes (Angell, 1972; Rojas, 2009). Moreover, compared to their Argentine counterparts, Chilean unions had less economic power as they had no control over welfare programs. In Chile, unions compensated this lack of institutional power by constructing alliances with Marxist parties such as the Communist and Socialist parties (Angell, 1972). While powerful, these parties were usually in the opposition and their Marxist orientation limited the chances of building strong and lasting cross-class, corporatist coalitions such as in Argentina (Drake, 1996).

This divergence had a significant impact on political conflict and labour mobilization, both before and after the establishment of military dictatorships in the 1970s. In contrast to Chilean politics, which during the period of Import Substitutive Industrialization (1930s–1970s) was clearly shaped by the left/right ideological cleavage, Argentine politics was shaped more by socioeconomic and cultural cleavages—most notably, the cleavage between anti-Peronists (who represented the rich, educated, and cosmopolitan) and Peronists (who represented the poor, uneducated, and local) (Drake, 1996; Ostiguy, 1997). Thus, although highly repressive military dictatorships were established in the countries in the 1970s, the political-economic orientation of each country's military regime varied significantly.

In Chile, the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990) put much more emphasis on dismantling the linkages between Marxist parties and unions than the dictatorship led by Jorge R. Videla (1976–1983) did in Argentina (Drake, 1996). Similarly, Pinochet in Chile was much more interested than his Argentine counterpart in repealing any corporatist aspect of the labour code. To do so, in 1979 Pinochet enacted a new labour code that was strongly aligned with his neoliberal project. The new labour code prohibited sectoral bargaining, allowed employers to replace striking workers, and weakened unions' bargaining power by promoting inter-union competition within companies (Feres, 2009; Pérez Ahumada, 2023). In Argentina, Videla attempted to enact atomizing labour laws like those established in Chile by Pinochet. However, Videla's attempt had limited success, mainly because Argentine industrialists were not really interested in dismantling the existing IR system as a means of destroying the labour unions (Drake, 1996: 160).

Labour unions after the democratic restoration

These differences in the dictatorships' approach to labour legislation and unions influenced noticeably the role played by the labour movements after Chile's and Argentina's democratic restoration.

In Chile, the end of the dictatorship in 1990 coincided with the triumph of a center-left coalition, the *Concertación* (later renamed New Majority), that ruled the country for nearly 25 years (1990–2010, and 2014–2018). Endorsed by Chile's National Confederation of Workers (the *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores*), both the *Concertación* and the New Majority governments implemented several reforms to protect workers' right—for example, laws to increase the protections against dismissals (1990), to reduce the weekly work hours from 48 to 45 (2001), and to restrict employers' unilateral ability to extend collective contracts to nonunionized workers (2017) (Feres, 2009; Pérez Ahumada, 2023). Nevertheless, these reforms did not revoke the central aspect of the 1979 neoliberal legislation, such as the provisions that allow for competition between multiple unions within firms and the provisions that in practice allow employers to hire strike replacements and that restrict collective bargaining to the level of the firm (Pérez Ahumada, 2023).

The persistence of this anti-union legislation had detrimental effects on workers' organization. In Chile, the fragmentation of unions is very high and union density and collective bargaining coverage low. Between 2010 and 2019 there were around 11,000 active unions, that had on average just over 90 members each, and that in most cases operated only at the enterprise level. Likewise, only 15% of employees belonged to a union, and less than 7% of private-sector workers were covered by a collective agreement (Pérez Ahumada and Ocampo, 2023: 462).

Against this backdrop, starting in the 2000s, Chilean union leaders began to distance themselves from center-left parties. On the one hand, they complained that their allies in power were simply unwilling to repeal the neoliberal legislation established during the dictatorship (Posner, 2017). On the other, they complained that tripartite social dialogue bodies, such as the Framework Accords (established in the early 1990s) and the Council for Social Dialogue (established in the early 2000s), did nothing to strengthen unions' influence on policymaking (Pérez Ahumada, 2023).

Union leaders' discontent with center-left parties coincided with the erosion of the ties between social movements and traditional parties in Chile, and with the emergence of several waves of anti-neoliberal protests that took over the country in 2006, 2011–2013, and 2019 (Somma et al., 2021; Von Bülow and Donoso, 2017). This political climate politicized labour unions (Medel et al., 2023), compelled union leaders to adopt more confrontational strategies (Bank Muñoz, 2017), and in some cases opened the door for the reconstruction of alliances with more left-leaning parties, such as the Communist Party, which provided support for successful mobilizations at the sectoral and national levels (Fox-Hodess and Santibáñez, 2020; Manky, 2018). Between 2005 and 2019, company and sector-level strikes grew from 186 to around 430 (OHL, 2020). Likewise, general strikes grew from only one strike recorded during the *Concertación* administrations (1990–2010) to 12 in the 2011–2019 period, four of which took place during the New Majority government (OHL, 2020: 25–26).

In post-dictatorial Argentina, the evolution of both labour legislation and party–union linkages differed substantially from that observed in Chile. In Argentina, the liberalization of IR took place *after* the return to democracy. Between 1990 and 2000, Presidents Carlos Menem (1989–1999) and Fernando de la Rúa (1999–2001) enacted laws and decrees aimed at reducing labour costs, making employment relations more

flexible, decentralizing collective bargaining, and restricting unions' bargaining power (Cook, 2007). However, due to opposition from unions, neither Menem nor de la Rúa were able to restrict unions' control of social welfare funds, nor could they repeal the regulations that establish that the largest (industry-level) unions have the quasi-monopoly on representation (Cook, 2007; Etchemendy, 2019).

Moreover, in the early 2000s, the country's sociopolitical crisis resulted in the election of left-wing Peronist leader, Néstor Kirchner, as president of Argentina. This led to a significant transformation of IR and labour politics in Argentina. With the support of the Confederación General del Trabajo and left-leaning labour unions such as the Central de Trabajadores Argentinos and the Movimiento de Trabajadores Argentinos, Kirchner implemented several policy changes that, along with recentralizing collective bargaining and strengthening the right to strike, set the foundations for what Etchemendy (2019) describes as a "segmented neo-corporatist" institutional arrangement. Like European neo-corporatist institutions, the institutions established in Argentina were based on a coalition between, on the one hand, a relatively unified and centralized labour movement and, on the other, a center-left government that not only played an active role in wage setting but also put strong emphasis on social dialogue and union's inclusion in policymaking (Cook, 2011; Etchemendy, 2019). However, due to Argentina's high levels of informality, Argentina's neo-corporatism was "segmented" because tripartite agreements only applied (and still apply) to the formal labour force (Etchemendy, 2019).

Kirchner's policy changes reversed many of the anti-labour consequences of neo-liberal reforms (Cook, 2011). While comparable data are not available, the existing data suggest that union membership rates increased from 25% (2000) to 40% (2010), and that the number of workers covered by collective bargaining increased from 3 million in 2003 to 5 million in 2008 (Senén, 2011). According to international labour organization estimates, by 2015 more than 30% of salaried workers were unionized and the proportion of formal sector workers covered by collective agreements was above 50% (ILO, 2024).

In addition to revitalizing unions as political actors, the development of neo-corporatism had implications for unions' propensity to resort to contentious actions. Initially, President Kirchner tolerated industrial conflict, stating that it was the natural way for workers to recover real wages (Etchemendy and Garay, 2011: 294). However, the government's promotion of sectoral collective agreements and its intervention in wage policy not only helped workers recover real wages, but it also created a pattern of bargaining that, at least for some years, successfully reduced industrial conflict (Etchemendy and Garay, 2011; Marticorena, 2020). Official statistics analyzed by Marticorena (2020: 2009) show that in 2005 nearly every collective bargaining process (around 300 in total) involved some type of work stoppage. By 2015, the proportion of bargaining processes involving work stoppages had dropped to 55% (400 out of 700). Furthermore, during the same period, the alliance between unions and the Peronist party (*Partido Justicialista*), which in the 1990s had weakened due to the *Partido Justicialista*'s embracement of neoliberalism, became stronger (Etchemendy, 2019). Unions' opportunities for direct policy influence increased due to the appointment

of union-friendly officials in crucial state positions (e.g., the ministry of labour) and the establishment of sectoral tripartite bodies (Cook, 2011; Etchemendy and Garay, 2011). This disincentivized unions' use of collective action for political purposes, especially during the administrations of Kircher (2003–2007) and Cristina Fernández (first term, 2007–2011). During these two administrations, and for the first time since the democratic restoration, no general strikes were called (Etchemendy and Garay, 2011: 288).

In sum, Argentina and Chile represent two contrasting examples of IR and labour politics in Latin America. Argentina is an example of a neo-corporatist system rooted in centralized bargaining, quasi-monopoly of union representation, and a relatively unified, centralized, and powerful labour movement that has direct access to the policy-making process, either through permanent tripartite bodies or through its links with the *Partido Justicialista* (Cook, 2011; Etchemendy, 2019). By contrast, Chile represents a fragmented IR system, based on decentralized bargaining, union fragmentation, and a weak labour movement. In Chile, unions have low influence on policymaking not only because tripartite institutions are less robust, but also because center-left parties are less receptive to labour's demands (Cook, 2011; Pérez Ahumada, 2023).

Hypotheses

Based on the literature on trade unions and political participation, and on the above-mentioned discussion on the differences between Argentina and Chile (e.g., differences regarding their IR systems, the type of party–union linkages, and the ideological orientation of traditional labour parties), our hypotheses are:

H₁: In both Argentina and Chile union members are more likely to participate in collective actions than nonunion members.

H₂: In Chile, union members' propensity to participate in collective actions is higher than in Argentina.

H₃: In the two countries, political left-wing orientation and the level of politicization mediate the relationship between union membership and collective action. In other words, differences between union and nonunion members regarding their left-wing orientation and their level of politicization can account for the gap in collective action participation between union and nonunion members.

H₄: In Chile, left-wing orientation is more important in explaining the association between union membership and collective action participation than in Argentina.

Data and methods

We relied on a subsample of the WVS conducted in Argentina and Chile. Due to data availability, we focused on the last three waves of the WVS, covering three time periods: 2006 (wave 5), 2012/2013 (wave 6), and 2017/2018 (wave 7). Our sample included only salaried workers because, in the two countries, the self-employed are very unlikely to join unions. After listwise deletion, the sample included 2976 cases (1519 from Argentina and 1457 from Chile).

Dependent variables

We measured collective action participation through two separate variables: (1) *participation in demonstrations*, and (2) *participation in strikes*. The two variables were coded 1 if the respondents “have done” and 0 if they have not. We focused on these variables because they represent two distinct forms of collective action, one that is legally regulated and the other that is not. In fact, participation in strikes differs from participation in demonstrations in that it is regulated by the labour law. The regulation of strike activity can certainly affect the interpretation of our results. Both in Argentina and Chile the law establishes that only union members have the right to strike. For the purposes of this article, this means that finding a relationship between union membership and strike participation is not surprising at all. More importantly, it means that if we find cross-national differences in this relationship, these differences cannot be simply attributable to labour law.

The survey question about participation in strikes was not asked in wave 5 of the WVS. Therefore, the analyses of strike participation presented below were based on a slightly smaller sample ($N = 2211$).

Independent variables

The main independent variable is *union membership*. This was measured through a dichotomous variable (1 = union members, 0 = not member).

Additionally, to test the hypotheses pertaining the mediation processes (H_2 and H_4), we analyzed two other variables. First, to measure the individuals’ *political orientations*, we used the 1–10 scale of political orientation included in the WVS and created a dichotomous variable coded 1 if they identified themselves with the left (scores 1–4 on the original variable), and 0 if they did not—that is, if they either scored between 6 and 10 on the scale or if they were unable to identify with the left/right labels.

Second, to measure the individuals’ *level of politicization*, we constructed an additive 0–6 interval scale in which higher values denoted higher levels of politicization. To construct this scale, we used two survey questions from the WVS questionnaire (original codes were reversed): (1) How important is politics in your life? (0 = *not important at all* to 3 = *very important*), and (2) How interested would you say you are in politics (0 = *not interested at all* to 3 = *very interested*).

Controls

Following recent scholarly literature (Kerrissey and Schofer, 2018; Turner et al., 2020), our analyses included the following sociodemographic controls:

- gender (1 = female);
- age, measured in six age groups: 15–24 (reference category), 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, and 65 years or more;
- marital status: 1 = married or live-in-partner, 0 = other;
- a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent has children (1 = yes);

- education level = 1. Lower (primary or no education), 2. Middle (secondary level of education), 3. Upper level (incomplete or complete tertiary education). Reference category = lower;
- sector of employment (1 = private sector; 0 = public sector).

In addition, we included wave dummies to control for unobserved time trends (reference category = wave 5). Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analysis. Data and codes are available in the OSF repository at: <https://osf.io/yd64h/>

Methods

To test the hypotheses, we used logistic regressions. Following the quantitative research mentioned in the literature review section, in our statistical analyses we included relevant controls to reduce self-selection effects. We must emphasize that our cross-sectional data do not allow us to demonstrate that union membership *cause* collective action, nor is our goal to do so. Instead, we aim to explain why union members are more willing to participate in collective actions than nonunion members. To do so, we employ the KHB method of mediation analysis developed by Breen et al. (2013). This method allows us to quantify how much of the relationship between union membership and collective action is due to other variables theorized as mediators—for example, due to political left-wing identification and politicization. The KHB method transforms the coefficients from the logistic regression models (log odds) into a common scale that allows them to be compared across models. This is key for assessing how much of the change (reduction) in the logistic regression coefficients could be attributable to the inclusion of the mediators. Furthermore, using the KHB package in Stata, it was possible to disentangle the mediating effect of these two variables simultaneously.

Building on traditional mediation analysis (Baron and Kenny, 1986), we present our results in three steps. First, we used logistic and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models to analyze whether the relationship between union membership and the two theorized mediators—political left-wing identification and politicization—was statistically significant. This allowed us to test whether union members and nonunion members differed in their propensity to identify with the left and in their levels of politicization. Second, we fitted logistic regression models to see whether there was a significant relationship between union membership and the two variables used to measure collective action. In this step, we estimated models with and without the mediators to see how the coefficients for union membership change after including the mediators. Finally, in the third step, we used the KHB method to see to what extent the hypothesized mediators account for the relationship between union membership and collective action.

Results

Step 1: analyzing the relationship between union membership and the theorized mediators

As suggested in prior research (Kerrissey and Schofer, 2018; Turner et al., 2020), the coefficients in Table 2 indicate that in the two countries union members are significantly more

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

	N	M	SD	Min	Max
<i>Dependent variables</i>					
Participation in demonstrations (1 = yes)	2976	0.20	0.40	0	1
Participation in strikes (1 = yes)	2211	0.16	0.37	0	1
<i>Independent variable and controls</i>					
Unionized (1 = yes)	2976	0.16	0.36	0	1
Gender (1 = female)	2976	0.44	0.50	0	1
<i>Age</i>					
15–24	2976	0.12	0.33	0	1
25–34	2976	0.25	0.43	0	1
35–44	2976	0.24	0.43	0	1
45–54	2976	0.20	0.40	0	1
55–64	2976	0.13	0.33	0	1
65 years or more	2976	0.06	0.23	0	1
Marital status (1 = married or live-in-partner)	2976	0.59	0.49	0	1
Children (1 = yes)	2976	0.73	0.44	0	1
<i>Education level</i>					
Primary or no education	2976	0.16	0.37	0	1
Incomplete secondary level of education	2976	0.61	0.49	0	1
Incomplete or complete tertiary education	2976	0.23	0.42	0	1
Sector of employment (1 = private sector)	2976	0.82	0.38	0	1

politicized and more likely to self-identify with the left than nonunion members. More specifically, models M1a and M2a show that union members score between 0.5 (Argentina) and 0.3 (Chile) points higher on the 0–6 scale of politicization than nonunion members ($P < .01$). Likewise, the coefficients from models M1b and M2b suggest a positive relationship between union membership and left-wing political orientation. Using the coefficients from these two models, we calculated the probability that unionized and nonunionized workers would self-identify with the left, holding constant all other variables included in the models at their average (for quantitative variables) or their reference category (for all others). The results of these calculations suggest that unionized workers in Argentina and Chile are respectively 4% and 6% more likely to self-identify with the left than their non-unionized counterparts ($P < .05$).

Step 2: analyzing the relationship between union membership and collective action

Table 3 presents the results of several logistic regression models predicting participation in demonstrations (models a and b) and strikes (models c and d), in Argentina and Chile. For either dependent variable, we present models that do not include the mediators of interest (models a and c) and models that do include them (models b and d). Additionally, Table 3 presents four models for the total sample (the two countries combined), with and without interaction effects between union membership and country (models 3a through 3d).

Table 2. Determinants of politicization and political left-wing orientations in Argentina and Chile.

	Argentina		Chile	
	M1a Politicization ^a	M1b Left-wing orientation ^b	M2a Politicization ^a	M2b Left-wing orientation ^b
Unionized	0.480*** (0.131)	0.491** (0.187)	0.291** (0.104)	0.379* (0.148)
Survey wave (ref.: wave 5)				
Wave 6	0.101 (0.104)	0.267 (0.168)	0.062 (0.107)	0.115 (0.165)
Wave 7	0.304** (0.118)	0.143 (0.191)	0.065 (0.107)	0.176 (0.163)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Intercept	1.526*** (0.187)	-2.019*** (0.311)	1.377*** (0.240)	-1.649*** (0.377)
AIC		1477.231		1635.021
BIC		1557.118		1714.283
Log likelihood		-723.616		-802.511
Deviance		1447.231		1605.021
Adj. R^2	0.08		0.07	
Number of observations	1519	1519	1457	1457

Note: The following controls were included in the models but not reported in this table: gender, age, marital status, having children, educational level, and sector of employment (see main text for definitions). AIC = akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayes information criterion.

^aOLS regression coefficients.

^bLogistic regression coefficients.

*** $P < .001$. ** $P < .01$. * $P < .05$. † $P < .1$.

The models estimated for each country separately show that, when mediators are *not* included, there is a statistically significant relationship between union membership and participation in demonstrations and strikes. The coefficients from models 1a, 1c, 2a, and 2c show that, both in Argentina and Chile, union members are more likely to demonstrate and strike than nonunion members. Using the coefficients from these models, we calculated the probability of participating in demonstrations and strikes for unionized and nonunionized workers, holding constant all other variables included in the models. The results are presented in Figure 1. This figure indicates that in the two countries unionized workers are around 6% more likely to demonstrate than nonunionized workers ($P < .01$). Likewise, compared to nonunionized workers, the probability that union members would participate in strikes is around 3% higher in Argentina and nearly 8% higher in Chile ($P < .01$). These results are statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction, suggesting that H_1 should be accepted.

The models estimated for the two countries combined indicate that, in Chile, the propensity to participate in demonstrations (model 3a) and strikes (model 3c) is higher than

Table 3. Determinants of participation in demonstrations and strikes in Argentina and Chile.

	Argentina				Chile				Both countries combined			
	M1a Demons.	M1b Demons.	M1c Strikes	M1d Strikes	M2a Demons.	M2b Demons.	M2c Strikes	M2d Strikes	M3a Demons.	M3b Demons.	M3c Strikes	M3d Strikes
Unionized	0.674*** (0.187)	0.485* (0.200)	0.602** (0.226)	0.491* (0.231)	0.443** (0.159)	0.300† (0.168)	0.510** (0.195)	0.303 (0.206)	0.322* (0.127)	0.463* (0.196)	0.337* (0.151)	0.402† (0.230)
Politicization		0.307*** (0.045)		0.107* (0.054)		0.221*** (0.044)		0.310*** (0.056)	0.261*** (0.031)	0.260*** (0.031)	0.208*** (0.038)	0.208*** (0.038)
Left-wing political orientation		0.862***		0.588**		1.047***		0.737***	0.942***	0.943***	0.641***	0.641***
Survey wave (ref.: wave 5)												
Wave 6	-0.414* (0.163)	-0.522** (0.171)			0.510** (0.173)	0.508** (0.180)			-0.050 (0.122)	-0.054 (0.122)		
Wave 7	-0.540** (0.192)	-0.668*** (0.201)	0.382* (0.177)	0.387* (0.178)	-0.120 (0.182)	-0.164 (0.189)	-0.490** (0.172)	-0.490** (0.179)	-0.487*** (0.134)	-0.488*** (0.134)	-0.108 (0.125)	-0.106 (0.125)
Country (ref: Argentina)									0.169 (0.107)	0.210† (0.116)	0.074 (0.132)	0.095 (0.143)
Unionized x Country										-0.240 (0.256)	-0.113 (0.302)	-0.113 (0.302)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Intercept	-2.379*** (0.336)	-3.105*** (0.362)	-2.556*** (0.409)	-2.829*** (0.420)	-1.004** (0.386)	-1.549*** (0.408)	-1.075* (0.508)	-1.751** (0.533)	-2.482*** (0.263)	-2.507*** (0.265)	-2.321*** (0.317)	-2.336*** (0.320)
AIC	1395.535	1297.558	970.175	956.885	1463.430	1371.798	979.302	921.773	2677.049	2678.173	1883.277	1885.139
BIC	1475.422	1388.097	1040.557	1037.322	1542.692	1461.628	1049.140	1001.587	2785.019	2792.142	1980.198	1987.760
Log likelihood	-682.767	-631.779	-471.087	-462.443	-716.715	-668.899	-475.651	-444.886	-1320.524	-1320.087	-924.639	-924.569

(continued)

Table 3. Continued

	Argentina				Chile				Both countries combined			
	M1a		M1b		M1c		M1d		M2a		M2b	
	Demons.	Strikes	Demons.	Strikes	Demons.	Strikes	Demons.	Strikes	Demons.	Strikes	Demons.	Strikes
Deviance	1365.535	942.175	1263.558	942.175	1433.430	924.885	1337.798	889.773	2641.049	2640.173	1849.277	1849.139
Number of observations	1519	1127	1519	1127	1457	1127	1457	1084	2976	2976	2211	2211

Note: The following controls were included in the models but not reported in this table: gender, age, marital status, having children, educational level, and sector of employment (see main text for definitions). Demons. = demonstrations; AIC: akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayes information criterion.
*** $P < .001$. ** $P < .01$. * $P < .05$. ^a $p < .1$.

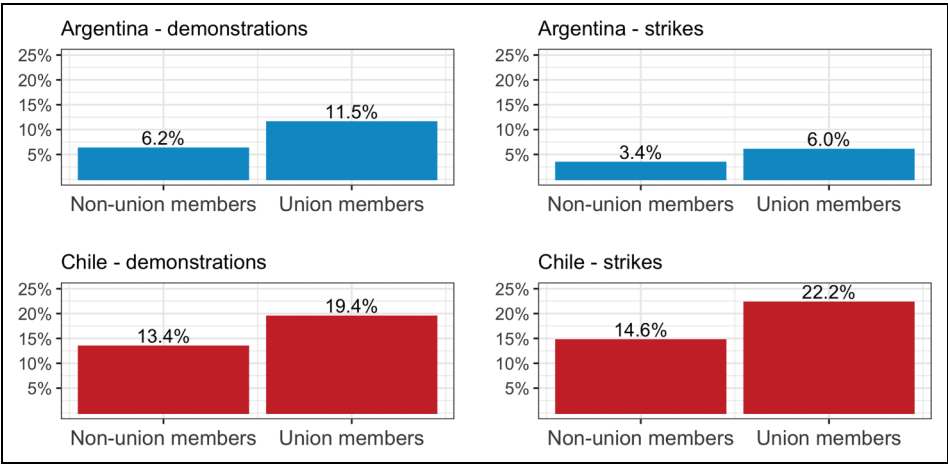


Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of participating in demonstrations and strikes.

in Argentina. However, the coefficients are not statistically significant. Furthermore, the coefficients for the interaction terms (models 3b and 3d) are negative and not statistically significant. This indicates that the relationship between union membership and participation in demonstrations and strikes does *not* differ by country. Thus, H_2 cannot be accepted.

Now we return to the models estimated for each country separately. The models that include the hypothesized mediators (models 1b, 2b, 1d, and 2d) suggest that, in the two countries, there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between politicization and collective action ($P < .01$) and between left-wing orientation and collective action ($P < .05$). More interestingly, when compared to the models without the mediators, the size of the coefficients for union membership was reduced (see e.g., model 1b vs model 1a).

This is further confirmed when we calculate the predicted probabilities of participating in demonstrations and strikes using the coefficients from the models with the mediators and compared them with the probabilities shown in Figure 1 (which were calculated using the models without the mediators). In the two countries, the difference in the probabilities for union and nonunion members decreases, relative to the difference in the probabilities shown in Figure 1. For instance, in both Argentina and Chile the difference in the probability of participating in demonstrations decreases from around 6% (Figure 1) to around 4% in the models that include the mediators. Similarly, when compared to the numbers in Figure 1, the union–nonunion difference in strike participation decreases from nearly 3% to 2% in Argentina, and from nearly 8% to 4% in Chile. Furthermore, in this latter case, the union–nonunion difference is no longer significant even at the 10% level (see coefficient for union membership from model 2d).

These results are consistent with H_3 . They show that when the mediators are included into the models, the size of the coefficients for union membership is smaller. In theoretical terms, this means that the difference between union and nonunion members can be attributed to differences in workers’ politicization and left-wing political orientation.

Step 3: KHB mediation analysis

The conclusion stated above is further reinforced when we look at the results from the KHB mediation analysis. These results are presented in Table 4. The third column of Table 4 shows the estimated contribution of each mediator to the indirect (mediated) “effect” of union membership on either dependent variable, along with their standard errors. This indirect effect is calculated as the difference between the estimated “total effect” of union membership (i.e., the effect derived from the models without the mediators), and the estimated “direct effect” obtained from the models with mediators. To facilitate comparisons across models, in the KHB method these coefficients are rescaled (Kohler et al., 2011: 429–430). Based on these rescaled coefficients, the fourth column of Table 4 expresses the contribution of the mediators in percentages.

In line with H₂, Table 4 shows that in the two countries politicization and left-wing orientation account for a substantial portion—more than 30%—of the relationship between union membership and participation in demonstrations. However, the contribution of either mediator separately differs by country. In Argentina politicization is more important than left-wing orientation in explaining the difference between union and non-union members. While politicization explains nearly 21% of such difference, left-wing orientation explains less than 11% of it. By contrast, in Chile, differences between union members’ and nonunion members’ participation in demonstrations can be attributable more to variations in their left-wing orientation (18% of mediation) than to variations in their degree of politicization (15% of mediation). These results are consistent with H₄, as they suggest that, compared to Argentina, in Chile union members’ left-leaning orientation is more important than their level of politicization in explaining their willingness to participate in demonstrations.

Table 4. KHB analysis of mediation.

Dependent variable	Mediation due to...	Difference in coefficients (SE)	% mediation
<i>Demonstrations</i>			
Argentina	Politicization	0.147 (0.048)	20.8
	Left-wing orientation	0.074 (0.032)	10.5
	Total	0.221 (0.065)	31.3
Chile	Politicization	0.064 (0.027)	14.6
	Left-wing orientation	0.078 (0.033)	17.5
	Total	0.142 (0.046)	32.1
<i>Strikes</i>			
Argentina	Politicization	0.062 (0.035)	10.3
	Left-wing orientation	0.047 (0.028)	7.8
	Total	0.109 (0.045)	18.1
Chile	Politicization	0.147 (0.047)	29.4
	Left-wing orientation	0.049 (0.029)	9.9
	Total	0.196 (0.059)	39.3

That said, the results for participation in strikes do not support H_4 . Table 4 shows that in the two countries, differences in strike participation between union members and non-union members can be attributable more to variations in politicization than in left-leaning orientation. This is especially evident in the case of Chile, where politicization explains 29% of the relationship between union membership and strike participation, whereas left-leaning orientation explains only 10% of it. In Argentina, on the other hand, politicization accounts for 10% of the unionization–strike participation relationship, and left-wing orientation explains less than 8%. This suggests the existence of important country differences regarding the two mediators analyzed here: while in Chile the two mediators account for nearly 40% of union members' participation in strikes, in Argentina, they explain less than 20%. Differences aside, in the two countries the contribution of politicization is larger than that of left-wing orientation. While consistent with H_3 , this is contrary to H_4 , meaning that H_4 can only be partially accepted.

Discussion

Our results suggest that there is a significant relationship between union membership and participation in collective actions. We found that such relationship can be explained by differences between unionized workers and nonunionized workers regarding their levels of politicization and left-leaning orientation. Thus, our findings are consistent with the argument that unions strengthen workers' disposition to participate in collective actions by politicizing them (e.g., by enhancing their interest in politics) and by reinforcing their left-leaning orientations (Hadziabdic and Baccaro, 2020; Kerrissey and Schofer, 2013; Terriquez, 2011; Turner et al., 2020; Verba et al., 1995).

Additionally, our findings allow us to establish that the relationship between union membership and collective action participation does *not* differ by country. This implies that unions' "political effects" on their members are essentially the same, regardless of the institutional and political context in which unions operate—more specifically, regardless of differences in the predominant level of collective bargaining, in union membership and collective bargaining coverage rates, or in the degree of union involvement in policymaking.

That said, we found important differences regarding the mechanisms that explain why, in Argentina and Chile, union members are more likely to participate in collective actions than nonunion members. In Chile, left-leaning orientations are more important than in Argentina in explaining union members' participation in demonstrations. We interpret this difference as a result of the dissimilar type of party–union linkages predominant in each country. As stated above, the Argentine labour movement was built on a state–corporatist model in which unions constructed a strong alliance with the Peronist movement (Bensusán, 2016; Cook, 2007). Since then, Peronists have mobilized workers by emphasizing nonideological, sociocultural differences between the "rich" and the "poor" (Ostiguy, 1997). While the strength of this alliance deteriorated in the 1990s, the party–union alliance became stronger in the 2000s, probably reinforcing its political effects on union members. By contrast, the Chilean labour movement grew out of a "radical" alliance between unions and Marxist parties (Cook, 2007) that, at least until

the early 1970s, appealed to the working class by emphasizing strong ideological, class-based narratives (Angell, 1972). The ideological nature of this alliance was significantly altered due to the programmatic transformation of traditional labour parties such as the Socialist Party and their separation from social movements (Drake, 1996; Roberts, 2017). However, despite unions' disillusionment with traditional center-left parties, the linkages between unions and more left-leaning parties such as the Chilean Communist Party proved to be strong, at least in the most organized sectors (e.g., mining) (Manky, 2018). These linkages have played a crucial role in the mobilization of Chilean unions and are key for explaining the renaissance of labour activism in the country (Fox-Hodess and Santibáñez, 2020; Manky, 2018). This renaissance and the legacies of the "radical" alliance between Chilean unions and left-leaning parties explain why, in Chile, the left-right cleavage is more important in accounting for union members' participation in demonstrations than in Argentina.

Despite this, and contrary to our hypothesis, our analysis suggests that both in Argentina and Chile union members' willingness to strike can be attributable more to their level of politicization (understood as their interest in politics and the degree of importance assigned by them to politics) than to their ideological (left-wing) orientations.

In both countries, the mediating effect of left-wing orientation was low (less than 10%), which is consistent with the argument that workers go on strike mostly for economic, nonideological reasons (Hyman, 1989). By contrast, we found that politicization is substantially more important in accounting for union members' participation in strikes, especially in Chile. In this country, politicization's percentage of mediation is nearly 30% (i.e., three times larger than in Argentina). We argue that this difference between the mediating effect of politicization in Argentina and Chile can be explained, again, by looking at the institutional and political contexts that have shaped strike activity in both countries during the last two decades.

As noted above, in Argentina, the establishment of a neo-corporatist IR system in the early 2000s not only recentralized collective bargaining and increased unions' bargaining power and policy influence, but it also institutionalized industrial conflict, which was at its peak in the early 2000s. Between the mid-2000s and 2010s, political strikes (e.g., general strikes) became rare, and labour protests focused largely on wage disputes that closely followed the pace of tripartite pacts (Etchemendy and Collier, 2007: 372–373; Marticorena, 2020: 2006–2009). This pattern of strike activity contrasts significantly with that observed in Chile. Despite the existence of a neoliberal, anti-union legislation, between the mid-2000s and the late-2010s the country witnessed a resurgence of labour activism (Medel et al., 2023; OHL, 2020; Pérez Ahumada and Ocampo, 2023). The total number of strikes increased from 186 in 2005 to nearly 450 in 2019, whereas the number of unofficial strikes increased from 85 to around 270 (OHL, 2020: 8–9). Recent research shows that the growth of strike activity coincided with a politicization of Chilean unions, observed both in the aforementioned rise in general strikes and in the slow but consistent growth of strikes based on noneconomic demands, that is, demands related more to labour conditions and organization than to economic issues (Medel et al., 2023; OHL, 2020).

Consistent with this evidence, our analysis indicates that in Chile strike participation is comparatively more "politicized" than in Argentina, in the sense that a significant portion

of the relationship between union membership and participation in strikes—around 30% of it—is due to differences in the level of politicization between unionized workers and nonunionized workers. This, in contrast to Argentina, is where politicization explains only 10% of the relationship between union membership and strike participation.

Conclusion

The relationship between membership in unions and collective action participation has been demonstrated in several empirical studies. Focusing on the cases of Argentina and Chile, in this article we contributed to those studies by explaining why union members are more likely to participate in collective actions than nonunion members. Using the KHB method of mediation analysis, we could disentangle the contribution of politicization and left-wing orientation by showing how much of the relationship between union membership and participation in demonstrations and strikes is explained by them. We found that union members are more likely to demonstrate and strike, because they are more politicized and have more leftist orientations than nonunion members (although in the case of strike participation, the size of the mediating effect of left-wing orientation was smaller).

All in all, our findings were consistent with prior studies suggesting that unions strengthen workers' willingness to act collectively by politicizing them and by reinforcing their left-leaning orientations (Kerrissey and Schofer, 2013; Terriquez, 2011). Additionally, we found that unions' "political effects" on their members were essentially the same in Argentina and Chile. This probably suggests that union membership politicizes workers regardless of the institutional and political context in which unions operate.

That said, we did find important differences regarding the mechanisms that explain why union members are more likely to participate in collective actions than nonunion members (e.g., we found that, in Argentina, left-leaning orientation is less important than in Chile in explaining union members' propensity to demonstrate, and that in this latter country politicization is much more important in explaining union members' participation in strikes than). We argued that these divergences are a result of differences in the type of party–union linkages upon which the Argentine and Chilean movements are built and a result of differences in the IR systems and in more recent processes within the labour movements (e.g., the growth of more "politicized" strikes in Chile and the decline of them in Argentina after 2003).

In this article, we explained why unions matter by analyzing two mediators usually emphasized in the literature. In supplementary analyses, available in the OSF repository associated with this article, we analyzed whether other factors may also mediate the relationship between union membership and collective action. For instance, we analyzed whether such relationship was mediated by working-class identity (1 = lower or working-class self-identification, 0 = other). Following recent literature (Dixon et al., 2004; Fantasia, 1988; Wright, 1997), we hypothesized that union members are more likely to participate in collective actions because they have a stronger working-class identity than nonunion members. Contrary to this hypothesis, our results suggested that working-class identity does not mediate the "effect" of union membership on collective action

participation. Although having a working-class identity increases the probability of participating in demonstrations and strikes, we found no evidence that being a union member increases the probability of identifying with the working class. This result is consistent with recent research showing that unions tend to organize workers that have a comparatively advantageous position in the labour market and that, therefore, have lower probabilities of identifying as working class (Jensen, 2020; Pérez Ahumada and Andrade, 2023).

Further studies should clarify this issue. They should also analyze whether other individual factors emphasized the literature (e.g., higher political skills resulting from membership in unions) mediate the relationship between unionization and collective action. This is fundamental for understanding the individual-level mechanisms through which unions shape workers' willingness to act collectively.

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