

ABSTRACT

This study sets out to develop a framework of comparative analysis for trade union performance which fills the gaps left by the analysis of trade unions in labour economics. The key objectives are to acknowledge that trade unions are organisations that pursue both social and economic objectives and to analyse their performance and effectiveness by integrating their institutional context into the model while using rigorous quantitative econometric analysis to isolate the effect of union membership. Because union objectives can vary across different styles of unionism, we instead focus our analysis on the power resources of unions, and how union membership affects social attitudes required to build those power resources. We argue that this approach allows a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of union strategies, as it gives us information about the union's long term ability to achieve its goals, rather than assume that all unions have a single set of goals.

In the case of Japan, we adjust the insider-outsider theory of employment to the Japanese labour market to understand union behaviour. We explain changes in employment patterns endogenously by linking subjective, institutionally bound choice sets to macroeconomic outcomes. We present a case study of UA Zensen, a major union federation, to show a set of apparently inclusive strategies and then show how they still exist within an insider-outsider dynamic. We draw attention to the importance of path-dependent institutional development and how the stated objectives of a movement are not always translated into action that benefits union members in practice. We shift our focus to European trade unions and we summarise the trends of generalised decline in trade union power resources. We use the existing literature on industrial relations and trade union history to divide our sample into five distinct styles of unionism and investigate the extent to which union membership in Europe is associated with social solidarity. We find significant relationships between individual union membership and attitudes towards inequality, the welfare state, diversity and immigration, however none of these are consistent across industrial relations regimes, highlighting the importance of institutions in shaping organisational and ideological outcomes.

We then explore the relationship between organised labour and the European Social Model. We explore the relevance of European integration to the future of the labour movement, as well as the challenges and opportunities it creates for trade unions across different industrial relations regimes. We contextualise the relationship different union models have with the European Union and use a pooled cross section of survey data to analyse the relationship between union membership and trust in the EU, using trust in national parliaments to control for general trust in government. We find that being a trade union member has no positive correlation in a person's trust in the EU in any industrial relations regime, and instead it has a negative correlation in Nordic countries. We find that trust in government institutions acts as a negative confounder because it is positively correlated to both trust in the EU and union membership, masking the negative relationship between union membership and trust in the EU. Our results suggest there is an asymmetry between the way union leadership relates to the European Union and how its rank-and-file members feel about it. As a result, major external shocks or changes in the political landscape risk driving the leadership's stance further and further apart from its members, compromising its own representative legitimacy in the process.