

Learning About Democracy at Work: Evidence on the Societal Effects of Employee Participation in Decision-Making

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Introduction

- Longstanding question: how do employees' workplace experiences shape their wider participation in political activities?
 - e.g., the workplace as a breeding ground for democratic participation (Pateman 1970)
- Evaluations of HR practices typically focus on effects on organizations and work-related individual outcomes
 - A clearer understanding of any “upward” links between workplace practices and civic engagement can help inform a fuller assessment of alternative human resources systems

Introduction

- Our understanding of workplace voice → political sphere has become increasingly clouded
 - Scholars have raised methodological and theoretical concerns
 - Many studies are narrow in scope and may lack generalizability, particularly outside the U.S. context
 - Selection biases, omitted variable biases, and reverse causality; also very small samples
 - Little attention paid to different national institutional environments

Introduction

- Our study aims to address some of these gaps
 - Analyze several measures of both employee voice and democratic participation
 - Instrumental variables to address endogeneity concerns
 - 15,000 workers from the European Social Survey across 27 European countries
 - Can analyze whether results on workplace voice and societal engagement are driven by particular countries
 - If so, then relationship is likely conditional upon specific institutional contexts

Theory

- Claim: what happens at work doesn't stay at work
 - The workplace provides an opportunity for individuals to develop civic skills (Verba) and serve as a breeding ground for democratic participation (Pateman)
 - Decision-making skills and human agency
 - Autonomy and participation in decision-making can promote this development
 - Dictatorial work systems less likely to produce the skills and agency consistent with democratic participation outside of work
 - Collective voice important too, but not our focus

Theory

Dilbert, March 9, 2002



Data

- European Social Survey: a cross-national survey of individuals aged 15 and over with extensive indicators of social attitudes and behaviours
 - Round 5 was conducted in 2010-2011 across 27 European countries with an overall sample size in excess of 50,000 individuals (20,000 workers)
 - Nine measures of democratic participation (dependent variables)
 - Four measures of individual employee voice in workplace decision-making (key independent var)
 - Demographic and employer characteristics (controls)

Data

- Nine measures of democratic participation—did/have you...
 - Vote in last national legislative election (B11)
 - Contacted politician or government official (B13)
 - Worked in a political party or action group (B14)
 - Wore or displayed a campaign badge/sticker (B16)
 - Signed a petition (B17)
 - Took part in a lawful public demonstration (B18)
 - Boycotted certain products (B19)
 - Do you feel closer to a particular political party (B20a)
 - Are you a member of a political party (B21)

Within last 12 months

All are yes/no

Data

- Four measures of individual employee voice—the extent to which the individual respondent can...
 - Decide how own daily work is organized (F27)
 - Influence policy decisions about organization (F28)
 - Choose or change own pace of work (F28a)

no												complete
influence												control
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		

- Decide the time they start and finish work (G31)

not at all true	a little true	quite true	very true
1	2	3	4

- Demographic and employer characteristics (controls)
 - Union member (current, previous)
 - Union in workplace, also consultation
 - Collective influence on working conditions
 - Citizen of country
 - Ethnic minority in country
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Years of education
 - Urban, suburban, etc.
 - Living with a partner, also with children
 - Is a supervisor
 - Type of employer (government, private, etc.)
 - Employer size
 - Major occupation
 - Major industry
 - Country

Empirical Methodology

- Retain individuals whose main activity in the last 7 days was working, and worked for employer ≥ 1 year
- Dichotomous dependent variables (nine yes/no measures of democratic participation)
 - Estimate separate probit models for each
- Employee voice measures
 - Include as a set of individual measures
 - Convert to a composite index (0-12 range)
- Plus control variables
- Also, instrumental variables; *Future: simultaneous equations*

Summary Statistics

(n=15,392)	Mean	Sd	Range
Voted in last election	0.786	0.410	0-1
Contacted politician / official	0.150	0.357	0-1
Worked in a political party	0.041	0.198	0-1
Displayed campaign badge	0.077	0.267	0-1
Signed a petition	0.233	0.423	0-1
Lawfully demonstrated	0.069	0.254	0-1
Boycotted products	0.164	0.370	0-1
Feel closer to a specific party	0.469	0.499	0-1
Member of a specific party	0.043	0.203	0-1
Daily work control	6.117	3.322	0-10
Pace of work control	5.642	3.386	0-10
Start/finish time control	1.800	1.800	1-4
Policy decision influence	3.800	3.249	0-10
Composite index of individual voice	5.076	3.256	0-12

Probit Results

18 separate probit models (n=15,392)	d.v.	Composite index of individual voice		
	mean	w/o controls	w/controls	“effect”
Voted in last election	0.786	0.016** (0.001)	0.004** (0.001)	0.061
Contacted politician / official	0.150	0.017** (0.001)	0.009** (0.001)	0.720
Worked in a political party	0.041	0.005** (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)	0.585
Displayed campaign badge	0.077	0.009** (0.001)	0.003** (0.001)	0.468
Signed a petition	0.233	0.021** (0.001)	0.008** (0.001)	0.412
Lawfully demonstrated	0.069	0.004** (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)	0.348
Boycotted products	0.164	0.017** (0.001)	0.004** (0.001)	0.293
Feel closer to a specific party	0.469	0.024** (0.001)	0.007** (0.002)	0.179
Member of a specific party	0.043	0.004** (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)	0.558

Probit Results

- Take-aways
 - Composite voice index is statistically significant at 1% level for all nine measures of political participation
 - Magnitudes fall considerably when add controls (as expected), but what's left is still significant
 - Effect of individual workplace voice is statistically and practically significant in every case
 - Reminder: If we reverse code the voice variable, then the coefficients would all be negative
 - Dictatorial work is bad for political participation

Additional Results

- Comparing individual and collective voice results
 - Union membership and having a union in the workplace also have democratic spillovers (as one would expect)
 - But effect of individual voice appears just as strong (practically and statistically)
 - No consistent pattern of indiv x collective interactions
- Endogeneity (preliminary)
 - IV estimate $>$ OLS coefficient in all nine cases
 - Suggests that the OLS estimates are not an artefact of reverse causality or endogeneity

Importance of Particular Countries / Systems?

- Maybe results driven by particular countries / systems?
- Not sure how to group them; instead systematically omit all possible single, double, and triple combos and see if overall results change

	Number of Models with Individual Voice Score p-value < 0.05		
	Omitting One Country at a Time	Omitting Two Countries at a Time	Omitting Three at a Time
<i>Number of Country Combinations</i>	27	351	2,952

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2 weakest
dep vars

		Number of Models with Individual Voice Score p-value < 0.05		
Dependent Variable		Omitting One Country at a Time	Omitting Two Countries at a Time	Omitting Three at a Time
Voted in last national legislative election				
Took part in a lawful public demonstration				
<i>Number of Country Combinations</i>		27	351	2,952

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dep vars

		Number of Models with Individual Voice Score p-value < 0.05		
Dependent Variable		Omitting One Country at a Time	Omitting Two Countries at a Time	Omitting Three at a Time
Voted in last national legislative election		27	345	2,849
Took part in a lawful public demonstration		27	351	2,906
<i>Number of Country Combinations</i>		27	351	2,952

Conclusion

- Expect that what happens at work doesn't stay at work
- Individual-level workplace autonomy, control, and voice hypothesized to foster skills and agency that will increase political participation in civic society
- In a cross-section of 15,000 European workers, we find that employees with greater levels of individual voice are significantly more likely to engage in a broad array of democratic behaviours
 - This is consistent with a micro-macro link connecting democratic skills and attitudes within the workplace to participation in civil society
 - “Democratic spillover” can be positive or negative

Conclusion

- We find these results in arguably the broadest analyses of diverse countries to date
- The results do not appear to be driven by a small number of specific countries
 - The relationship between workplace and political democracy is one that holds across diverse European countries, and hence across diverse institutional environments
- The workplace-civic society nexus appears to be an important one that deserves greater attention in the public policy arena



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Composite Index of Voice

- Extent to which the individual respondent can...
 - Decide how own daily work is organized (F27)
 - Influence policy decisions about organization (F28)
 - Choose or change own pace of work (F28a)

no
influence

0 1 2

0

not at all true

3 4 5

1

a little true

6 7 8

2

quite true

9 10

3

very true

complete
control

- Decide the time they start and finish work (G31)

So four measures on a 0-3 point scale; then add them