

# Labor Unions in the Contemporary Welfare State: Preferences, Salience, Positions

## Dissertation

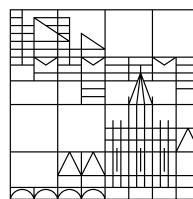
zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades eines  
Doktors der Sozialwissenschaften (Dr. rer. soc.)

vorgelegt von

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an der

Universität  
Konstanz



Sektion Politik – Recht – Wirtschaft  
Fachbereich Politik- und Verwaltungswissenschaften

Konstanz, 2021



Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 9. September 2021

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# Acknowledgements

I am deeply thankful for all the support I experienced by the people around me in the course of working on this dissertation project.

First and foremost I want to thank my thesis advisor Marius Busemeyer. Thank you for always being there to give helpful feedback, guidance, and support; but also for granting me the freedom to pursue my own course. Beyond the dissertation project directly, Marius also offered encouragement and advice on navigating the academic world more generally and aided me in having the opportunity to become involved in other research projects besides the dissertation. I further want to thank Sven Jochem for not hesitating to take on the role as my second supervisor quite spontaneously several months ago. Thank you for your supportiveness and for taking the time to become involved in the dissertation process. Many thanks also goes to Michael Becher, who provided valuable in-depth feedback on my project on multiple occasions over the years. It was always a great help to get your perspective on my work. A further perspective that was valuable for me was provided by Christian Breunig, who was my second supervisor for part of the way. Thank you for the insightful discussions and helpful feedback.

Besides those people directly involved in my dissertation, I also owe a great deal to all my colleagues and fellow researchers in our research group, at the Graduate School of Decision Sciences and at the excellence cluster ‘The Politics of Inequality’. Thank you for constructive feedback, good ideas, and interesting discussions – as well as for sharing enjoyable coffee breaks. I further want to thank the secretariat of the chair and the supporting staff of the GSDD for their invaluable help on various occasions.

I further am thankful for all of the more general support from the people around me, both within the academic context as well as beyond. I consider myself an extremely lucky person because of all the wonderful people in my life. Starting with my family, I want to thank my parents, Sylvia and Arnim, and my siblings, Marcia and Ronald, for their largely unconditional appreciation of and support in what I choose to do.

Thanks further goes to my friends in Heidenheim, Konstanz, Berlin, Dortmund, various parts of Switzerland and those dispersed across the rest of the world. Thank you for being willing to listen to me talk about my work, my thoughts, and my doubts – but also for distracting me and sharing adventures with me that helped me get to work again the next day with fresh motivation. To those of you who co-worked with me (digitally and in the home office), especially in the past year: you added to my productivity in the times of the pandemic and, more importantly, made work much more enjoyable.

I also want to thank my housemates whom I lived with for almost the entire time working on my dissertation: thanks for time spent at the lake and in the mountains. Thanks for evenings of relaxation, of celebration, of heated debates, and inspiring conversations. And thank you for

occasions of finishing work late, coming home hungry and arriving right in time for delicious food.

Commencing somewhat later than my dissertation project, a second project has been an important part of my life during the past years: many thanks to the Hausprojekt-crew for being compassionate with what was going on in my life, encouraging me and excusing me from project work when I was too busy with the dissertation. I'm looking forward to sharing a home and everyday life with you.

Last but by no means least, I want to thank Fabian – one of my closest companions over the past decade – who shared the journey that was the time spent on my dissertation most intensively with me, providing support and encouragement, but also valuable criticism. You are a wonderful friend.

## Summary

In this dissertation I examine what Western and Northern European unions want in the contemporary welfare state, comparing, in particular, member preferences as well as union goals and policy standpoints concerning compensatory and social investment policy. I further consider what union standpoints suggest about whom they are trying to represent with regard to social policy, and which strategic considerations shape their standpoints to what degree. I find that unions want traditional compensatory policy – but also support social investment to some extent, which is in contrast to assumptions made by much of the existing literature. The importance of social investment compared to compensatory policy varies considerably across unions: those unions whose membership is relatively more privileged tend to accord more importance to social investment. The relative importance further depends on the country contexts.

Unions have historically played a central role in the creation and expansion of the welfare state. Yet for several decades welfare states have been facing major challenges and there are efforts to restructure them to meet these challenges and adapt to changing circumstances. Unions have also come under pressure and are having to deal with a loss of density and other power resources; many unions are still seeking effective revitalization strategies. Given these shifts, it is important to consider what the role of unions as actors in the welfare state is today. While this role has been extensively studied regarding the welfare states in the past century, much less is known about what their role is in the contemporary welfare state.

While some view unions as (still) being homogeneous supporters of universal social policy, in the context of changing welfare states, organized interests in general and unions in particular are frequently taken to be forces defending narrow traditional interests of their core membership and opposing reforms. However, it is not clear to what degree this is, indeed, the role that unions play today. The actual standpoints of different unions and the preferences of their members regarding social policy have not been sufficiently studied. This is particularly the case regarding newly important types of social policy, such as social investment. Moreover, the extent to which member preferences shape union standpoints and behavior relative to other determinants is rarely investigated – often unions are simply assumed to mirror their members' interests.

Better understanding what role unions play in the contemporary welfare state is important: they remain potentially important forces that can help or hinder reforms. Moreover, as organized interests they shape democratic interest representation; and one main policy realm in which they do so is social policy. This dissertation project aims to contribute to shedding light on what unions want in the welfare state today.

In the first Paper, which is joint work with Marius Busemeyer, we compare union member preferences towards social investment and classic compensatory policy to those of non-members in eight European countries. Our results show that union membership is more strongly associated

with compensatory policy support, but union members do also tend to support social investment policy somewhat more than non-members. Hence our evidence suggests that unions are lukewarm but not enthusiastic supporters of social investment. Our findings further indicate that union members are particularly supportive of social investment types that are directly labor market related.

With Paper II I move to the level of unions and study the salience of social policy topics in the publications of four German unions, across a time span of seven years. Applying quantitative text analysis, I compare, firstly, the focus on social investment and compensatory policy and, secondly, the salience of social policy topics in general, compared to more directly labor market related issues. I find that labor market related issues are by far the most salient field for all unions. The salience of the other topics varies substantially across the four unions, however. There is a slight increase in the importance accorded to social investment over time, but only for labor market related types of social investment.

In the third Paper I again study the union level, but, adding a cross-country perspective, I look at unions in Denmark, Germany, and the UK. Using semi-structured expert interviews, I aim to explore both what social policy types unions focus on as well as what strategies lie behind their respective focus. The results demonstrate that the policy focus differs across countries. Further, while some unions prioritize compensatory policies, others assign higher importance to social investment. Overall, a focus on social investment is seen as a ‘luxury’ that especially those unions with somewhat more privileged members can afford. I find evidence for the logic of membership being at work, yet other logics, notably a logic of recruitment appear to play a considerable role as well.

In summary, my dissertation contributes to the literature in three main ways. First, it adds an analysis of union member attitudes towards and union standpoints on compensatory and social investment policies. Second, I conceptualize unions as strategic actors whose standpoints and behavior in the social policy realm are shaped by their members, but also by other factors. In particular, I argue that influence considerations and what I term the logic of recruitment matter. Third, the dissertation contributes through examining union standpoints directly. This is rarely done, but it is important if we want to go beyond making assumptions about union goals and strategies. Besides these main contributions the dissertation also contributes through the use of innovative methodological approaches, in particular by applying quantitative text analysis to union newspapers, which included the creation of a data base as well as the construction of a dictionary for categorization.

## Zusammenfassung

In dieser Dissertation untersuche ich die Positionen und Ziele von westeuropäischen Gewerkschaften im heutigen Wohlfahrtsstaat. Hierbei vergleiche ich insbesondere Mitgliederpräferenzen sowie die Standpunkte der Gewerkschaften zu Sozialinvestitionspolitik und traditioneller, kompensatorischer Sozialpolitik. Darüber hinaus analysiere ich, was die Standpunkte der Gewerkschaften für Hinweise liefern, wen sie in Bezug auf die Sozialpolitik zu vertreten versuchen, und welche strategischen Überlegungen ihre Standpunkte in welchem Maße prägen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Gewerkschaften eine kompensatorische Sozialpolitik unterstützen – aber auch soziale Investitionen in gewissem Maße befürworten, was im Gegensatz zu den Annahmen eines Großteils der bestehenden Literatur steht. Die Bedeutung von Sozialinvestitionen im Vergleich zu kompensatorischer Sozialpolitik variiert beträchtlich zwischen den Gewerkschaften: Diejenigen Gewerkschaften, deren Mitglieder relativ privilegierter sind, messen Sozialinvestitionen tendenziell mehr Bedeutung bei. Die relative Wichtigkeit hängt ferner von den Länderkontexten ab.

Gewerkschaften haben historisch gesehen eine zentrale Rolle bei der Schaffung und Ausweitung des Wohlfahrtsstaates gespielt. Seit einigen Jahrzehnten jedoch stehen die Wohlfahrtsstaaten vor großen Herausforderungen und es gibt Bestrebungen, sie umzustrukturieren, um diesen Herausforderungen zu begegnen und sie an die veränderten Umstände anzupassen. Auch die Gewerkschaften sind unter Druck geraten und haben mit einem verringerten Organisationsgrad und dem Verlust weiterer Machtressourcen zu kämpfen; viele Gewerkschaften suchen noch immer nach effektiven Revitalisierungsstrategien. Angesichts dieser Veränderungen ist es wichtig zu untersuchen, welche Rolle die Gewerkschaften als Akteure im Wohlfahrtsstaat heute haben. Während diese Rolle in Bezug auf die Wohlfahrtsstaaten im vergangenen Jahrhundert eingehend untersucht wurde, ist viel weniger darüber bekannt, was ihre Rolle im heutigen Wohlfahrtsstaat ist.

Während manche die Gewerkschaften (nach wie vor) als homogene Befürworter einer universellen Sozialpolitik sehen, werden organisierte Interessen im Allgemeinen und die Gewerkschaften im Besonderen im Kontext der sich verändernden Wohlfahrtsstaaten häufig als Kräfte angesehen, die traditionelle Partikularinteressen ihrer Kernmitgliedschaft verteidigen und sich Reformen widersetzen. Es ist jedoch nicht klar, inwieweit dies tatsächlich die Rolle ist, die Gewerkschaften heute spielen. Die tatsächlichen Standpunkte der verschiedenen Gewerkschaften und die Präferenzen ihrer Mitglieder in Bezug auf Sozialpolitik sind nur unzureichend erforscht. Dies gilt insbesondere für neuerdings wichtige Arten von Sozialpolitik, wie zum Beispiel Sozialinvestitionen. Darüber hinaus wird selten untersucht, inwieweit die Präferenzen der Mitglieder die Standpunkte und das Verhalten der Gewerkschaften bestimmen, und welche anderen Faktoren diese zusätzlich beeinflussen. Häufig wird einfach angenommen, dass die Gewerkschaften die Interessen ihrer Mitglieder widerspiegeln.

Besser zu verstehen welche Rolle die Gewerkschaften im heutigen Wohlfahrtsstaat einnehmen ist wichtig: Sie bleiben potenziell bedeutende Akteure, die Reformen voranbringen oder behindern können. Außerdem prägen sie als organisierte Interessengruppen die demokratische Interessenvertretung; Und ein wichtiger Politikbereich, in dem sie dies tun, ist die Sozialpolitik. Dieses Dissertationsprojekt soll dazu beitragen, Licht in die Frage zu bringen, was die Gewerkschaften im heutigen Wohlfahrtsstaat wollen.

Im ersten Artikel, verfasst mit meinem Co-Autor Marius Busemeyer, vergleichen wir die Präferenzen von Gewerkschaftsmitgliedern gegenüber Sozialinvestitionen und kompensatorischer Sozialpolitik mit denen von Nicht-Mitgliedern in acht europäischen Ländern. Unsere Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Mitgliedschaft in einer Gewerkschaft vor allem mit der Unterstützung kompensatorischer Politik assoziiert ist. Dennoch neigen Gewerkschaftsmitglieder auch dazu, die Sozialinvestitionspolitik etwas stärker zu unterstützen als Nichtmitglieder. Daher deuten unsere Ergebnisse darauf hin, dass Gewerkschaften zwar mäßige, aber keine enthusiastischen Befürworter von Sozialinvestitionen sind. Unsere Resultate deuten außerdem darauf hin, dass Gewerkschaftsmitglieder besonders Arten von Sozialinvestitionen unterstützen, die unmittelbar mit dem Arbeitsmarkt in Verbindung stehen.

Im zweiten Artikel gehe ich auf die Ebene der Gewerkschaften über und untersuche die Salienz sozialpolitischer Themen in den Publikationen von vier deutschen Gewerkschaften über einen Zeitraum von sieben Jahren. Mittels quantitativer Textanalyse vergleiche ich erstens den Fokus auf Sozialinvestitionen und Kompensationspolitik und zweitens die Bedeutung sozialpolitischer Themen im Allgemeinen im Vergleich zu direkt arbeitsmarktbezogenen Themen. Die Ergebnisse demonstrieren, dass arbeitsmarktbezogene Themen für alle Gewerkschaften bei weitem das salienteste Feld sind. Die Salienz der anderen Themen variiert jedoch erheblich zwischen den vier Gewerkschaften. Die Salienz von Sozialinvestitionen hat im Laufe der Zeit leicht zugenommen, allerdings nur für arbeitsmarktbezogene Arten von Sozialinvestitionen.

Im dritten Beitrag untersuche ich erneut die Gewerkschaftsebene, aber füge eine vergleichende Perspektive hinzu und betrachte Gewerkschaften in Dänemark, Deutschland und Großbritannien. Mithilfe semi-strukturierter Expert\*inneninterviews untersuche ich sowohl auf welche Arten von Sozialpolitik sich die Gewerkschaften konzentrieren, als auch welche Strategien hinter ihrem jeweiligen Fokus liegen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass der sozialpolitische Fokus in den verschiedenen Ländern unterschiedlich ist. Ferner priorisieren zwar einige Gewerkschaften kompensatorische Politikfelder, andere messen jedoch Sozialinvestitionen eine höhere Priorität bei. Insgesamt wird ein Fokus auf Sozialinvestitionen als 'Luxus' gesehen, den sich vor allem Gewerkschaften mit relativ privilegierteren Mitgliedern leisten können. Die Ergebnisse deuten ferner darauf hin, dass die Logik der Mitgliedschaft zwar eine Rolle spielt, aber auch andere Logiken, insbesondere eine Logik der Rekrutierung, wichtig sind.

Insgesamt trägt meine Dissertation auf mindestens drei Arten zur Literatur bei. Erstens liefert sie eine Analyse der Einstellungen von Gewerkschaftsmitgliedern und der gewerkschaftlichen Standpunkte zu kompensatorischer Sozialpolitik und Sozialinvestitionen. Zweitens konzeptualisiere ich Gewerkschaften als strategische Akteure, deren Standpunkte und Verhalten im Bereich der Sozialpolitik durch ihre Mitglieder, aber auch durch andere Faktoren geprägt werden. Insbesondere argumentiere ich, dass eine Einflusslogik und das, was ich als Logik der

Rekrutierung bezeichne, eine Rolle spielen. Drittens leistet die Dissertation einen Beitrag, indem sie die Standpunkte der Gewerkschaften direkt untersucht. Dies wird selten getan, ist aber wichtig, wenn wir über bloße Annahmen über gewerkschaftliche Ziele und Strategien hinausgehen wollen. Neben diesen Hauptbeiträgen leistet die Dissertation auch einen Beitrag durch die Verwendung innovativer methodischer Ansätze, insbesondere durch die Anwendung der quantitativen Textanalyse auf Gewerkschaftszeitungen, die sowohl die Erstellung einer Datenbank als auch den Aufbau eines Wörterbuchs zur Kategorisierung umfasste.



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# Chapter 1

## Introductory chapter

## 1.1 Introduction

What is the role of unions in the welfare state today? While unions as actors in welfare states of the past are quite well studied, we know much less about what their current role is; unions in the contemporary welfare state have as of yet been insufficiently researched. In the existing literature unions are often either assumed to, homogeneously, support universal social policies (see, for example, Korpi 1983), or they are viewed as supporters of traditional social policies and defenders of the interests of a dwindling group of privileged employees (such as by Rueda 2007). Where the current role of union is studied, generally indicators of union presence and outcomes are examined. Yet this provides limited information about the goals unions have today and the strategies they adopt. The goal of this dissertation project is to examine what unions and their members actually want in the contemporary welfare state. Spelled out in more detail, I examine what goals and policy standpoints unions have with regard to the welfare state, in particular concerning ‘new’ social policy types. I also investigate union member preferences with regard to different social policies. Further, I explore what lies behind differing union standpoints, considering the importance of membership considerations compared to other factors influencing union standpoints and, ultimately, behavior. This can also provide some insights as to whom unions are attempting to represent, though more definitive answers to this question are beyond the scope of this project.

With this dissertation project I aim to contribute to a more comprehensive picture of the general standpoints different unions take towards social policy, in particular, as concerns new developments compared to traditional policies. I further introduce the concept of a recruitment logic, which, I argue, is important to consider as one determinant of union standpoints and behavior, particularly in the current context. I focus on unions in Western and Northern European countries.

Besides their activities in the bargaining realm and the labor market more generally, social policy is another main concern of labor unions (Streeck and Hassel 2003b); thus, from the perspective of research that has unions at its center, considering the role of unions in the welfare state today is of clear interest. However, it is also of interest from more general perspectives: for one thing, unions have historically played an important role in the welfare state, promoting its construction and expansion (Brugiavini et al. 2001; Korpi 1983; Streeck and Hassel 2003b). In the past few decades, however, both welfare states and labor unions have undergone significant changes. While union power has been coming under threat increasingly over the past decades (as will be discussed below), unions remain a potentially important actor in the welfare state. Because of the changing socio-economic environment, welfare states are also under pressure to change, but welfare states are notoriously hard to reform (Pierson 1996). In the current period of welfare state recalibration organized interests, including unions, are often seen as opposing reform, yet research on when and to what extent they do so is lacking (Ebbinghaus and Naumann 2018b). The global shock induced by the COVID-19 pandemic may initiate a further phase of change in the welfare state – making it all the more important

to understand unions' goals and strategies. Accordingly, it is crucial to reconsider what role unions play in the welfare state.

From an even more general perspective, unions as organized interests are one way in which individuals can exert influence. Unions can affect social and economic outcomes, such as wage dispersion and political participation. There is evidence that economic inequality is inversely related to union presence – both as concerns market incomes, including the concentration at the top of the income distribution, as well as net incomes (Card, Lemieux, and Riddell 2004; Jaumotte and Osorio Buitron 2020).<sup>1</sup> While unions can shape inequality directly (through collective bargaining), they may also shape it through information and mobilization (see, for example, Iversen and Soskice 2015). Political inequality is also affected directly: depending on whose interests unions represent and try to further, they may have different consequences for democratic representation. In most democracies there is a bias of political participation, representation, and influence in favor of resource rich and privileged citizens (Armingeon and Schädel 2015; Lijphart 1997; Oesch 2006). Consequently, to the extent that unions represent the less privileged, they may diminish this bias. On the other hand, interest groups can also be one element that distorts representation (see, for example, Grant 1985; Schattschneider 1960). One area in which unions represent their constituents and influence policy making is social policy. Their engagement in the welfare state can be one important source of legitimacy for unions (Streeck and Hassel 2003b). What unions want and whom they represent in the welfare state is thus an important question. This is particularly the case in the context of shifting welfare state structures, built for a type of labor market and society that no longer exists in its former shape, struggling to adapt, in order to cover new groups of disadvantaged people.

From the perspective of unions, reconfiguring their role in the welfare state is one channel to address the problems they are facing, including declining density as well as the decline of other power resources. Adjusting their goals and focus in the right way may help them to better represent their existing members and keep them from leaving, to attract new members, and to stay at the discussion table in policy making. Briefly put, realigning their goals and standpoints is one way in which unions can exert agency. Considering unions as having agency, even in a situation in which they face many constraints and declining influence, has received too little attention in recent literature (Dörre 2011).

In the three empirical papers that constitute the core of this dissertation (see chapters 2, 3, and 4) I investigate unions in the contemporary welfare state from different perspectives. The central findings indicate that, while union members and unions strongly support traditional compensatory social policy, they are also more supportive of new types of social policy, such as social investment, than often claimed in the literature. Further, union standpoints concerning different types of social policy vary considerably across unions. There is some evidence that it is especially relatively more privileged unions that focus on social investment. The results also suggest that although social policy standpoints are shaped by a membership logic, other considerations, notably recruitment, play a role. Unions are aware that potential recruits have social policy interests differing in part from those of their traditional core membership and

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<sup>1</sup>The results by Jaumotte and Osorio Buitron (2020) (attained through an instrumental variable approach) further suggest that a substantial part of the effect is causal.

they perceive the need to work towards addressing these, though they seem to do so only partially. For the politics of the welfare state the findings imply that unions may be part of future coalitions advancing social investment – if it is conceptualized as complementary to traditional social policy and policy packages are constructed accordingly.

The remainder of this introductory chapter first sets the stage, by outlining recent developments in the labor market, in the welfare state, including the emergence of social investment, as well as among unions in Western and Northern Europe. The subsequent section introduces three broad literatures that are relevant for considering unions in the welfare state: the organized interests literature, the industrial relations literature, and literature centered on the welfare state, which considers unions as one among other actors. Having established the empirical and conceptual base, I go on to discuss how this dissertation project contributes to reconsidering unions in the welfare state. Section 1.4 first identifies the shortcomings in the previously introduced literatures and goes on to describe this project’s conceptual and empirical contributions. A brief summary of all three papers concludes the introductory chapter.

## **1.2 Setting the stage: changes in the workforce, the evolving welfare state, and union developments**

The developments described in the following sections are heavily interrelated. Nevertheless, I split them into three parts, since they all play a slightly different role in considerations of labor unions in the current welfare state. While the first part describes the general changes in the workforce, the fundamental developments, in a sense, the second and third part focus on the two components of this project’s topic: the welfare state and unions.

### **1.2.1 Labor market developments and changes in employment experiences**

#### *Structural shifts*

Major shifts in the workforce have occurred in the developed world during the past decades. Spurred by an increasingly globalized economy, technological changes, such as automation and computation (Autor, Katz, and Krueger 1998; Powell and Snellman 2004), as well as societal changes, such as changing family structures and increased female labor market participation (Oesch 2006; Standing 2011; Thévenon 2013), have altered the composition of work environments and job types and changed the typical individual experiences and trajectories faced in the labor market. Today, more people than ever are in employment relationships (Dörre 2011), but the types of employment are becoming more diverse and the sectors in which people are employed are shifting.

A broad and virtually by definition worldwide development in the economy and in the world of work has been globalization. This is of course no recent phenomenon, but it is nevertheless an ongoing process and has accelerated since the 1970s, at least concerning certain features such as continuously more mobile capital, transnational ownership of companies, and increasingly international production chains (Hyman 2015; Standing 2011; Streeck and Hassel

2003b). Co-occurring with and related to economic internationalization are bouts of privatization and deregulation (Streeck and Hassel 2003b). Partly pushed by such external pressures as international competitiveness, there has been an increase in labour market and organizational flexibility and an increasing unwillingness of firms to support broad national solutions to regulating employment relationships (Granados and Knoke 2005; Standing 2011).

A second development besides globalization, beginning roughly in the 1960s in many countries, is de-industrialization or tertiarization. As the shift from manual industrial occupations to service sector employment has progressed, the relative share of people employed in the tertiary sector has overtaken the proportion working in the secondary sector (Dörre 2011; Gingrich and Häusermann 2015; Oesch 2006; Standing 2011). On the basis of these developments the transformation from an industrial to a ‘knowledge’ society has been proclaimed; education and human capital are said to be increasingly important (Esping-Andersen 1993; Powell and Snellman 2004). These developments, in particular the decline in the relative importance of industrial occupations, are ongoing and are taking place even in highly industrialized, export-oriented countries. As Oesch (2013) states: “once the backbone of labor parties and trade unions, the industrial working class shrank by another third since the early 1990s and today accounts even in Germany – the most industrialized West European country – for less than a fourth of the labor force” (p.147).

Technological change and automation have further contributed to changing labor markets. Scholars disagree in their expectations with regard to the implications for the growth of different labor market segments. Some expect ‘skill-biased technology change’ to lead to increased demand for high skills, accompanied by diminished demand for low- or unskilled work (Autor, Katz, and Krueger 1998; Oesch 2013). Others, notably Autor (2010), Goos and Manning (2007), and Goos, Manning, and Salomons (2009), expect labor market polarization: according to the hypothesis of ‘routine-biased technological change’, a pressure on middle-skill, middle-income occupations, in particular, appears likely. Indeed, middle incomes have been ‘hollowed out’ (OECD 2019), with the share of people in middle income households decreasing and middle incomes stagnating (OECD 2019; Peugny 2019).

### *Changing employment experiences*

These pressures and the shift in sectors have led to a change in working environments, occupational structures, and contract arrangements. While the semi-skilled industrial workers tended to work in relatively large, homogeneous factories, semi- and low-skilled service workers face much more heterogeneous working environments, which are often very small, and more unstable (Esping-Andersen 1993; Hyman 1989). With tendencies of deregulation and attempts to increase labor market flexibility, company-specific arrangements have become more frequent, and even if companies are still subject to multi-employer regulation they increasingly sub-contract – often to firms that are not subject to these regulations (Hyman 2015).

A major change in the structure of occupations has been the increase of non-standard employment, also referred to as atypical or precarious employment (Allmendinger, Hipp, and Stuth 2013; Hyman 2015; Standing 2011). The term non-standard employment typically refers to

fixed term contracts, part-time employment, agency work and solo self-employment, compared to standard employment, which is full-time and permanent (Hipp, Bernhardt, and Allmendinger 2015; Hyman 2015). The prevalence of non-standard employment varies substantially across countries, as does its development in the past decades (Allmendinger, Hipp, and Stuth 2013). This increase in non-standard employment is related to the shift in sectors, since service sector jobs, even those which require higher skill levels, involve more non-standard and discontinuous employment (Häusermann, Kurer, and Schwander 2015; Oesch 2006). In the service sector, labor is often project oriented with frequent changes in labor demand, making temporary employment particularly attractive (Standing 2011). However, in recent years, particularly in the wake of the Great Recession, employment in the public sector has also become more flexible; working in this sector no longer necessarily provides the traditionally stable and secure employment that the public sector long provided (Standing 2011).

The pervasiveness of non-standard employment differs across different socio-economic groups: women are more likely than men to be in non-standard employment, especially with regard to part-time employment (Allmendinger, Hipp, and Stuth 2013; Standing 2011, p.59). Further, non-standard employment is especially frequent among people entering the labor market and young people (Allmendinger, Hipp, and Stuth 2013; Standing 2011, p.59). This has always been the case to some degree, but the duration of periods spent in this type of employment is longer and the perspectives of exit are less clear (Standing 2011, p.59). The most important form of non-standard employment among young people, in the case of Europe, is fixed-term contracts (Allmendinger, Hipp, and Stuth 2013; Simms et al. 2018), but unpaid or very low-paid internships are increasing in frequency as well (Hyman 2015; Standing 2011, p.75). Comparing groups with different skill levels, the low-skilled are more likely than medium or high-skilled individuals to be in non-standard employment relationships (Allmendinger, Hipp, and Stuth 2013), but to some extent medium to high-skilled people do also work in these non-standard jobs (Häusermann, Kurer, and Schwander 2015). The increase in non-standard employment is further related to wage inequality, since wages tend to be less for those in non-standard employment and wage differentials between those in standard and non-standard employment have risen (Standing 2011, p.41). The entitlement to company and in some contexts public benefits also tends to differ across types of employment (Standing 2011, p.41f.).

Besides the likelihood of being in non-standard employment positions differing across different socio-economic groups, scholars identify a tendency of polarisation of the more securely employed workers at the core of the work force and those in atypical and often precarious labor market positions; this is often referred to as increasing ‘dualization’ between labor market insiders and labor market outsiders (Emmenegger et al. 2012; Palier and Thelen 2010). This also applies to the risks people face, as discussed in the following section.

Besides these changes in the types of employment and the contracts people have, how they go about their work has also changed: working from home and remote working in general has increased (Standing 2011, p.38). This trend has been accelerated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Kunze, Hampel, and Zimmermann 2020). While this has advantages for both employees and companies, it can also lead to less information exchange, employees feeling isolated, and handling excessive workloads (Kunze, Hampel, and Zimmermann 2020; Standing

2011, p.38). Overall, the new occupational landscape consists of more heterogeneous working arrangements, which entail more volatility and insecurity for employees (Hayter 2015; Hyman 2015; Standing 2011).

### *Risks and cleavages*

The developments portrayed above have led to decreasing security across multiple dimensions. This encompasses both objectively more uncertain future developments, and potentially ensuing psychological insecurity. As Iversen (2001) points out, in the shift to the service sector those workers employed in the industrial sector face a risk of unemployment and the risk of diminished labor market power more generally. Their prospects of finding new work at previous income levels are uncertain, because their skills are likely to be worth less in services, where most of the jobs are, and they may have to give up entitlements to non-wage benefits as well, since these are not always transferable, creating further insecurity (ibid.). The increasing share of non-standard employment is, of course, closely tied to decreasing employment security. Along with more heterogeneous work environments, it also impacts other types of security. It further diminishes what Standing (2011) calls job security, describing the ability to retain one's niche in employment without skill dilution, and income security, encompassing security in market income, but also the ability to rely on benefit entitlements (p.31ff.). These risks appear to be accruing especially to some segments of the workforce, leading to what has been termed a dualization of risks (Emmenegger et al. 2012; Palier and Thelen 2010; Rueda 2007). While the focus of the literature is often on the low-income low-skilled and the increased risks they face in the context of atypical employment, more highly educated people with higher incomes can also face risks. As (Häusermann, Kurer, and Schwander 2015) show, it is unlikely that for this group of employees being atypically employed is commonly a free choice for more personal flexibility: for many, being in non-standard employment is related to labor market disadvantages and adverse outcomes such as income insecurity and lower job satisfaction.

These shifts in the labor market and changes in employment situations lead to the necessity of re-examining class structures thought to be present in previous eras. While it seems clear that the industrial class structure as it existed in the golden age of the welfare state and the height of union power is no longer dominant, it is unclear whether and which new stable classes are emerging (Esping-Andersen 1993). One tendency that is discerned is more differentiation among both the middle class, e.g., between socio-cultural professionals and managers, and the lower class, e.g., between routine service workers and routine operatives (Oesch 2006, p.40ff.). These groups appear to differ with regard to political mobilization in general, and union membership in particular (Oesch 2006). While the idea that society was organized along one main cleavage, namely capital and labor, was always a simplification, the importance of multiple cleavages has further increased (Bornschiefer and Kriesi 2012; Granados and Knoke 2005; Häusermann 2012; Streeck and Schmitter 1991). Issues such as consumer protection, gender and environmental concerns have become increasingly important, giving rise to distinct groups and movements and contributing to the multidimensionality of cleavages (Streeck and Schmitter 1991). The increased heterogeneity in employment and risk experiences as described above further contributes to this complexity of cleavages and class structures. Increasingly

complex and multidimensional cleavages influence and restructure politics, as well as shaping individual preferences towards issues such as welfare policy. To summarize, the socio-economic developments in the past decades have led to increasingly heterogeneous employment experiences, leading to decreased stability and security, in particular for some groups. This has implications for the welfare state.

### 1.2.2 Recent developments in the welfare state and the emergence of social investment

#### *Contemporary challenges to the welfare state*

Welfare state developments after World War II can be divided into two main phases: a first phase of expansion, in which the welfare state grew substantially in most industrialized economies, and a second phase, starting after the oil crisis in the 70s, which was a period of stagnation and retrenchment (Hemerijck 2013; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012). Considering the pressures of retrenchment and cost containment, some scholars note that the welfare state has been remarkably stable and resilient (Pierson 1996). Yet the welfare state has also undergone – and is currently undergoing – substantial transformation and recalibration (Häusermann 2010b; Hemerijck 2013, 2018; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012; Taylor-Gooby, Leruth, and Chung 2017).

The structural developments described in the previous section – economic integration, deindustrialization, and technological change – have put pressures on the welfare state. Socio-economic developments, such as population ageing and low fertility, are further tightening budgets and increasing the need to contain costs (Hemerijck 2017; Taylor-Gooby, Leruth, and Chung 2017). This need was reinforced through the Great Recession after 2008, which increased the pressure on budgets and in many European countries led to the implementation of austerity packages (Hemerijck 2017; Taylor-Gooby, Leruth, and Chung 2017). These included spending cutbacks on welfare as a main element, leading to a decline in the growth of welfare state spending (ibid.).

Not only does the welfare state face budget pressures, it also has to address the need to modernize, because the current environment is quite different from the post-World War II industrial era, in which the basic structures of the existing welfare state were constructed or expanded. Economic and social changes have led to an increasingly large share of non-standard employment, which is related to multiple types of insecurities, as described in section 1.2.1. These developments have further heightened risks, such as economic difficulties through single parenthood, long-term unemployment and labour-market exclusion: welfare state scholars have discerned the appearance of ‘new social risks’ (Bonoli 2005; Hemerijck 2017; Taylor-Gooby 2004). These include insufficient social security coverage in non-standard employment positions, youth unemployment, problems in reconciling work and family obligations, long-term unemployment due to obsolete skills and old age as well as in-work poverty (Busemeyer, Porte, et al. 2018; Hemerijck 2017). Such new risks are contrasted to ‘old social risks’: those risks pertaining to the industrial era, which involve job and income loss through old age, unemployment or sickness, primarily of the male breadwinner (Bonoli 2007; Häusermann 2012).

Traditional social policies, or ‘old social policies’, following the terminology used by Häusermann (2012), dealt well with old social risks. As Bonoli (2007) puts it: “Postwar welfare states were arguably well adapted to the societies in which they were conceived and developed: industrial societies with stable family structures and a clear division of labor between men and women in couples” (p.496). However, as discussed above, society today is different, it is less industrial, with fluctuating family structures and much more female labor market participation. Old social policies have a hard time addressing the new risks emerging in this changed context. Old risks were generally dealt with through transfers providing income protection and often tied to previous status and income of one single earner per household (Häusermann 2012). This worked, because most households had an earner with a complete unbroken contribution record, which entitled them to substantial benefits. However, this system entails that “weak labor market integration or deviation from the standard model of employment (i.e. full-time, permanent employment) results in risks of income and welfare losses” (Häusermann, Kurer, and Schwander 2015, p.238), leading to vulnerability among increasingly large segments of the population. In the context of less stable life-course careers, single parent households, and individuals suffering from labor market exclusion or in work-poverty other and additional types of policies are needed.

### *New risks and the emergence of Social Investment*

While there is no full consensus on which period the welfare state can be said to be in today, one concept that has been gaining increasing weight in the discourse is the idea of social investment (henceforth SI), sometimes also described using other terms such as the ‘new welfare state’ (Taylor-Gooby, Gumy, and Otto 2015). This can be seen as a potential (if not yet established) paradigm (cf. Hemerijck 2013, Morel et al. 2012). SI has become increasingly important both in academic as well as policy making circles, and both within most European countries as well as at the EU level, though it also has relevance in countries outside Europe (Hemerijck 2017).

The main idea of SI is to invest in the skills of people *ex ante*, trying to prepare them for risks they may face (cf. Hemerijck 2017; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012, p.9f.). Put concisely, the aim of SI policies is “skill creation, mobilization, and preservation” (Garritzmann, Häusermann, et al. 2017, p.39). This is in contrast to old social policies, which, as described above, are usually centered around providing transfers once someone is in an adverse life situation or a life-course situation of need. Policies that generally are seen as part of SI are education, training and retraining, lifelong learning, ALMPs, family policies, in particular policies facilitating the combination of work and family life, such as guaranteed childcare, paid maternity and paternity leave, as well as health, long-term and elderly care (Garritzmann, Häusermann, et al. 2017; Hemerijck 2017).<sup>2</sup>

SI is taken to have the potential of addressing the different challenges the welfare states face simultaneously: because it activates, creates, and protects skills, it should lead to higher human capital, which is particularly needed in the post-industrial knowledge society. Consequently, it should spur growth – SI underlines the role of social policy as a productive factor, going against

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<sup>2</sup>Although for a more globally applicable understanding of SI other types of policy may be usefully understood as variants of SI as well, such as conditional cash transfers (Garritzmann, Häusermann, et al. 2017).

one strand of economic arguments claiming that social policy hampers economic efficiency. At the same time, SI is also believed to be better able to address the new risks: it focuses on the skills needed in the ‘new’ labor market and it is less geared to unbroken employment histories. It concentrates more on policies important to these risk groups (Esping-Andersen 2002; Hemerijck 2017).

SI is a relatively broad concept and both its meaning and its perceived relationship to classic compensatory policies differ. Most scholars have a comprehensive understanding of a turn towards SI, seeing it as encompassing not only the pure enabling component but also social protection (see, for example, Busemeyer, Porte, et al. 2018; Esping-Andersen 2002; Hemerijck 2017). They stress that in order to achieve its goals of addressing new risks and leading to more employment and reduced poverty, SI needs to be seen as a complement to traditional compensatory policy (Busemeyer, Porte, et al. 2018; Crouch 2017; Esping-Andersen 2002; Hemerijck 2017; Kenworthy 2017). If SI policies are enacted at the cost of traditional social policies and SI crowds out compensatory policy, this may be counter-productive in reaching goals such as equal opportunities and inclusive growth, which are generally seen as belonging to SI. There are, however, conceptualizations seeing SI rather as a substitute for traditional social policies, which have their origins in the ‘Third Way’ approach (Giddens 1998; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012). These readings put the focus more on work incentives and conditionality (Jenson 2012).

Concerning the actual implementation of SI policies, a turn towards SI can be observed in Europe, although it is not an unambiguous turn and has only occurred partially in some cases (Hemerijck 2017; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012). SI reforms have also taken place in many other countries across the world, with the shapes that SI policies take varying across contexts (Garrizmann, Häusermann, et al. 2017; Hemerijck 2017). Social service spending has increased across the OECD in the past decades (Hemerijck 2017). The Scandinavian countries have the strongest SI profile and have a longer history of SI policies than other European countries (Hemerijck 2017). Yet some measures of deuniversalization and cutbacks have recently taken place in Sweden and Denmark (Van Kersbergen and Kraft 2017). Continental welfare states, long seen as those most prone to resist reform, have also introduced SI reforms, for example, regarding family policy and care in the German context (Fleckenstein 2011; Seeleib-Kaiser 2017; Taylor-Gooby, Leruth, and Chung 2017). In the times of austerity following the 2008 financial crisis and the ensuing European sovereign debt crisis, some countries hit hard by the crisis recorded a shift away from SI, with relative spending shifting towards older cohorts and away from families (Hemerijck 2017). But there were also some interventionist responses, in particular concerning the expansion of child care and family friendly work (Taylor-Gooby, Leruth, and Chung 2017). With reference to skill and ALMPs, an increase of the funds allocated to incentive reinforcement and employment assistance but not to upskilling has been discerned (Bengtsson, Porte, and Jacobsson 2017). Given that SI policies are not cheap, implementing such policies is difficult in an environment of austerity; existing studies show that discretionary spending (public investments) is particularly under pressure in times of tight budgets, compared to entitlement spending (Breunig and Busemeyer 2012; Streeck and Mertens 2011), limiting the scope for reforms to that end, especially in those European countries most severely impacted

by the crisis, which are potentially particularly in need of enabling policies (Hemerijck 2017). Taken together, the increasing heterogeneity of employment experiences and policy trends in response to newly occurring risks lead to new configurations of interests in the welfare state and support for different types of policies. Consequently, the politics of SI and the current welfare state in general need to be considered.

### *The politics of the welfare state today*

With the shifts in the welfare state described above, the politics of the welfare state have also changed, becoming increasingly multidimensional (Häusermann 2018). Concerning the traditional welfare state, labor was seen as supporting an expansion (Huber and Stephens 2001; Korpi 1983), in some contexts along with employers (Hall and Soskice 2001; Mares 2003) and Christian Democratic parties (Huber, Ragin, and Stephens 1993). According to the ‘new politics’ literature, as welfare states matured, traditional actors became less important: over time, welfare states created their own support constituencies via positive feedback effects, making radical change hard, even in times of tight budgets and efforts of retrenchment (Pierson 1996). Yet, as described above, the pressure on the welfare state increased and, despite stability in some respects, change took place. With the emergence of new risk groups and the rise of SI, both the universe of social policies as well as support for it have become more complex. There can be increases or decreases in compensatory policy and SI – in various combinations (Häusermann 2012). Public attitudes diverge, with social groups reacting differently to the restructuring of social policy and support varying across different policies (Ebbinghaus and Naumann 2018a,b; Naumann 2018). Popular support is further likely to differ across different types of social policy: individual preferences for SI and compensatory policies are distinct, as Garritzmann, Busemeyer, and Neimanns (2018) show. The differences in support cut across previous divisions between left and right (Abou-Chadi and Immergut 2019; Taylor-Gooby 2004); traditional working class voters tend to support compensatory policies, while more highly educated individuals who see themselves as left-wing support SI (Garritzmann, Busemeyer, and Neimanns 2018). While SI is generally highly popular, it is less so once the trade-offs with regard to other policies are pointed out (Neimanns, Busemeyer, and Garritzmann 2018).

The complexity is also reflected in collective interest representation: Häusermann (2012) looks at collective actors, whose constituencies are changing in post-industrial societies, and finds distinct patterns of support for the two types of policies and their combinations. Due to their evolving constituencies, parties are also expected to realign their stances on different policy types: Abou-Chadi and Immergut (2019) indeed find that, in certain contexts, left governments are willing to prioritize SI over compensatory policy, while center-right governments avoid retrenchment of compensatory policy. The multidimensionality both in policies or reforms and in support, leads to support coalitions differing across policies. Since reform packages consist of facets of both types of policy, support coalitions become complex and are subject to changes (Häusermann 2012, 2018). In order to be able to garner support for reforms despite widespread preferences for welfare state stability and against retrenchments, governments need to combine cutbacks and expansions in strategic ways (Häusermann, Kurer, and Traber 2019).

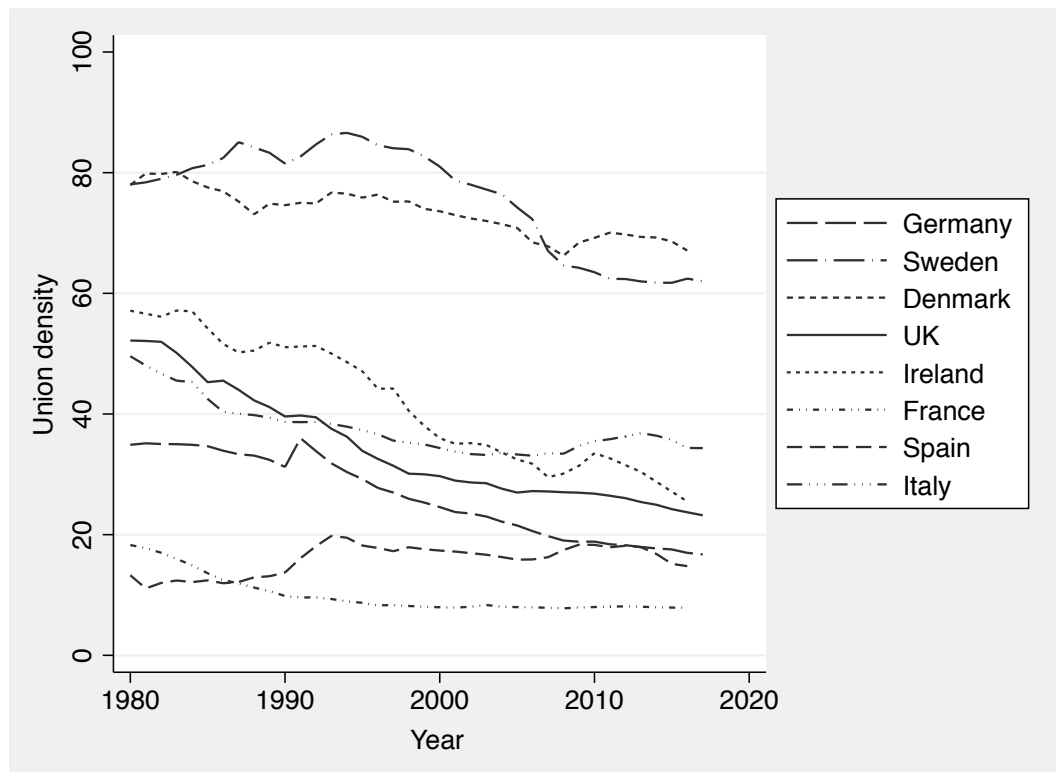
To recapitulate, the politics of the welfare state have indeed changed and need to be considered in light of changes brought about through the shifts towards a post-industrial society. This makes it necessary not only to examine individual level support for different social policy types, but also to investigate the attitudes and roles of collective interests, notably labor unions.

### 1.2.3 Developments of unions and union membership

#### *Density developments across countries and sectors*

When looking into union developments in industrialized countries in recent times, the most salient feature is widespread decline of union density. This decline began several decades ago, and came after a period of unprecedented union strength. In most countries, unions became more influential and grew massively after the Second World War, the unions ‘golden age’, during which they secured legal recognition, the welfare state was expanding, and economic policy in line with worker interests was achieved regularly (Ebbinghaus and Visser 1997; Streeck and Hassel 2003b; Wallerstein and Western 2000). Starting in the 1980s, however, union membership began to decline (Tepe and Vanhuyse 2013; Visser 2019; Wallerstein and Western 2000), thus diminishing one primary power resource of unions (Bryson, Ebbinghaus, and Visser 2011). While this decline has occurred in nearly every industrialized country, its magnitude differs greatly across countries (Hassel 2015). In the Scandinavian countries membership levels continue to be between 50 and 70% (Visser 2019), while in liberal countries density is now at 10%, in the case of the US, and at approximately 23% in the UK (Visser 2019) (see Figure 1.1 for a display of the density trajectory in several countries). In the Continental European countries it is for the most part around 17% (ibid.). Institutions seem to be of major importance in explaining this variation; one noticeable feature, for example, is the continuously high union density in countries with a (quasi-)Ghent system, namely Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Sweden (Hassel 2015). The developments of union density also differ across sectors: generally, the public sector has been able to sustain much higher membership rates. The decline has been strongest in the industrial sectors, parallel to general processes of deindustrialization. With regard to the (private) service sector, unions are finding it hard to recruit members, although there is variation across countries and unions (Pontusson 2013; Visser 2019). In absolute numbers, union membership levels are still lower in the private service sector (at least in routine services) than in industrial jobs (Oesch 2006; Pontusson 2013). Increased unemployment, as in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, leads to further decreasing density as well as making it harder for unions to defend achievements, e.g. in wages and employment terms (Bryson, Ebbinghaus, and Visser 2011; Dörre 2011).

Reasons for the decline of density and union power in general are, among others, the changes in the sectoral and occupational structures described in section 1.2.1. The decline in the industrial sector, which used to be a stronghold of unions, constitutes a substantial problem for union movements (Van Der Meer, Van Os Van Den Abeelen, and Visser 2009). Moreover, the types of work environments becoming more common differ from those in which unions traditionally recruited members. As outlined above, service sector work is more fragmented in various ways, in terms of time (short-term and part-time employment), but also of space: semi-

**Figure 1.1:** Union density developments over the past four decades

Note: union density is net union membership as a proportion of wage and salary earners in employment. Source: ICTWSS Database Version 6.0, see Visser (2019).

and low-skilled service workers are more likely to work in heterogeneous and smaller working environments, rather than large factories (Esping-Andersen 1993; Hyman 1989, p.11ff.). There is less interaction in the firm, work is frequently done with or at clients or customers and there is fragmentation in training and qualification (Haipeter 2011). This entails less interaction among employees and more fragmented interests, making it additionally hard for unions to recruit members from this group. Similarly, the changes in classes, with the decline of the industrial working class, may further make it harder for unions by diminishing within-class solidarity and similar types of group identification (Pontusson 2013; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.32ff.; Hyman 1989, p.11ff.). Skill-biased technological change may also affect union membership through creating more attractive outside opportunities for skilled workers, decreasing their propensity to join unions (Acemoglu, Aghion, and Violante 2001).

Oesch (2006) systematically studies the differences in degree of organization across sectors. As he puts it ‘if we compare routine operatives and routine service workers, we find two classes that are similarly disadvantaged with respect to working conditions [...], but which significantly diverge with respect to their embeddedness in collective organization’ (p.177). As mentioned, there is further a substantial difference between the public and the private sector: employees in the public sector tend to be organized in unions to a much higher degree than private employees (Oesch 2006). This may be due in part to employers in this sector being much more union friendly (ibid.). Privatization is accordingly one factor contributing to declining union density (Bryson, Ebbinghaus, and Visser 2011; Van Der Meer, Van Os Van Den Abeelen, and Visser

2009). Oesch (2006) concludes that it is not the expansion of services as such that poses a problem for trade union membership, but rather the expansion of private services. Public service expansion on the other hand has mostly benefited unions.

### *Membership composition*

Information on density of different socio-economic groups and the composition of unions is in some cases hard to obtain; quite frequently general representative surveys must be consulted (as also noted by Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013). Yet the evidence such surveys provide is also limited, because, especially in countries with low density, the number of union members surveyed will be insufficient. Nevertheless, some tendencies can be discerned quite clearly.

The changes in the workforce described in section 1.2.1 are mirrored somewhat by changes in unions' membership composition; for example, the proportion of women is increasing (Van Der Meer, Van Os Van Den Abeelen, and Visser 2009). Oesch (2006) observes that women who are socio-cultural professionals or semi-professionals appear to have a particularly high propensity to organize. Feminization of the workforce does not seem to be a major problem for unions: the difference in membership seems not to be between men and women per se, but rather between full-time and part-time employment, as well as other types of non-standard employment (Oesch 2006). Part-time employees are substantially less likely to be members (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013; Schnabel 2013). Oesch (2006), however, finds that the difference between part-time workers and full-time workers is not large in all contexts: in Sweden and Switzerland, part-time workers are only slightly less likely to join a union. The divergence holds similarly for other types of atypically employed people: Hassel (2015) compares individuals in insecure labor market positions (outsiders) to those in more secure position (insiders) in different countries.<sup>3</sup> She finds that one can differentiate between two types of countries: universalist countries, where a substantial amount of the complete workforce is unionized, and segmented countries, where unionization is largely restricted to particular segments of the workforce (cf. Hassel 2015). The first group consists of the Nordic countries and Belgium (all of which except for Norway have a Ghent system), while LMEs constitute the other group. Continental CMEs and MMEs are in a middle position between the two. Union membership is also ageing; the median union member is about 50, according to Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman (2013). Young people are less likely to be in unions in many countries (Hassel 2015; Schnabel 2013; Simms et al. 2018; Van Der Meer, Van Os Van Den Abeelen, and Visser 2009). Unionization rates also tend to be higher among those earning above-average incomes, though this varies across countries (Becher and Pontusson 2011; Hassel 2015).

Overall, changes in union membership have not kept pace with those in the workforce. On aggregate, the core clientele of unions continues to be males in permanent employment positions, the majority of which are employed in manufacturing in most countries (Hyman 2015; Oesch 2006; Streeck and Hassel 2003b). As summarized by Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman (2013): “the composition of union membership often reflects the structure of the labour force several

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<sup>3</sup>She constructs an outsider/insider ratio, which counts part-time and fixed-term contract employees as outsiders, but also women, younger people, and those who earn below average incomes.

decades ago” (p.52). Furthermore, the core membership is relatively old and consists mostly of above average-income earners (Becher and Pontusson 2011; Hassel 2015; Van Der Meer, Van Os Van Den Abeelen, and Visser 2009).

### *Wage setting and union concentration*

A further important facet related to the strength of unions regards the characteristics of wage setting procedures. Bargaining coverage, in contrast to density, has not declined in all countries, but continues to vary substantially across countries (Hassel 2015; Visser 2013). In the Nordic countries as well as in Continental Europe it has remained relatively stable or has increased (Hassel 2015). In the Anglo-Saxon countries, on the other hand, it has decreased markedly (ibid.). Concerning levels of wage bargaining centralization, there is a broad tendency towards decentralization (Visser 2013; Wallerstein and Western 2000). In the Anglo-Saxon countries as well as the Nordic countries there has been a substantial decentralization of wage bargaining. The Continental European countries have also faced decentralization, but to a lesser degree (Dribbusch, Lehndorff, and Schulten 2017; Hassel 2015). While wage bargaining coordination is not fully determined by centralization levels (companies or sectors can function as wage leaders, for example), it exhibits similar patterns (Hassel 2015).

A further dimension shaping the degree of union coordination is union concentration, i.e. the concentration of union members in a few large, rather than many smaller unions (Golden 1993; Wallerstein and Western 2000). A higher degree of concentration can facilitate coordination of wage setting, even if bargaining is not formally very centralized (ibid.). Looking at the confederations of most industrialized countries, there has been an increase in union concentration for a long time, since around the 1950s (Wallerstein and Western 2000). A higher degree of concentration can also reflect unions’ need to merge because of declining membership and problems in recruiting new members (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013; Wallerstein and Western 2000). There have been a considerable number of mergers in the past decades, in particular in the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands, as well as in the Nordic countries (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.81ff.). Mergers are also made necessary by traditional recruitment boundaries being blurred through the shifting labor market sectors (ibid.). Large unions created through mergers also impact union membership composition: they often have more heterogeneous constituencies (ibid.).

Developments in the past decade have been shaped by the financial, economic, and debt crises starting in 2008. These crises appear to have had ambiguous consequences for labor unions. In some contexts, unions suffered additional decreases in their structural power due to unemployment and austerity policies (Schmidt et al. 2019). In other countries, the decline of overall power does not seem to have accelerated in the aftermath of the crisis (Dribbusch, Lehndorff, and Schulten 2017; Schmidt et al. 2019). In Germany, for example, unions were perceived as part of a relatively effective crisis management, bolstering their legitimacy and possibly leading to some gains in influence (Dribbusch, Lehndorff, and Schulten 2017). Collective bargaining responses to the crisis have been more important in certain countries and have played a bigger role in manufacturing than in services (Glassner, Keune, and Marginson 2011). The overall

tendency observable in collective bargaining in the context of the crises is in line with the general course towards decentralization (Glassner, Keune, and Marginson 2011; Visser 2013).

To summarize, measured by the main indicators of union strength, unions in most industrialized countries have become gradually weaker since the 1980s. Great cross-national disparities remain, however, despite unions facing global pressures. This attests to the importance of institutions and country contexts. While the decline in density, for example, has occurred in virtually all industrialized countries, the ranking of countries did not change greatly, demonstrating the importance of institutional frameworks (Bryson, Ebbinghaus, and Visser 2011). National labor market institutions regulating the framework in which collective bargaining takes place and defining employment protection are important, as is the welfare state.

### 1.3 Conceptualizing unions in the welfare state

In the following I consider three literatures, each of which examines unions in the welfare state from a different perspective. The first is the perspective from the interest group literature, which looks at unions as one among multiple types of interest groups. The second is industrial relations, which focuses on the actors central in employment relationships, thus including unions. Since employment and social policy are related, it includes a perspective on the role of unions as social policy actors. The third literature is centered on the welfare state and considers unions from that angle, as one actor in this domain. The following sections discuss what these three perspectives can tell us about unions in the welfare state, as well as why investigating unions in the contemporary welfare state is important.

#### 1.3.1 Unions as a type of interest group

##### *Interest groups and democratic representation*

One perspective that the work undertaken in this dissertation draws from and is motivated by is interest group research. Unions, as a type of organized interest group, form part of the subject of this field of research. Since the focus of this contribution is on the unions as actors in the welfare state, in which a substantial part of what they do involves political activities, the literature studying interest groups and strategies such as lobbying is of particular relevance. With regard to their industrial relations role, unions have a more particular role, as will be discussed in the subsequent section, which is less comparable to that of other interest groups.

A question at the core of the research on interest groups is the impact groups have on politics and policy making and what this does to democratic representation. In order to address this question, a perspective taking into account whole populations of groups, including many different types and their relative influence, is useful. In his foundational work on interest groups Truman (1951) takes a positive stance concerning the influence of interest groups on representative democracy. His quintessentially pluralist argument is that there are many groups competing with each other, working towards achieving a relatively equal balance of interests. According to him, this comes about through the competition between groups, overlapping

memberships in multiple groups, and his stance that even those interests not organized in groups at a specific point in time can be seen as potential interest groups. These virtues of pluralism are also expounded in subsequent interest group literature, in particular in publications focusing on the US (cf. Granados and Knoke 2005). A positive take on groups more broadly is found in the social capital literature, with Putnam (2000) arguing that social capital and ‘civic virtue’ are tied to interaction with others in different types of groups and networks, which is important for the functioning of a democratic society. In his seminal work Schattschneider (1960), on the other hand, argues that representation is skewed, with the interests of privileged groups, such as elites and business, being overrepresented. Schattschneider (1960) discusses the democratic paradox that the disadvantaged, in economic as well as social and political terms, participate less even though they would have a lot to gain. This still appears to be the case (Maloney 2015). By introducing the notion of the collective action problem, Olson (1965) points out that there are hurdles to participation, which may make organizing in a group less easy than generally assumed by pluralists. He further contends that smaller groups have an easier time overcoming the collective action problem, making narrow interests easier to organize and giving them an advantage, leading to an overrepresentation of business interests. Recent literature on interest groups, especially in the pluralist tradition, tends more towards emphasizing the dangers of interest group influence (cf. Busemeyer 2020; Granados and Knoke 2005). There are, accordingly, competing theoretical perspectives leading to the following general claim: because interest groups influence representation, depending on what groups represent whom and what relative power they have, they can either reinforce the strength of Schattschneider’s ‘heavenly chorus’ or they can counteract the bias, by strengthening the voice of the underrepresented.

Concerning empirical research, there is a wealth of sophisticated studies looking at the impact of interest groups through different methodological approaches, such as process-tracing, assessing attributed influence, and gauging preference attainment (Klüver 2012).<sup>4</sup> Yet despite these various approaches empirical results remain inconclusive. In their comprehensive study of interest groups in the US, Baumgartner et al. (2009) find that interest group success in outcomes is not immediately related to resources. However, this does not imply that representation is not skewed; on the contrary, according to them there is a strong bias overall. Yet because this bias is present in previous periods as well, most of the time the existing policy status quo already expresses this bias. When investigating influence over changes at specific points in time there is therefore no clear relation, but this is because privileged interests tend to have gotten their way in previous periods. Nevertheless, other authors do find the direct expression of bias: using a combination of specifically compiled survey data, coded interest group positions and policy outcomes, Gilens and Page (2014) find that groups representing economic elites and business interests have substantial impact on government policy, while groups representing average citizens do not. Other research similarly indicates that those who participate in interest groups tend not to be representative of the citizenship as a whole and groups tend to invest efforts in mobilizing those most likely to join, which tend to be those who have more resources and capacity for political participation (Maloney 2015a, Maloney 2015b).

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<sup>4</sup>The preference attainment approach compares stated group preferences or positions to policy outputs, it thus necessitates studying interest group perspectives directly. As one way to do this Klüver (2009) suggests using quantitative text analysis and shows that this compares favorably to hand coding – part of this dissertation project builds on this suggestion of studying interest group positions using this approach.

This tendency is strengthened by organizations increasingly relying on professional recruitment and ‘manufacturing demand’ (Maloney 2015b, p.165), often creating more ‘checkbook participation’ than actual participation. The participatory deficit can be even greater than simply not representing specific groups of individuals, it can “be exclusionary and involve the redlining of potential constituencies – many of whom are composed of disadvantaged citizens that would benefit from better and more effective representation” (Maloney 2015b, p.165). On the other hand, some groups, among them unions, appear to hold positions relatively close to the less privileged and average citizens (Gilens and Page 2014) – they should thus tend to increase responsiveness if there exists an overrepresentation of privileged interests.

Even though the question of interest groups and political representation has been discussed for many decades, to what extent the effect interest groups have on representation reinforces existing inequalities or whether they give voice to the underrepresented has not been conclusively answered; it is unclear which of the two expectations is born out. The importance of this question is heightened by the recent changes in societal cleavages, the emergence of new risk groups and new groups of underprivileged and, in all probability, underrepresented individuals. This is likely to be related to the emergence of new interest groups and a restructuring of existing ones. The question as to the implications of interest group involvement for democratic representativeness needs to be further explored, taking these recent developments into account (Beyers, Eising, and Maloney 2008; Busemeyer 2020). As of late, there is a tendency to see interest groups as distorting representation, but the literature proclaiming this has neglected certain perspectives such as neo-corporatism (Busemeyer 2020). Potential specific implications of neo-corporatist interest group systems for representativeness merit attention and are of particular importance when considering unions. The following section will therefore contrast pluralism and neo-corporatism.

### *Pluralism and neo-corporatism*

The literature discussed in the previous section adopts primarily a pluralist perspective. While the classic pluralist authors had a relatively positive view of interest groups in terms of democratic representativeness, the prevailing view today is that interest groups tend to have a distorting effect, as described above. Yet there are systems of organized interests that function quite differently from the picture painted of the pluralist ideal type. Contrasting pluralist with neo-corporatist structures shows that there are not only different types of interest groups, but the contexts and ways in which they operate and interact with each other and with other actors differ greatly, possibly yielding quite different consequences with respect to democratic representativeness (Busemeyer 2020; Streeck and Kenworthy 2005).

Neo-corporatism describes corporatism as it was established in many, especially Nordic and Continental, European postwar democracies. While there is no one definite meaning of corporatism, the main characteristic is the sharing of the public space by the democratic political institutions with (generally voluntary) interest groups, which are involved in multiple ways in consultation processes, in political decision-making and in some areas are involved in policy implementation and enjoy self-government (Grant 1985; Jochem 2003; Streeck and Kenworthy

2005). Neo-corporatism (for reasons of simplicity henceforth referred to as corporatism) is contrasted with pluralism. As Streeck and Kenworthy (2005) put it, pluralism conceptualizes “interest politics as free competition among a variety of organizations in a market for political representation, whereas in corporatist systems selected organizations enjoy a representational monopoly” (p.448).

Corporatism differs from pluralism both in terms of how the interests are organized, as well as in the way organizations interact with the state, and what rights and privileges they are granted (Streeck and Kenworthy 2005). With respect to the first point, there tend to be fewer, more encompassing organizations, with partly diverse interests subsumed in few broad organizations (Lijphart 2012; Streeck and Kenworthy 2005). In corporatist contexts organizations not only represent their constituents vis-à-vis the state, but are truly intermediary organizations<sup>5</sup> in that they shape collective interests and mediate between the state and their members, creating reciprocal relationships between the organizations and the state (Busemeyer 2020; Grant 1985; Streeck and Kenworthy 2005). Moreover, to be granted a role in corporatist decision making, groups often have to fulfill organizational conditions. This stands in contrast to pluralism, where groups have organizational autonomy (Streeck and Kenworthy 2005). Concerning the interaction with the state, in corporatist contexts interest groups and the state engage in ‘political exchange’, with the groups promising, for example, wage restraint in the case of unions, in exchange for institutional concessions or benefits – this is described as concertation (Streeck and Kenworthy 2005). Interest groups are also integrated in policy formation processes, with their role being institutionalized to some degree. Organizations are also sometimes explicitly incorporated into policy implementation; this is termed self-government and can take different forms, such as the delegation of governance or regulatory capacities (Streeck and Kenworthy 2005). In pluralist systems, in contrast, organizations are not institutionally privileged but compete with one another and influence the state primarily through lobbying (Grant 1985; Streeck and Kenworthy 2005).

Given the described differences, both in terms of organization as well as in interactions with the state, these different types of interest organizations can clearly be expected to have different consequences in terms of democratic representation. In fact, it is a central normative idea of corporatism that corporatist interest mediation systems are able to counteract unequal power resources across different groups. Through requiring agreement by all concerned groups in order to make policy decisions, ideally the interests of all sides, including those with less power resources should be represented and taken into account (Busemeyer 2020). Corporatist institutions are meant to achieve compromises and non-zero-sum games, where everyone benefits compared to the absence of corporatist arrangements, and try to arrive at consensual decisions on policy, supported by large parts of the population (Busemeyer 2020; Grant 1985).

An additional reason why corporatism has the potential to be more representative of general interests, as discussed by Busemeyer (2020), is that it can strengthen organizational capacities of certain interest groups. As mentioned above, in corporatist contexts it is generally formally or informally regulated which groups can participate in corporatist decision making. This

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<sup>5</sup>It has been questioned whether groups under pluralism can be understood as engaging in interest intermediation and whether it is not rather a process of bargaining between groups ( cf. Grant 1985).

strengthens these groups' ability to attract members, since participating in these associations is an additional channel of influencing political decisions that other groups cannot offer. At the same time, the groups that are privileged through integration into corporatist decision making structures need to take public, i.e., somewhat broader concerns into account as well (Streeck and Schmitter 1985). A condition for participating in corporatist structures is for groups to demonstrate that they are legitimate representatives of the interests they claim to represent. This can entail, for example, internally endorsing modes of organization along principles of representative democratic structures. This has the potential to strengthen representativeness (Busemeyer 2020), since these groups' leadership is clearly accountable to its members.

Moreover, the, often more encompassing, organizations found in corporatist settings, which tend to be involved in broader networks and governance structures, are more likely to represent wider interests than more specialized, separate organizations (Armingeon 1986; Busemeyer 2020; Olson 1965). Further, the compromise orientation and goal of finding agreement can further a mentality of social partnership and of promoting goals more conducive to collective goods (Granados and Knoke 2005; Katzenstein 1985, p.157). In the past, corporatist structures appear to have benefited (at least substantial parts of) the working class, a group that traditionally is seen as underrepresented (Grant 1985). As Grant (1985) concludes: "Corporatism at least has the potential of changing the balance of political power in favour of the weaker side in a capitalist market society (organised labor)" (p.25).

However, as with the case for interest groups in general, there is also potential for interest groups in corporatist contexts to contribute to representational bias. Even in corporatist settings there is a danger of dualized structures with the interests of some privileged insiders – people in secure labor market positions – being better represented within and between organizations than the interests of outsiders in more precarious employment situations. Not only can corporatist structures fail to prevent such tendencies, they can also promote them, for example, through supporting rigid labor markets and other structures increasing the divide between insiders and outsiders (Busemeyer 2020; Streeck and Kenworthy 2005). Moreover, the emergence of oligarchical structures can be promoted through features of corporatist settings: because the leadership receives benefits from participating in decision-making processes and because they have to defend decisions made in this arena vis-à-vis their members, they have incentives to make centralized decisions and avoid strongly involving the base. Further, there is the general problem of excluded interests in corporatism, concerning the weak, poorly organized and underprivileged groups which may simply not be at the corporatist decision-making table (Busemeyer 2020; Grant 1985).

The general problem is that corporatist arrangements to some extent mean that the state delegates power to interest organizations rather than to an elected parliament (Grant 1985). By granting certain groups access to decision making while excluding others, the state actively interferes in representation through interest groups, privileging some while disadvantaging those that are not 'corporatized' (Granados and Knoke 2005, p.294). At the same time, corporatism offers additional opportunities for citizens to participate, via such organizations (Grant 1985). Overall, as with interest groups in general, the effect on democratic representativeness of groups in corporatist settings can go both ways. Whether they counteract existing bias rather than

enhancing existing inequalities or creating new ones depends on to what extent they really create new opportunities for participation and whose interests they actually represent. Yet the points described underline the importance of being aware of the respective specificities of corporatism and pluralism for analyses of interest groups' consequences for representation.

### *Unions as a special type of interest group*

The interest group literature often adopts a perspective of looking at the population of groups as a whole (Halpin and Jordan 2012), which is very useful for some questions but also has limits. Interest groups are a diverse category, much more diverse than parties, for example, in terms of their strategies but also concerning the form of organization. For instance, some are membership groups, others are not (Beyers, Eising, and Maloney 2008). It is accordingly difficult to generalize. The interest group literature differentiates between different types of groups, distinguishing, for example, between different types of organization and different constituencies. Unions are seen as examples of the membership organization type of interest group (Jordan, Halpin, and Maloney 2004). In this sense unions are already part of a particular type of group within the generally studied interest group population. Beyond this, however, unions are a very specific type of interest group in terms of the role they play, the goals they have and how they interact with political decision makers. They have distinctive structural features, as well as an interesting middle position with regard to multiple interest group characteristics.

As noted above, trying to influence policy through influencing political decision makers is only one of two broad types of union activity, with the other being their interactions with employers, such as bargaining (this is discussed in detail in section 1.3.2). The focus of this project is on what unions do in the welfare state, so unions as political actors are central and this is the role in which their activities are more comparable to other interest groups. Yet the existence of their other role, that in industrial relations, the importance of which is central in many contexts, also influences what they do as political actors, for example, when engaging in political exchange. Unions are also different in that they are, in many contexts, more institutionally embedded in the policy making process than other groups. For most interest groups, the general strategies of consulting policy makers and attempting to frame issues are commonly employed, while for unions they are solely one tool, the usage of which differs (Beyers, Eising, and Maloney 2008; Streeck and Hassel 2003b). Unions' status as distinct from other groups is also reflected in the way many of them see themselves, claiming a "special political status above that of a mere lobbying group" (Streeck and Hassel 2003b, p.335).

In the extensive study of interest groups and their involvement in policy in the US by Baumgartner et al. (2009), different types of interest groups are considered, one of these being unions. In terms of the relative number of different organizations, unions make up a relatively low proportion. They are quite present in policy debates, but have much fewer associations working on specific issues than business. Those unions that are there are often professional and well financed, yet frequently they have to allocate their resources across many different issues, similar to citizen groups. Unions are important in electoral politics, in that they make substantial campaign contributions; however, since there are so many more business and similar associ-

ations, these overall spend still more (Baumgartner et al. 2009, p.201). Moreover, looking at the resources of connection and influence, unions do well working with intermediate levels of government, but have very few connections to the top levels (ibid., p.202). Furthermore, if pitted against business interests, unions lose more often than citizen groups (ibid., p.238). On the other hand, when talking about the overall bias of interest group influence towards professions and occupations and against citizen interests, unions are seen as clearly part of the former, stronger group. While these observations are specific to the US context, they provide an example of how unions are in different ways in between professional interest groups and general interest groups.

Unions also hold an in-between position with regard to interest group strategies in general. Two general strategies are identified in the interest group literature: inside and outside lobbying. The former refers to gaining and using access to decision makers, while the latter describes strategies involving the public (Beyers, Eising, and Maloney 2008; Dür and Mateo 2013). Which strategy dominates depends on the type of group, but appears to be moderated by resources and issue context (Dür and Mateo 2013). Citizen groups often tend towards outside lobbying, because they must gain and maintain members (or supporters); since outside lobbying is more visible this helps. Unions use both types of strategy. As discussed above, unions share some features with citizen groups and others with professional groups and business associations, thus their strategies can be expected to be relatively mixed, as seems to be the case. While outsider strategies are said to play a role in the early stages of interest groups, in particular, they can resurge in importance if the insider position comes under pressure (Beyers, Eising, and Maloney 2008), but also if there are substantial shifts in discourse or the constituency of an interest group changes, for example, when the traditional constituency is diminished. Given unions' situation of declining power and membership, it is one potential strategy for unions to focus increasingly on outside lobbying strategies (as will be discussed below). Overall, from the observations about unions discussed above, it emerges that unions have a special position in between other types of interest groups.

Unions, as a specific type of interest group, are of particular interest with regard to the debate on how interest groups overall affect democratic representation. Unions have a dual role as industrial relations and political actors. They also face the double and sometimes conflicting aim of representing broad societal interests as well as more narrow interests of their core constituents; (both of these issues will be discussed in more detail in section 1.3.2). Similarly, as discussed for the US example, empirically comparing unions, their behavior, and their power resources with other interest groups, they fall in between different types. Attempts to measure the impact of unions on democratic representation indicate that in some contexts at least they appear to represent disadvantaged interests. According to Baumgartner et al. (2009, p.256) for the US case, while unions have become considerably weaker in the past decades, they still have substantial resources and influence and they do, to some degree, represent the poor and work to promote issues affecting the poor. Also investigating the US, Gilens and Page (2014) find that union policy positions are relatively close to the preferences of average citizens, which is different for most interest groups. Becher and Stegmueller (2021) find that the bias of legislators towards representing the interests of the rich is lower in districts with strong unions

(measured by union membership). In fact, their results indicate that “in districts with relatively strong unions, legislators are about equally responsive to rich and poor Americans” (Becher and Stegmueller 2021, p.3). How unions affect representation also appears to depend on the degree of centralization. Results by Becher, Stegmueller, and Käppner (2018) show that in districts with more decentralized unions, voting records of district representatives are more liberal and support of Democratic politicians is higher. The causal mechanism argued to be at work here is that in smaller unions, people interact more with each other, creating stronger social incentives to engage in political action. Their argument goes against classic lines of argumentation stating that union strength and influence should be positively related to centralization. One argument this is based on is that centralized unions should tend to have more homogeneous policy preferences among their members. But joint political action can still be possible even with heterogeneous preferences, for example, through issue bundling. Moreover, long-term survival interests of unions can lead them to organize across diverse interests (Becher, Stegmueller, and Käppner 2018).

### 1.3.2 Unions from the industrial relations perspective

#### *Core themes of the industrial relations perspective*

A second perspective on unions in the welfare state is provided by industrial relations (henceforth IR) research. The core focus of this field is employment relations and the actors and processes that are involved in these relations. Organized interests important in employment relations, especially unions and employers’ organizations, are therefore one main topic of IR (Hayter 2015). IR studies collective bargaining, strikes, collective labour law and policy concertation leading to social pacts. Compared to the interest group literature discussed above, unions are much more central to this literature. Accordingly, IR scholars examine unions, how they differ across time and countries, and how these differences can be conceptualized, in more detail. Nevertheless, the IR perspective and the interest group perspective intersect: themes that have been discussed in the preceding section as part of the interest group perspective also play a role in IR research, such as general questions of legitimacy and representation. A widely shared assumption in IR is that workers and firms have different and partly conflicting interests (Hayter 2015). Accordingly, IR studies the representational balance between capital and labor, and, similarly to the interest group literature discussed above, generally claims that there is an imbalance in favor of capital (see, for example, Crouch 1982; Hayter 2015; Offe and Wiesenthal 1980, Chapter 2).

Concerning unions themselves, the question of who is represented by unions is considered complex in IR approaches. Firstly, this can vary greatly across countries and across unions within countries. Secondly, and more fundamentally, this question is related to two co-existing but conflicting aspects and self-conceptions of unions: unions as representatives of specific, clearly defined, and relatively narrow interests and unions as representatives of the working class as a whole, as agents of broad, societal interests and defenders of justice (Dörre 2011; Hyman 2005; Streeck and Hassel 2003b; Van Der Meer, Van Os Van Den Abeelen, and Visser 2009). While most unions to some degree attempt to fulfill both functions, according to Gumbrell-

McCormick and Hyman (2013), two general union strategies can be distinguished corresponding to these conflicting roles. Which of the two dominates differs across countries and time. The first focuses on narrow questions of employment and economic interests, while the second addresses the position of workers in society and appeals to broader social agendas. To what extent unions recruit non-typical groups (such as the unemployed or self-employed) and how important broader social and political issues are on the union agenda indicates whether a union tends towards the first or the second type (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013).

Dissecting these conflicting aspects further, Hyman (2001) adds the function of unions as channelling and voicing class interests and class consciousness. Accordingly, he describes unions as having three strategic and ideological orientations. Unions can be seen as “interest organizations with predominantly labour market functions, vehicles for raising workers’ status in society more generally and hence advancing social justice; [...] ‘schools of war’ in the struggle between labour and capital” (Hyman 2001, p.1f.). He captures this by describing unions as actors in between society, market, and class. While all unions need to take all three orientations into account, they typically tend towards one or two and this may change over time. As will be argued in section 1.4, while unions have room for agency and strategic choices, which orientation prevails is also strongly influenced by historically evolved institutional frameworks, such as the involvement in policy, the degree of corporatism and overall tools unions have to influence political outcomes (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013; Hyman 2001). While the challenge of simultaneously addressing these different orientations and catering to diverse constituencies has existed historically, it is said to be especially acute in current times, given the developments described in 1.2 (Ibsen, Toubøl, and D. S. Jensen 2017).

Union landscapes at the country level – the unionisms – vary in membership density and composition, collective bargaining coverage, organization, internal decision-making structures, union identities and in how they understand their purpose and what it means to be a union member (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013). There are different ways to conceptualize and systematize these differences between unionisms. Corporatism as distinguished from pluralism, discussed above in section 1.3.1, is one theoretical distinction that can be applied to groups overall. Yet corporatism has specific cleavages, capital and labor, at its center (although other cleavages and groups are relevant as well). Because of this centrality of the cleavage between labor and capital and the ensuing importance of unions (and employers’ organizations) in corporatist systems, corporatism is also a perspective closely related to industrial relations (see, for example, Crouch 1982). Ebbinghaus (2010), following Crouch (1993), conceptualized further distinctions between different general structures, adding to the corporatist and pluralist ideal types the contentious and the social partnership type. The latter, the social partnership type, describes corporatist structures such as in Germany, albeit with somewhat weaker unions and within conservative rather than universalist welfare regimes. The contentious type describes labor relations such as found in France and Italy, for example, with fragmented and politicized unions.

Further distinctions can be drawn between industrial and craft unions, with the former organizing workers in entire sectors, encompassing a breadth of skills, while the latter organize more homogeneous groups with similar skills (Visser 2012). A further type is business unions,

understood as unions representing typically relatively skilled workers in a narrow labor market niche, as was dominant historically in the US (Hyman 2001, p.8).

### *The dual role of unions*

When comparing unions to other interest organizations above, the two roles unions play were mentioned: on the one hand, they are an industrial relations actor, but on the other hand, they are also a political actor. As Streeck and Hassel (2003b) put it: “Modern trade unions act in two arenas: the state and politics on the one hand, and the labour market and collective bargaining on the other” (p.335). As noted in section 1.3.1, the co-existence and interaction of an industrial relations role and a political role is one of the features particular to unions (and employers’ organizations). This particularity merits being considered in more detail.

As industrial relations actors, unions engage in collective bargaining, exert pressure via strikes and the threat of strikes, for example, to protest against lay-offs, and attempt to help members address grievances in the workplace.<sup>6</sup> Further activities that are somewhat in between the industrial relations and the political role are union involvement in the area of bipartite organization of vocational training or occupational pensions. These can be considered in between, since they do not primarily address the state with demands, but are formed by the industrial relations actors themselves. Yet since these belong to areas in which the state is also heavily involved, education and pensions, they are also related closely to unions’ political role.

As political actors unions attempt to exert influence on the state and policy makers. In particular, they attempt to influence fiscal, labor market, and welfare policies. On occasion unions are also involved in even broader fields, such as campaigns for peace or abortion rights (Streeck and Hassel 2003b). In their political role, besides classical lobbying, such as campaign spending and lobbying of parliament and government regarding legislation or other interest group strategies as, for example, trying to raise public awareness of an issue, unions have various additional ways of exerting influence (Streeck and Hassel 2003b). These are, for example, institutionalized collective representation or co-administration functions and (partly formal, partly informal) inclusion in bi- or tripartite councils and privileged links with parties (ibid). Historically, unions have had especially close ties to Social Democratic or left-wing parties, but relations with conservative, in particular Christian Democratic parties, have also been of importance and the ties to parties vary between unions and countries (Ahlquist 2017; Streeck and Hassel 2003b). In many contexts ties between unions and parties have loosened over the past decades (Streeck and Hassel 2003b).

Clearly, the two roles are intimately related. Institutions, agreed upon and upheld politically, set the context in which industrial relations activities take place. Declining influence in one role may lead to activities in the other; an example here is the turn by unions in Germany and the UK towards embracing and promoting a statutory minimum wage, after having previously been opposed to having minimum wages regulated by the state (B. Meyer 2016; Weishaupt 2018). A further, crucial way in which the two are related is ‘political exchange’ (Hyman 2001,

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<sup>6</sup>Note that in some countries, such as Germany, the workplace responsibilities are shared with a workplace council (Betriebsrat) (Ebbinghaus 2010).

p.51ff.; Streeck and Hassel 2003b). This describes the practice of offering moderation in certain demands, such as wage growth, in exchange for other concessions, e.g., in social policies. This is a very union-specific way of exerting influence, and requires sufficient union strength and control over members (Dörre 2011; Streeck and Hassel 2003b).

Most academic work, in the field of political economy, in particular, has conceptualized unions primarily as economic actors (Hyman 2001, p.9; Streeck and Hassel 2003b) and, indeed, industrial relations and the economic sphere is of core importance for unions. However, labor is not a normal commodity (Hyman 2001, 9ff.; Polanyi 1944) and any type of market for labor is embedded in a larger political context and necessarily tied to other realms of policy and politics. This is not only the case indirectly, because the political context influences industrial relations and the labor market, but also directly, because ‘labor’ not only concerns people’s employment situation, but the well-being of employees more generally (ibid). Therefore, also taking on the role of political actors is inevitable for unions (Hyman 2001, p.15f.; Visser 2012). Even business unions cannot focus exclusively on industrial relations and be active solely in the market – although this may work in periods where market conditions are favorable (Hyman 2001, p.13ff.). This is important to keep in mind when considering union activity in the welfare state, as will be discussed in section 1.3.3.

Even though some degree of engagement in the political realm is important for all unions, which role is focused on more varies between countries, i.e., between unionisms, as well as between unions. The arenas are connected, but how and to what degree also varies (Streeck and Hassel 2003b). Fragmentation of unions is associated with less emphasis on the political role and stronger preferences for voluntary and more particularistic regulations, while more encompassing unions tend to accord higher importance to political activities and are associated with statutory and universalistic regulations (Streeck and Hassel 2003b).

### *Determinants of union behavior*

The preceding parts of section 1.3.2 discussed main conceptual concerns and empirical patterns concerning unions, from the IR perspective. Above, the importance of differences between unions and between union movements was underlined. Despite these differences, unions have fundamental features in common, though the relative importance differs, and these aspects influence their behavior both in their political as well as in their industrial relations role. In the following, I first give a brief overview of unions’ power resources, and then discuss conceptualizations about how these determine union behavior.

Union power is influenced by a variety of interrelated factors, which are related to the different and sometimes competing logics that influence union behavior. Four main types that are commonly distinguished are structural, organizational, institutional, and societal power resources (Dribbusch, Lehdorff, and Schulten 2017; Dörre 2011; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.30ff.). The first, structural power, is the bargaining power unions gain through their capacity to disrupt work processes and if employees are difficult to replace, i.e., through low unemployment, employment regulation, and skill development (Dörre 2011; Dribbusch, Lehdorff, and Schulten 2017). This power resource can for the most part only be influenced

indirectly by unions themselves (Dribbusch, Lehndorff, and Schulten 2017). The second type of power is organizational, i.e., influence gained through density and through the capacity to mobilize members (Dribbusch, Lehndorff, and Schulten 2017; Dörre 2011; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.32ff.) The third type of power resource is institutional, and describes the influence gained by the role that unions are accorded in collective bargaining, policy making, and corporatist structures (ibid.). Fourth is societal power, which encompasses coalitional and collaborative power, i.e., influence gained through acting jointly with other societal actors and engaging in civil society networks (Dribbusch, Lehndorff, and Schulten 2017; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013), but also discursive and communicative power, describing “the capacity of unions to successfully influence the public discourse and agenda setting” (Dribbusch, Lehndorff, and Schulten 2017, p.212). According to Dribbusch, Lehndorff, and Schulten (2017), organizational power is the type of power resource that unions can influence most directly. However, as I argue below, they can also influence other types of power resources, and striving towards one type of power resource can come at the cost of decreasing another.

The types of power resources discussed above help unions achieve their goals. The behavior of unions is determined by their trying to achieve these goals through strengthening their power resources. However, unions have multiple goals, which entail different logics, leading to potentially diverging courses of action. Two main types of goals can be distinguished: firstly, unions have goals arising from their nature as a (generally voluntary) membership organization, which creates the need to represent their members and keep them sufficiently happy. Secondly, unions as organizations, meaning in particular union leadership and union functionaries, have the goal of surviving as an organization and of gaining influence (Kremer and Olken 2009; Schmitter and Streeck 1999). The two goals are linked: in order to survive unions need to retain their members and, to the extent that members have an extended time horizon in which the union is of use to them, they want the union to survive. Even though the two goals are linked, as are the ensuing logics, since they can also conflict, it is useful to distinguish them. The first goal gives rise to the logic of membership (Schmitter and Streeck 1999). If a union fails to keep its members sufficiently happy, it loses legitimacy and members may protest or exit the organization (Hirschmann 1970). Since unions’ internal structures are usually also democratic, this applies directly to elections within unions: to some degree competitors for elected leadership positions need to promise and deliver what is in the interest of the members or their constituencies within the membership.

The second goal entails the importance of maintaining and gaining influence; this has been referred to as the logic of influence (Schmitter and Streeck 1999). In order to influence the industrial relations and the political realm, unions need to have functioning relationships with employers, the government, and parties. A second factor is important for union survival as well, namely recruitment (Kremer and Olken 2009). In section 1.4 I will discuss this in more detail and argue why the issue of recruitment needs to be explicitly considered as a distinct logic. The goal of survival is closely related to the logic of membership, since a union’s survival depends on retaining its existing members. However, the distinct logics can still prescribe conflicting courses of actions. For example, in certain contexts influence considerations may lead to less confrontational behavior than what would be preferred by the members (see, for

example, Kremer and Olken 2009).

In all contexts, unions rely on a mixture of the power resources defined above and all unions face the different logics simultaneously. However, which power resource is how important and which logic dominates differs. In corporatist countries institutional power tends to be important (Dörre 2011; Van Der Meer, Van Os Van Den Abeelen, and Visser 2009), while in Anglo-Saxen countries societal power plays an important role. The relative importance of different types of power resources and logics may also be shifting, given the challenges unions face; ‘social movement unionism’ (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.50) has been hailed by some as a strategy unions in corporatist settings should turn to more. Perspectives on union strategies for revitalization are the subject of the next section.

### *Union revitalization literature*

As discussed in section 1.2.3, the development of union density, as well as of other factors generally taken to indicate union strength, provides ample reason to argue that unions are losing power. How to judge these developments, the strategies unions use to address them, and what this means for the future of unionism has, naturally, been discussed at length in the IR literature.

One strategy of revitalization is focusing on recruitment, especially of those groups which are not yet well organized. A major challenge unions face is the decline of industrial workers, among whom they historically recruited the main part of their membership (see section 1.2.3), leading to increased pressures to recruit members. Unions are diagnosed as neither keeping up with this shift nor with other changes in the workforce. Many scholars hold that this is leading to a representation crisis, and point to the importance of reaching out to not-yet unionized groups, as well as increasing the recruitment of underrepresented groups, such as the young and the atypically employed (see section 1.2) (Bryson, Ebbinghaus, and Visser 2011; Cha, Holgate, and Yon 2018; Dribbusch, Lehndorff, and Schulten 2017; Tapia and Turner 2018; Van Der Meer, Van Os Van Den Abeelen, and Visser 2009). Recruiting enough young members is seen as essential for unions, firstly because they are currently underrepresented and secondly because they have a long membership horizon (Cha, Holgate, and Yon 2018; Tapia and Turner 2018). Unions have increasingly seen and addressed the need to recruit younger workers (Van Der Meer, Van Os Van Den Abeelen, and Visser 2009), though, for example, Cha, Holgate, and Yon (2018) note that some unions take a sceptical view of forms of activism as they are sometimes endorsed by young workers.

Unions are also increasingly trying to reflect the variety of types of employment, recognizing the necessity and exerting at least some efforts to recruit those in atypical employment (Dribbusch, Lehndorff, and Schulten 2017; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.55; Haipeter 2011). Unions are also trying to recruit more, partly high-skilled, self-employed workers Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.57f. Van Der Meer, Van Os Van Den Abeelen, and Visser 2009). In order to be accessible for young people, and especially for precariously employed workers, institutions that are less based in the workplace may be necessary (Bryson, Ebbinghaus, and Visser 2011). Atypically employed workers are more likely to change employers regularly. In

order to be able to recruit and retain those employees, some unions are strengthening the territorial basis of organization.<sup>7</sup>

A further strategy of addressing the threatening ‘representation crisis’, besides recruiting from previously under-represented groups, is increasing internal representativeness. Changing internal democratic structures to allow for better representation is one strategy. For example, attempts have been made to better represent and become more attractive to younger workers through creating (semi-)separate organizations for young workers, as one among other measures (Van Der Meer, Van Os Van Den Abeelen, and Visser 2009). Adjustments to the internal structures have also been made to increase the representation of women, with structural arrangements ensuring that a sufficient amount of posts, e.g., are held by women (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, 51ff.).

Recruiting new and under-represented groups of course involves becoming attractive to them. One main strategy to achieve this is focusing more on issues important to these groups. Simms et al. (2018) argue that one strategy of encouraging young workers to join can be addressing the problem of precarious work, which many of them face, and strengthening collaboration with civil society groups. An example is explicitly addressing temporary agency work and, to some extent, the shift towards support of minimum wages (Dribbusch, Lehndorff, and Schulten 2017).

On a more general level, a change of the set of strategies typically used by unions is pointed out by various authors. Using classical lobbying tools similar to those used by other organized interests is becoming increasingly important for unions, as is influencing public opinion (Haipeter 2011; Streeck and Hassel 2003b). This can be challenging for unions, because they are not used to influencing legislation via outside strategies and ‘selling’ their cause to the public (Streeck and Hassel 2003b). Nevertheless, one strategic approach, which some authors argue may be a way to successfully revitalize unions, is the ‘organizing model’ or the social movement turn, which involves relying more on outside strategies (Bryson, Ebbinghaus, and Visser 2011; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.55; Haipeter 2011). This approach also includes active engagement of the members and can involve collaboration with other types of interest groups, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.145). While this approach has its origins predominantly in the US, it has been recently picked up to some extent in Continental European countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands (Bryson, Ebbinghaus, and Visser 2011; Dörre 2011). In the past years, however, in the wake of the Great Recession, in particular, unions in some countries appear to have turned back to long-established modes, such as a renewed turn towards corporatism and traditional social partnership structures in Germany (Dörre 2011; Eichhorst and Weishaupt 2013).

Summarizing the forecasts and recommendations on future strategies of unions in the literature, the partial adoption of social movement and organizing strategies in countries not traditionally relying on the related tools is generally seen as an advisable course of action (see, for example, Haipeter 2011; Hyman 2015). However, scholars also point out that in countries with corporatist structures this entails a conflict, since it involves some degree of contentious politics and

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<sup>7</sup> According to Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman (2013) this is taking place among unions in Italy, for example (p.64f.).

thus can cost unions their standing as social partners (Hyman 2001, p.61). Despite tendencies of resurging corporatist structures in some countries after the 2008 crisis, the widespread view is that corporatist structures are shifting (see, for example, Dörre 2011; Haipeter 2011). In terms of substantive focus, several scholars argue that unions need to realign their focus on policies and general topics; in particular, more importance should be accorded to investment in education, health, and social services (Dribbusch, Lehndorff, and Schulten 2017; Visser 2012). As Visser (2012) formulates it: “It would be an important achievement if these unions were to make the employment and training of young people, and the health and mobility of mid-career workers in preparation for a longer and healthier working life as important a priority as fighting for better wages and social protection” (p.140). Focusing on Europe, Hyman (2015) outlines three future scenarios for IR and consequently for unions. The first scenario is ongoing weakening of IR and the decline of unions. The second scenario is ‘elite reform’, meaning the restructuring and re-empowering of IR through a new policy orientation by national governments. The third potential scenario describes the reshaping and re-emerging strength of IR driven from below, a counter-movement from the base at its center. This scenario requires unions to successfully address the challenge of representing the marginalized beyond their core constituency. It may also require collaborating with other forms of social movements. According to Hyman (2015), the future of unions depends on how well they manage to meet the “daunting challenge of mobilizing the discontented far beyond their traditional constituency” (p.5).

These assessments imply that understanding the current and likely future developments of unions necessitates recognizing their agency and strategic capacities – something that has been lacking in the recent literature, as Haipeter (2011) observes. It further implies that examining who unions represent and what unions want, as this dissertation tries to do for the field of social policy, is central for understanding the present and future role of unions.

### 1.3.3 The welfare state and unions

#### *Why the welfare state matters to unions*

In the preceding sections I discussed the role of unions from the perspectives of literatures that have interest groups in general or unions at their center. This dissertation has as its focus unions in the welfare state and this section will add conceptual perspectives on this aspect more specifically. In a first step I will briefly outline how and why the welfare state is (still) important for unions. In a second step I will look at the literature that has social policy and the welfare state at its center, and discuss how unions are viewed from this perspective, as one actor influencing the welfare state.

As discussed above, unions represent their members’ interests and, in some contexts, the interests of the working class or generally a broader part of society. The focus is on their members’ interests as they pertain to their working lives, their labor power. Yet, as discussed in section 1.3.2, because labor is embedded in a wider context and is not a commodity like any other, unions also have to engage in the political sphere. The interests of union members concerning their working lives are clearly closely tied to social policy interests. The ‘real wage’ is composed

not only of the wage itself, but also of the ‘social wage’, consisting of transfers, benefits, and services provided by the welfare state (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.133; Hyman 2001, p.51). Thus this component needs to be influenced as well; social policy is a direct interest of union members (Streeck and Hassel 2003b).

The welfare state does not matter for unions solely because it belongs to their members’ interests that they need to address, but also because it can be a direct or indirect source of power. As mentioned before, social policy and developments in the labor market are interwoven for unions, e.g., through political exchange and schemes such as early employment, which are sometimes utilized to stabilize the labor market (Streeck and Hassel 2003b). On a more fundamental conceptual level, the two realms are also related via decommodification (Esping-Andersen 1990): since expansive social policy makes workers less dependent on their market income, thus having a decommodifying effect, it strengthens their bargaining power vis-à-vis the employers. A further reason that makes it essential for unions to accord social policy considerable importance is that a substantial proportion of union members are employees of the welfare state (Streeck and Hassel 2003b).

To what extent unions focus on non-labor market spheres and on social policy varies across countries and union types (Hyman 2001, p.1ff.). Over time, there has been an increasing tendency of unions to use social policy to stabilize the income of their members (Streeck and Hassel 2003b). The way in which unions are involved in the welfare state also varies across country contexts. In several corporatist countries, namely Belgium and the Nordic countries (with the exception of Norway), unions run the administration of (voluntary) unemployment funds, the so-called Ghent-system (Brugiavini et al. 2001; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.9f.). Other countries with corporatist traditions tend to have more government involvement, but unions are still involved in systems of tri- or bipartite administration (Brugiavini et al. 2001). Pluralist countries, on the other hand, have little institutionalized union involvement (Ebbinghaus and Visser 1997). Unions are further active through participation in consulting councils and as policy lobbyists (Brugiavini et al. 2001). The involvement of unions in the welfare state and the importance of social policy for unions make unions one important actor in the politics of the welfare state.

#### *Unions in the politics of the welfare state*

Within the literature on the politics of the welfare state, various strands have accorded unions different roles. Power resource theory (PRT) sees unions as part of the labor movement, the power resources of which are decisive for a strong welfare state (Korpi 1983, 2006). More specifically, PRT understands capital and labor as engaging in a democratic class struggle, one point of contention being the welfare state, with capital generally opposing welfare state expansion. While business has structural benefits with regard to power resources, the working class can increase its power resources through organizing in parties and unions (Huber and Stephens 2001; Korpi 1983). Korpi (1983) argues that these power resources are distributed across classes very differently in different countries and points in time, and that how they are distributed depends, among other things, on a country’s structure of unions. In some countries

in addition to the power of labor, Christian Democratic parties and cross-class alliances, e.g. between the working class and farmers, were important for social policy expansion, according to PRT (Huber, Ragin, and Stephens 1993; Swenson 1991). Not only do more power resources held by labor lead to stronger welfare states, but, as mentioned above, through increasing decommodification more expansive welfare states, in turn, increase the power resources of labor (Esping-Andersen 1990).

Modifying the assumption that capital tends to oppose social policy, the Varieties of Capitalism approach (VoC) argues that, in certain settings, capital promotes certain types of social policy, partly working alongside organized labor as social partners (Hall and Soskice 2001). VoC argues that in some settings, firms and businesses are important positive determinants of welfare state policies, because they need, for example, sufficiently high replacement rates to attract and retain high skilled labor (Hall and Soskice 2001). They differentiate between liberal market economies (LMEs), in which coordination is achieved predominantly through competitive markets, and coordinated market economies (CMEs), in which firms engage in non-market coordination, both with each other as well as with other actors, such as unions (*ibid.*). In the latter type, business associations will work alongside unions to create and maintain (certain types of) welfare state policy. While Hall and Soskice (2001) state that they do not mean to neglect the role of unions (p.4), they take firms and business associations to be of prime importance. Adding variation across firms and sectors in terms of employer social policy support, Mares (2003) argues that employer support for different social policies depends on their skill specificity, but also on the risk profile of their workforce. The account of business as being quite frequently supportive of the welfare state is questioned by other authors, however, who argue that, empirically, business has consented to reforms in some contexts, rather than being actively supportive (Hacker and Pierson 2002; Korpi 2006). On the role of business in the welfare state the literature is, accordingly, somewhat divided. On the role of unions, in the traditional literature there is more agreement that unions tend to support expanding social policy. However, in more recent literature this is no longer the case.

As outlined above in section 1.2.2, despite the stability of welfare states induced by feedback effects and support constituencies, and the ensuing diminished importance of previously relevant welfare state actors, change has taken place and actors still seem to matter. Yet, as discussed above, the politics of the welfare state have become increasingly complex and multidimensional. With respect to unions this becomes apparent in diverse claims about the role of unions in the welfare state today. The literature on dualization sees unions as increasingly trying to protect their core members, who are seen as insiders, even if this means accepting adverse policies for outsiders and less privileged groups in general (C. Jensen 2012; Nijhuis 2009; Palier and Thelen 2010; Rueda 2007; Tepe and Vanhuysse 2013). Several authors similarly argue that unions fail to adequately represent the interests of ‘new risk’ groups, claiming that the focus is still on traditional members such as elderly males (Anderson and T. Meyer 2003; Häusermann 2010a). Yet empirical findings, where they exist, are inconclusive and show that it matters what context and what specific policy field is looked at (Anderson and Lynch 2007; Anderson and T. Meyer 2003; Häusermann 2012). Notably, many studies discussing the alleged increasingly narrow focus of unions do not explore this empirically, building on this

assumption instead (Brugiavini et al. 2001; Palier and Thelen 2010; Rueda 2007).

As regards new, emerging social policy trends, in particular SI, the role of unions remains under-researched. While some studies consider unions' involvement, in particular, in social policies that can be seen as parts of SI, such as ALMPs ( cf. Gordon 2015; Tepe and Vanhuyse 2013), there is little literature considering the role of unions in SI more generally. Yet unions are still a potentially important actor in the welfare state. Divergent union standpoints and engagement across country contexts may be one factor explaining differences in the shift towards SI in different countries.

## 1.4 Reconsidering unions in the welfare state

While the previous section discussed insights on unions in the welfare state from different perspectives, this section describes what these perspectives fall short of telling us and argues that there is a need to reconsider unions in the welfare state. The first part of this section identifies the gaps in the literature and outlines the conceptual contributions of this dissertation project as a whole, considering all three papers simultaneously. The second part describes the methodological approaches used in the three papers that form part of the dissertation. The third part then gives a separate summary of each of the three papers.

### 1.4.1 Examining what unions want in the welfare state today and whom they represent

#### *Shortcomings of the existing literature*

In the preceding section I described three perspectives on unions in the welfare state: the perspective from the interest group literature, from the industrial relations literature, and from the literature focusing on welfare states and social policy. Comparing these literatures, the interest group literature studies especially how groups, including unions, affect representation; the industrial relations literature investigates union engagement in different spheres as well as different determinants of unions goals and behavior; the welfare state literature considers unions as one actor in the welfare state. The research undertaken in these literatures has produced substantial insights regarding how unions compare to other types of interest groups, their involvement in specific labor market and social policy reforms, and their role in the construction and expansion of the welfare state. However, much less is known about how the general role of unions in the welfare state has developed recently. In particular, it remains unclear what unions as a specific type of group want in the welfare state today and whose interests they represent.

In the literature on interest groups, some scholars invoke unions as a potential force against the bias towards the interests of business and the better-off. Others argue that organized interests distort representation in democracies and that unions in particular are increasingly representing privileged workers, while neglecting those facing new risks and other precarious groups (see preceding sections). In the IR and welfare state literature there are similarly controversial

positions: some argue that in the course of union revitalization, unions are strengthening their focus on broad social interests, while others argue that unions support solely traditional social policies geared towards very narrow constituencies and block reforms (as discussed above). With regard to new types of social policy specifically, in particular SI, assessments of union standpoints also vary. A frequent claim is that unions tend to have a status quo bias and block reforms (Anderson and T. Meyer 2003; Brugiavini et al. 2001; Emmenegger et al. 2012; Häusermann 2012; Naczyk and Seeleib-Kaiser 2015; Rueda 2007). Others, however, find union presence to be positively associated with ‘new’ social policies, for example family policy (Engeman 2016). Further, in some country contexts, for example in Denmark, social partner agreement on activation strategies existed as early as in the 1990s (Jochem 2003).

There is, accordingly, a general lack of agreement on whose interests unions represent in the welfare state and what standpoints unions hold with respect to social policy today. The main gap in the literature behind this disagreement is that unions in contemporary social policy and particularly as regards new social policy types have been insufficiently studied. This lack of agreement is further likely due, at least in part, to the following more specific shortcomings in the literature. The first shortcoming is directly related to the question of whose interests unions represent today. While there are some studies on the composition of union membership, what this implies in terms of social policy interests is rarely considered. In particular, the social policy preferences of union members are seldom analyzed. Despite this dearth of knowledge of what social policy preferences union members actually have, the claim that unions focus on narrow interests is often based on the argument that union members have an interest in traditional social policies. The purported composition of union members and corresponding assumptions about union member preferences are taken to lead to unions focusing on these kinds of policies and blocking reforms – for the most part without investigating the validity of these assumptions and inferences.

This is related to a second shortcoming: in much of the literature, especially in the welfare state literature, unions are assumed to be mainly transmission mechanisms of their members’ interests. From the observation of who typical union members are it is directly inferred that unions focus on these groups (see, for example, Hassel 2015). Yet, as insights from research on industrial relations and interest groups more generally suggest, other logics are also important in determining the standpoints of organized interests and their behavior. In particular, the role that considerations of influence and of recruitment play has been insufficiently considered.

Comparing how and to what extent membership composition and other factors influence what unions want and do in the welfare state also underlines the importance of distinguishing between unions. The traditional literature on welfare states tends to treat unions as homogeneous actors – failing to acknowledge that different unions within a country may differ considerably (this criticism is also raised, for example, by Becher and Pontusson (2011)). This constitutes a third gap in the literature.

Fourth, when attempting to gauge the role of unions in social policy, many scholars look at policy outputs and outcomes. This, however, makes it impossible to distinguish between the influence unions have to bring about certain outcomes and their underlying strategy and positions. Quite frequently both arguments claiming that unions (still) have an equalizing

effect, and those claiming that they no longer have any effect, or that they rather increase bias, fail to distinguish between strength and standpoints<sup>8</sup>. Yet these are two distinct aspects: while the standpoints unions have with respect to policy are likely to be related to what strength they have and how effective they are in influencing policies and outcomes, these aspects are not identical. Conceptually, one can distinguish between how well unions manage to work towards their goals and what goals and standpoints they actually have. To understand union behavior it is crucial to distinguish the two. This is more important than ever in times of diminishing union strength. It is further necessary in order to discern variation in strategies of different unions, which may differ substantially, given varying membership patterns and revitalization strategies of unions.

While the literatures discussed in part 1.3 all provide important partial insights concerning unions in the welfare state, the knowledge of what unions want in the realm of social policy today and whom they represent remains ambiguous. In order to get a comprehensive idea of what role unions do indeed play in the current welfare state and how this varies across country contexts, there is a need for systematic research into what different unions actually want with regard to different social policy types and whose interests they actually are attempting to represent. We lack sufficient insights regarding this: it is unclear what positions and standpoints different unions have concerning in particular newly important types of social policy, such as SI. With this dissertation I want to contribute to filling this gap: I aim to provide a more comprehensive picture of the general standpoints different unions in diverse country contexts take towards distinct social policy types today, as well as considering what this tells us about their strategies and whom they are attempting to represent. Examining unions in the contemporary welfare state and especially with regard to newly important social policy types is the main contribution of this dissertation project.

In order to study unions in the contemporary welfare state, three different, albeit related, levels need to be explicitly considered. Firstly, as becomes clear from the discussion of the first two shortcomings in the literature, the level of individuals is important, since unions consist of members, who join unions voluntarily and whom they attempt to represent. Secondly, the level of unions is important. Here different unions and the characteristics in which they differ must be considered. Moreover, the different logics that influence union positions and behavior and their respective implications need to be discussed. Thirdly, the level of countries is also important. Country level institutions are closely related to union movements in a country. For example, the role accorded to unions in the provision of social benefits affects the incentives to join a union enormously. Institutional characteristics on the country level, which often co-evolved with the unions, affect what types of unions there are, what power which unions have, and thus in the end, which type of people, and how many, are union members.

The more specific contributions of this dissertation pertain predominantly to the individual level and the level of unions. However, the country context is also considered to some extent. In the following subsections I describe the specific contributions of the dissertation project and how they address the literature gaps identified above in more detail.

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<sup>8</sup>A note on terminology: the term standpoints is used as a broad term capturing positions, aims, and strategies. The term positions is understood as including both whether an issue is supported or not, as well as how important an issue is.

*Social policy preferences of union members*

When considering the effect of organized interests on democratic representation a central issue is, of course, whom organizations represent. For membership organizations – such as unions – one important factor determining this is who the members are. As mentioned above (see section 1.3.1) and explored in more detail below, members are likely to be one important factor determining the political stance and behavior of unions; union members thus possess an additional channel of influence. Consequently, in order to understand whom unions represent in the welfare state today we need to investigate who is in unions, i.e., what characteristics union members have, and what union members want.

Examining the preferences of union members is important for a second reason as well: not only do union members influence unions; unions, in turn, may shape the preferences of their members as well. Preferences are malleable (see, for example, Bernheim and Rangel 2005; Druckman and Lupia 2000; Hall 2003), and can evolve continuously through experience and changing interpretations (Hall 2003). There is good reason to believe that unions attempt to influence their members behavior, for example, by encouraging political participation or providing information, and there is evidence that, to some degree, they succeed (Becher and Stegmueller 2021; Kerrissey and Schofer 2013; Leighley and Nagler 2007; Macdonald 2019; Rosenfeld 2010). The same applies to unions' influence on their members' attitudes (Ahlquist, Clayton, and Levi 2014; Donnelly 2015; Kim and Margalit 2016; Levi 2003). While it is difficult to disentangle the effect unions have on their members from effects stemming from selection into unions, part of the relation appears to be due to unions shaping member attitudes.<sup>9</sup> This means that the existence of unions not only impacts democratic representation by the fact that unions are an additional channel of influence for some segments of society to make their voices heard; in addition, their presence also changes what this segment of society does regarding other types of political behavior, such as voting, and it does so partly by influencing their preferences. Regardless of the notorious difficulty in disentangling the extent to which unions shape their members preferences from selection effects, this provides motivation to study union member preferences in comparison to those of non-members.

Despite this importance of looking at union member preferences, they remain understudied. This is not to say that there is no research on this topic: the work cited above is part of an emerging literature concerning union member attitudes and preferences in general. It examines attitudes towards trade (Ahlquist, Clayton, and Levi 2014; Kim and Margalit 2016) and immigration (Donnelly 2015), among others. However, despite a few exceptions (such as Mosimann and Pontusson (2017) and Lynch and Myrskylä (2009)), studies on welfare state preferences are sparse. While many studies that look at redistribution and welfare state preferences of the general population find significant and substantial associations between union membership indicators and preferences for social policies (see, for instance, Busemeyer and Garritzmann 2017; Finseraas 2009; Gingrich and Ansell 2012; Häusermann, Kurer, and Schwander 2015; Kitschelt and Rehm 2014; Rehm 2009), these are very rarely conceptually scrutinized or empirically analyzed further. For the most part, scholarship on unions in social policy assumes

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<sup>9</sup>For a critical discussion of the relative strength emphasizing the importance of selection effects see Hadziabdic and Baccaro (2020).

union member interests, without explicitly looking at what preferences union members have. In past decades, the assumption was that union members share an interest in greater redistribution and expansive social policy. More recently, this has been partly supplanted by the assumption that union members' interests lie in traditional compensatory social policies. Not only does this lack of explicit consideration risk making inaccurate assumptions about union member interests, it also neglects potential variations across country contexts, union types, and time. Given that few publications look at union member preferences concerning social policy, it is of little surprise that their preferences regarding new types of social policy, in particular SI, have also received scant attention. Expanding research on public support for SI in general (such as undertaken by Neimanns, Busemeyer, and Garritzmann (2018) and Garritzmann, Busemeyer, and Neimanns (2018)) to also take into account union members and how they differ from non-members is thus an important task.

Addressing this task is one of the aims of this dissertation: in Paper I, in collaboration with my co-author Marius Busemeyer, I study the preferences union members in different European countries have with regard to social policy. We focus in particular on the extent to which union members support the shift towards a SI model occurring in many countries. We do not have the means to isolate the extent to which preferences are causally influenced by unions; within this paper we remain agnostic in this regard – comparing union member preferences to those of non-members is important for representation regardless of whether this difference is mainly due to selection effects. Accordingly, two main contributions pertaining to the individual level are, firstly, the explicit consideration of union member preferences in general, and secondly, the focus on preferences towards SI in particular, compared to other, traditional types of social policy. These contributions are first and foremost empirical in nature, although in discussing what preferences concerning SI can be expected for union members, some new conceptual aspects are added as well.

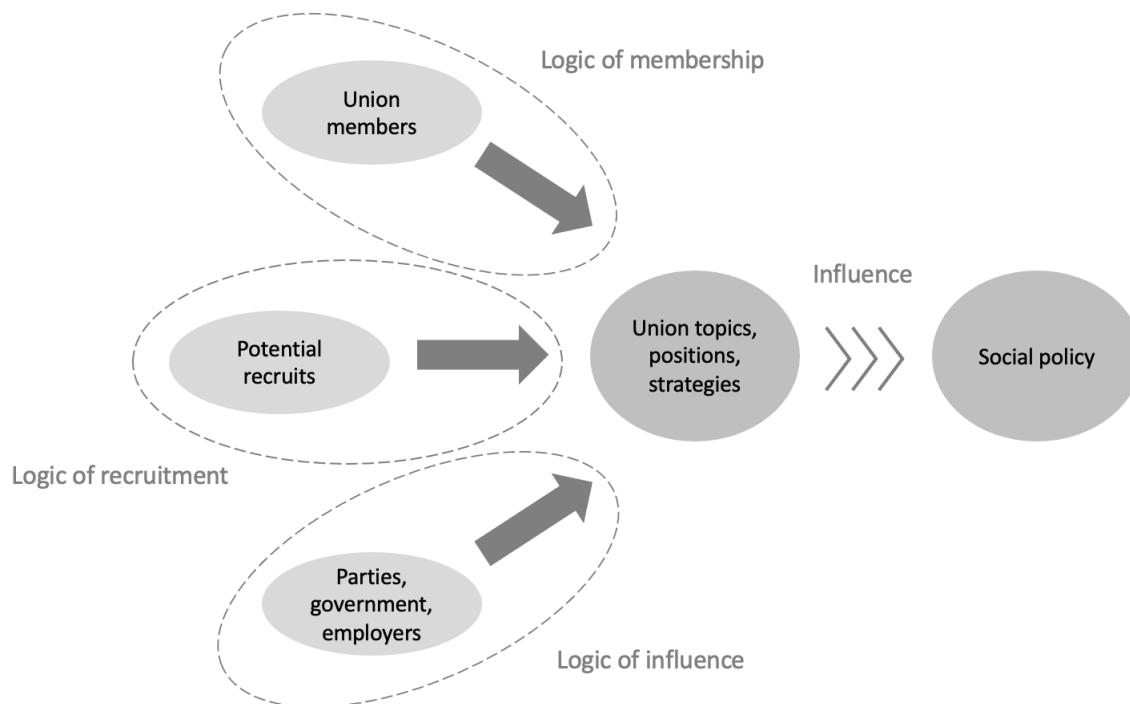
#### *Unions as strategic actors and the importance of recruitment*

For assessing the consequences of interest groups on democratic representation, as noted above, it is important to look at who is in these organizations. However, the characteristics and preferences of members are only one aspect of representation. Interest groups can represent people who are not their members and members are not the only factors that influence the positions and actions of interest groups. This also applies to unions, as described in section 1.3.2, other concerns besides membership shape union behavior as well. For one thing, internal structures of decision making and representation matter. Further, unions as organizations, i.e., in particular, professional union functionaries and the union leadership, have other goals besides keeping their members satisfied. One such additional goal is maintaining influence; this is what has been termed the logic of influence in contrast to the logic of membership (see 1.3.2). While these goals and logics have been distinguished in the literature on unions, firstly this has not been systematically considered with relation to the role as welfare state actors. Secondly, certain aspects, notably recruitment, have not received sufficient attention.

The different goals that interest organizations face have been more intensively studied for

a different type of aggregate interest association, namely parties. Strom and Müller (1999) identify three potentially conflicting goals that parties have: office, policy, and votes (p.5ff.). I argue that unions analogously have three types of goals that can come into conflict: representing their members, gaining and retaining influence, and recruiting new members. One innovation of this dissertation project as concerns determinants of union standpoints is distinguishing the third logic, which I call the logic of recruitment. Organizational power resources – density and the mobilization of members – are one of the main means of power unions rely on. This power resource does not only depend on retaining existing members, but also on the recruitment of new members. Put even more generally: unions need to recruit new members in order to survive. Because the interests of potential recruits may differ from those of existing members, the logic of recruitment needs to be distinguished from the logic of membership. The three logics are depicted in Figure 1.2.

**Figure 1.2:** Determinants of union standpoints and behavior



Explicitly identifying and analyzing the logic of recruitment is particularly important given the developments in the past decades, described in section 1.2: the labor market, the types of jobs, and the socio-economic situations people find themselves in have changed. People employed in secure full-time jobs in the industrial sector make up a declining share of employees. With regard to the welfare state, this entails new and more heterogeneous social policy interests. The changing world of work is also accompanied by changes in union membership composition. However, the membership of many unions is changing more slowly than the workforce at large. This can lead to an increased difference between the existing membership base and the pool of potential recruits. Relatedly, the pressures of renewal that unions face further motivate looking explicitly at all considerations and logics that determine union behavior.

Applying reasoning along the lines of the three logics to expected union positions and behavior in the welfare state shows that they are expected to conflict: the logic of membership leads

to the expectation of a focus on traditional social policies, at least for those unions with a strongly traditional membership base. Depending on the context, the logic of influence and the logic of recruitment provide reasons for unions to focus on other types of social policy as well. The importance of recruitment is also related to unions focusing on their standing in society in general, which may also entail appealing to social policy interests other than those that traditional members have.

The core argument here is that, in looking at unions as social policy actors, it is not sufficient to view them as mere transmission mechanisms of their members' interests. Other factors need to be considered as well, notably recruitment concerns. Conceptualizing the different objectives unions have and how these are related can help us to gain a better understanding of what unions want in the contemporary welfare state. Overall, it is important to acknowledge that unions still have room for strategic action and the different components shaping their strategies need to be considered.

The main conceptual contribution here is the consideration of recruitment as a separate logic, as well as the application of all three logics to unions' role as actors in the contemporary welfare state. Considering expectations from the three logics and studying how these play out is also related to the empirical contribution of distinguishing between unions. The logics apply to the union level: membership, recruitment and influence are goals of distinct unions. Despite the fact that many unions belong to federations and sometimes coordinate closely, their goals of survival and related matters such as membership and recruitment concerns ultimately pertain to the level of individual unions. As mentioned above, distinguishing between unions is something that has been often neglected in the classic welfare state literature, where they are usually taken to be one homogeneous actor at the country level. Of course, the level of countries is also crucial, since it captures the institutional framework within which a union operates. Studying unionisms, taking into account characteristics unions within a country share as well as common constraints they face, and comparing these to other countries helps shed light on the role of these institutions. While I do take the country level into account in considering unions as strategic actors and the different logics influencing their behavior, I focus in particular on the hitherto neglected level of unions.

#### *Studying topic salience and positions of unions*

As discussed in the previous sections, whose social policy interests are represented by unions and whose interests are excluded is very likely to depend on who tends to be organized in a union. But because other considerations also matter and unions' strategies and positions are consequently unlikely to purely reflect their members, these positions and strategies need to be studied explicitly and cannot be inferred from observing the membership composition. As noted in section 1.4.1, not only does much of the literature looking at unions as welfare state actors assume union positions and behavior to be predominantly influenced by the logic of membership, it also generally looks at outcomes rather than at positions directly. I add to this literature by focusing on positions and strategies directly – this constitutes an important contribution of this dissertation. Positions is meant here as including both whether an issue

is supported or not, as well as how important an issue is. I study both of these components. In Figure 1.2 this is visualized as a focus on the middle field, i.e., union topics, positions and strategies. In contrast to other research, I do not look at the rightmost part of the Figure, the influence on social policy.<sup>10</sup>

Studying the relative importance, i.e., the salience, of different types of social policy as well as social policy compared to other issues is important, because these should be understood as ‘valence issues’ (Stokes 1963) for unions. Unions are unlikely to voice direct opposition to any type of social policy. Instead, not being particularly supportive of a social policy is more likely to manifest itself via low salience. Saliency theory has been applied mostly to party competition (Budge 2015; Dolezal et al. 2014). However, I believe that it can be useful for studying the focus of unions on issues pertaining to different types of social policy and a focus on the welfare state compared to a focus on more narrow labor market matters. In order to do so, differences and similarities between parties and unions and the respective types of competition they face need to be considered, which I do in Paper II. Accordingly, a further contribution made in this dissertation is the conceptual application of saliency theory to labor unions and an empirical study of the salience of SI policies, compared to compensatory policies, and a general welfare state focus, compared to a narrower labor market focus.

Further, when studying the role of unions in the welfare state, recent literature has mostly focused on union behavior concerning specific policies and their involvement in particular policy reforms. Instead of studying the stance of unions toward individual policies, I try to gauge their more general positions and strategies. I therefore examine multiple related policy fields simultaneously and partly also attempt to determine the position with regard to policy types as a whole (SI and compensatory policy, subsequently also CP).

### 1.4.2 Methodological approach: mixed methods

The main research question of this work is what unions want in the contemporary welfare state. This entails the following more specific research questions: What goals and policy standpoints do unions have with regard to the welfare state and new social policy trends? What preferences do their members have? How do members shape union positions, compared to other factors? These questions pertain to the different levels discussed above and partly involve quite complex phenomena. Moreover, research studying unions encounters a range of challenges, such as a lack of data that distinguishes between unions. Researchers often face the choice of employing either a relatively general conceptualization of unions and union members, thus obfuscating important variation, or engaging in in-depth case studies, which provide valuable insights, but are limited when it comes to more general tendencies. I address these challenges by employing a multi-method approach, consisting of both quantitative as well as qualitative methods. The range of different methods used allows me to analyze the main questions from different perspectives. Shortcomings in one method are thus to some degree addressed by the other methodological

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<sup>10</sup>I further do not look in depth at feedback effects. These are omitted in the figure for the sake of clarity; they would be displayed as arrows leading from social policy to all four other items. I do take into account the importance of SI in the policy discourse within countries, but a more detailed investigation into the role of feedback effects for union members and unions is left to further research.

approaches.

The main object of concern with regard to which I study unions in this dissertation project is the contemporary welfare state and traditional compensatory social policies as compared to social investment policies, in particular. These policy types are operationalized somewhat differently across papers, but generally involve certain policies that are seen as paradigmatic of one type or the other. In the case of traditional compensatory policies, this is first and foremost pension policy, but also certain types of unemployment policy. As concerns social investment this is active labor market policy, different types of education, and child care. Paper II adds a distinction between different types of social investment, distinguishing between directly labor market related and more general variants. Paper III also attempts to gauge union positions with regard to the concepts of traditional compensatory policy and social investment directly.<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned above, three levels are important in studying the core questions of this paper: the level of individuals, i.e., union members, the level of unions, and the level of union movements, i.e., the country level. The first Paper addresses the level of union members. It also adopts a comparative perspective, by examining union members in multiple countries. In order to investigate the preferences of union members with regard to social policy, my co-author and I conduct quantitative analyses of survey data. The data set chosen is the INVEDUC data, from a survey conducted in 2014 in eight European countries<sup>12</sup> (Busemeyer, Garritzmann, et al. 2018). Unlike most existing survey data, this data set includes a battery of questions that allow for distinguishing support for SI and support for compensatory policy. It also includes an indicator for whether someone is a union member, as well as a comprehensive set of control variables. Like almost all available survey data, it does not ask which union an individual belongs to, thus we cannot distinguish between the preferences of members from different unions. Moreover, the data does not allow for causal identification strategies, thus we cannot distinguish between the extent to which member preferences are shaped by unions compared to the extent due to selection. Yet, as is argued in Paper I, examining the relation between union membership and social policy support is important, irrespective of what amount of the relation is due to causal effects.

In Paper II, I turn to the level of unions. In this paper the focus is on Germany, comparing the salience of social policy related topics across four major unions. As mentioned in the previous section, one important contribution of this dissertation project is to examine union standpoints directly, rather than policy output or reform outcomes. Further, this project aims at looking at the general standpoints with regard to different kinds of social policy. Getting at such general union positions is tricky, since single statements by union leaders cannot necessarily be taken as representative of a more general position. In Paper II I use a method that has a long history in party research (Budge 2015): the analysis of political text. Union publications are one possible way of getting at the more general positions. It does not suffice to look at publications at one single point in time, however, since this will provide a snapshot, which is likely to be influenced by what topic is currently debated in a country and potentially by seasonal developments. The publications should therefore cover at least more than one year. Surveying a sufficient number

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<sup>11</sup>As described below, the methodology used in Paper III consists of expert interviews. This allows to probe for such abstract and complex concepts directly, though of course this is done in conjunction with other questions.

<sup>12</sup>Sweden, Denmark, Germany, France, the UK, Ireland, Spain, and Italy

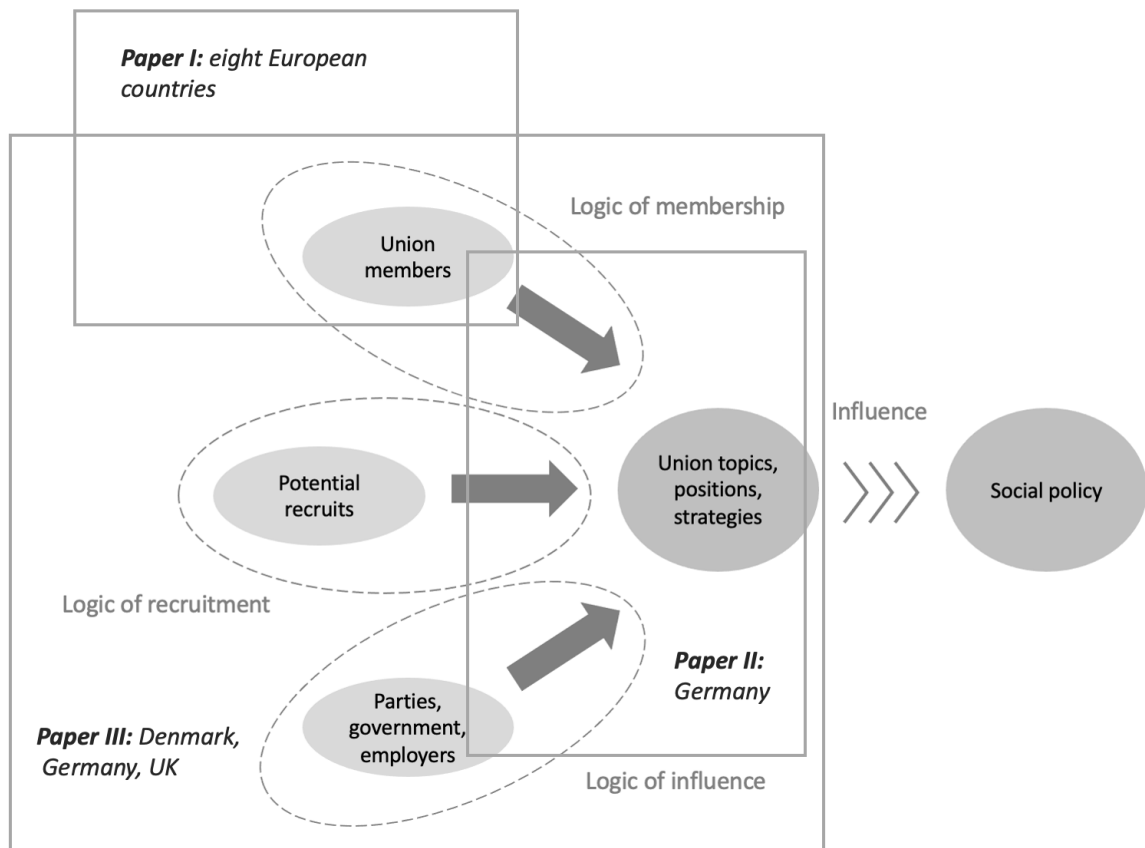
of publications to get a general picture across different unions and across multiple years can be very time consuming. In order for this to be feasible I use quantitative text analysis (QTA). To my knowledge QTA has been rarely applied to the study of interest group texts so far. An important exception here is Klüver (2009), who studies interest groups in European Union policy making and compares different types of QTA to hand coding. Her results show that QTA works well and can be a useful and resource efficient tool. In a first step I construct a large corpus of (monthly) union membership newspaper articles from 2012 to 2018. I then apply a combination of dictionary methods and supervised learning to categorize these texts into predefined categories. I take the relative frequency of these categories as a measure of topic salience, indicating how salient different kinds of SI are, compared to compensatory policy and labor market topics.

While Paper I examines what union members want from the welfare state and Paper II looks at the salience of different social policy related topics among unions, Paper III seeks to look at the positions as well as the strategies and logics behind these more directly. Strategic decisions of unions and union leadership are relatively complex and unlikely to be easily observable;<sup>13</sup> they will not necessarily be displayed in union statements or publications themselves. Moreover, since different logics can lead to similar outcomes in terms of positions in some contexts, it does not suffice to look at the positions if we have an interest in the underlying strategies as well. I therefore use a case study approach, which is well suited for studying this type of complex phenomena (Strom and Müller 1999, p.28; Häusermann 2018). More specifically, I conduct semi-structured expert interviews with union officials in three countries, Germany, Denmark, and the UK. In addition, I examine union press releases in order to cross-check insights gained in the interviews.

With Paper I investigating the preferences of union members in multiple countries, Paper II and III add the perspective on the level of unions. The method used in Paper II has the advantage of being able to process a large amount of text, thus allowing topic salience to be captured across multiple years. However, it has the disadvantage of disregarding the comparative perspective, since it is only applied to Germany. Moreover, it can only indirectly capture what logics may be at work, by looking at which patterns of salience they are expected to give rise to. Paper III is complementary to Paper II, firstly, because it takes the comparative aspect into account. This is crucial, since unions in different countries not only face differing constraints but, relatedly, how they define their problems and their priorities differs, as does the social policy context. Secondly, the method employed in Paper III is able to capture strategies and underlying logics somewhat better. Together, the diverse methods used in the three papers contribute in fruitful ways to shedding some light on what union members and unions want in the current welfare state, and whose interests unions tend to represent.

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<sup>13</sup>For similar challenges encountered when looking at conflicting party goals see Strom and Müller (1999).

**Figure 1.3:** Conceptual and empirical focus of the three papers

### 1.4.3 Summary of the three papers

*Paper I: Lukewarm or enthusiastic supporters? Exploring unions member attitudes towards social investment and compensatory policy*

In Paper I, which is co-authored with Marius Busemeyer, we focus on union members: using a recent representative survey, the ‘Investing in Education in Europe’ (INVEDUC) survey (Busemeyer, Garritzmann, et al. 2018), we investigate how union member attitudes toward social investment and classic compensatory policy differ from those of non-members. The survey was conducted in eight countries: Denmark, Sweden, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. This allows us to adopt a comparative perspective, covering countries belonging to the different varieties of welfare state regimes in Western and Northern Europe. Figure 1.3 depicts this focus of Paper I in the upper left corner.

On average, union members tend to differ in their characteristics, socio-economic as well as ideational, from non-members. This may well lead to them also displaying different social policy attitudes. Moreover, unions potentially shape the attitudes of their members, providing an additional reason to study these differences. Given typical union member characteristics, we expect union members to support generous pension policies as well as other compensatory policies, such as status-preserving unemployment benefits. Concerning SI policies, such as, for example, early childhood education and active labor market policies, the expectation is

somewhat more ambiguous. Typical union members are not the primary beneficiaries of SI policies. This should affect support, particularly in the context of budgetary pressures, when the trade-off between different types of policies is clearest. Yet SI policies can be expected to have redistributive effects in the long run (though this depends on the specific design) and are at least partially in line with union member interests. In sum, we expect union members to support SI, but less strongly and in a more reluctant, less enthusiastic way than they support CP. We further argue that members in public sector unions should support SI more strongly than private sector union members. We expect this because they tend to be in more privileged labor market positions and, since many are employed in the public sector and work in the provision of welfare and education, they have a direct material interest in SI.

We explore our expectations empirically as follows. The survey contains several items that jointly, through the use of factor analysis, yield measures of SI support and compensatory policy support. Using these composite variables as our main dependent variables, we conduct regression analysis, applying logit models. We find that union membership is more strongly and robustly associated with compensatory policy support than it is with support for SI policy. Nevertheless, union members do also tend to support SI policy somewhat more than non-members. Hence our evidence suggests that unions are lukewarm but not passionate SI supporters. When disaggregating the dependent variables, we find that union members are particularly supportive of types of SI policy that pertain directly to the labor market, such as labor market training. The average marginal effect of union membership is sizeable: for example, the likelihood of supporting opportunities for the unemployed increases by 5.2 percentage points if someone is a union member – almost as much as if someone is unemployed. In the case of education spending, being a union member increases the likelihood of support by 4 percentage points on average. This is more than having a child in the household increases support. Contrary to our expectations, we find no significant difference between private sector and public sector union members. The pattern across countries largely backs our general results; in addition, the association between union membership and compensatory policy is particularly strong in the continental corporatist welfare state regime countries.

Our findings imply that, while union members are unlikely to be the active forefront of a campaign for more SI, they are not opposed (as they are with regard to workfare) but rather tend to be supportive. As Garritzmann, Busemeyer, and Neimanns (2018) show, SI is popular among large parts of society. This appears to also be the case for union members. For unions as organizations this indicates that focusing on SI policies may be a beneficial strategy: both potential recruits as well as existing members are likely to have positive attitudes towards SI. Despite this, the most strongly supported social policy type among union members remains traditional compensatory policy.

*Paper II: Exploring topic salience among labor unions using textual data: social investment, compensatory policy, and the labor market*

In Paper I we found that union members support SI as well as compensatory policy, albeit the latter more strongly. In Paper II, I shift to the level of unions and study to what extent

unions focus on SI, compared to more traditional social policy fields. I further examine to what extent unions focus on social policy topics, compared to more directly labor market related issues. The combination of these two dimensions of relative focus yields four areas unions can potentially emphasize: general SI (SI1), labor market related SI (SI2), traditional labor market issues (LM), and traditional compensatory policies (CP). I argue that the relative focus accorded to these areas is influenced by three competing logics: the logic of membership, the logic of influence, and the logic of recruitment. Arguing from these logics, I derive exploratory expectations. While I do not study the logics directly in this paper, examining the patterns of salience of the topics and how they have changed over the past years can provide some indication of underlying logics and strategies. Applying saliency theory to unions' policy focus is appropriate; since the topics studied are 'valence' issues from a union perspective, outright opposition to any kind of social policy is not to be expected.

In order to study the topic salience of the four areas, I analyze union publications, namely union membership newspapers. Looking at political text is a useful way of studying general standpoints and in particular salience, because it can easily measure frequency of topics. Analyzing text further makes it possible to study salience in past periods and across multiple years, in a way not possible through interviews or surveys (Laver, Benoit, et al. 2003; Laver and Garry 2000). The type of text chosen, union membership newspapers, is likely to capture how unions want to be seen in a relatively comprehensive way. Unlike press releases the newspapers are published regularly and not in response to policy reforms. Given that they are geared predominantly towards union members, they may in particular reflect how unions want to be seen by their members. While this is a potential bias, it also presents a strong test case for other logics being at work. Specifically, I employ quantitative text analysis. Making use of automated content analysis methods allows me to analyze a large corpus, consisting of newspaper articles from four unions in Germany spanning multiple years (2012 – 2018). The unions are GEW (Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft), IG BCE (Industriegewerkschaft Bergbau, Chemie, Energie), IG Metall (Industriegewerkschaft Metall), and Verdi (Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft).

Examining general saliency patterns, I find that LM is by far the most salient area, while SI1 is the least salient. Concerning developments over the years, there is an increase in the salience of SI2 and CP. There appears to be an increased focus on SI, yet specifically on those SI policies that are directly labor market related, such as (re-)training. At the same time, the saliency of traditional, 'old' social policies, CP, has increased as well. I further find that salience of the four areas differs considerably across unions. For IG Metall and Verdi LM and CP are the most salient areas, while IG BCE exhibits a clear focus on the narrow labor market areas, spanning both LM as well as SI2. As is to be expected, the GEW, a union with a large base in education, focuses much more heavily on SI1 than the other unions.

That union focus is found to differ, underlines the importance of studying union standpoints explicitly and differentiating between unions. The increase in saliency of labor market related SI policies potentially signals union adaptation to corresponding shifts in the welfare state. Yet simultaneously CP has also become more salient. While this focus on traditional social policy could be read as a lack of adaptation, it also suggests a different kind of response to changes

in the welfare state, namely a reaction to traditional policies coming under threat.

The focus of Paper II on union standpoints of unions in Germany and to some extent on the underlying logics is depicted at the center of Figure 1.3.

*Paper III: Whose interests do unions represent in today's welfare state? Investigating social policy positions of labor unions*

In Paper III I again focus on the level of unions, but, as depicted in Figure 1.3, I add a comparative perspective: I study unions in three countries, Denmark, Germany, and the UK. In the current welfare state literature many scholars take unions to be increasingly narrow interest groups representing traditional social policy interests. Yet, to the extent that this claim is empirically explored, it does not receive unambiguous support. In this paper I explore the question what social policies unions focus on and what reasoning lies behind this focus. This sheds some light on whose interests they try to cater to and whom they represent. My aim in Paper III builds on Paper II in studying the focus on different policy types including SI and compensatory policies, but adds to it by explicitly studying prioritization and by attempting to study the reasoning behind the policy emphases. It thus tries to get at the underlying logics more directly (as also illustrated in Figure 1.3). To this end my choice of method is semi-structured elite interviews, which were conducted with representatives of the largest unions in the three countries. I further use press releases to probe the insights gained from the interviews.

My results show that policy focus differs across countries: while education has the highest priority in Denmark, in Germany it is pensions; in the UK, a clear priority failed to emerge. Moreover, unions do not seem to be unambiguous representatives of traditional, compensatory social policy interests: they also accord importance to SI. In all three countries, policies belonging to SI were seen as being of considerable importance alongside traditional compensatory policies; in Denmark SI was seen as having the highest priority. In the interviews it further emerged that, to the extent that there is a focus on compensatory policy, this is not taken as catering primarily to privileged interests. Rather, it is seen or framed as a safety net also protecting the less well-off, which needs to be ensured before focusing on the 'luxury' of SI. This framing is lent plausibility by the fact that those unions whose membership tends to be in somewhat more privileged employment positions accord SI a higher importance, while other unions stress the priority of CP more. In sum, the results concerning policy emphasis provide evidence for unions positioning themselves as supportive of both compensatory and social investment policy – but more strongly so with regard to the former, though Denmark is a partial exception. With regard to underlying reasoning, I find that while the logic of membership is at work, unions are not mere transmission mechanisms of their members. It emerges that union representatives also attempt to shape their member's attitudes towards social policies, such as life-long education. Other logics matter as well. In particular, the pool of recruits is perceived as differing from existing members and as influencing the focus of unions. Considering the logic of influence and comparing the results across countries, the UK emerges as a somewhat distinct case, in that there is no clear focus, neither on SI nor on CP. In Germany the focus on

CP is clearest, which is expected given the involvement in traditional social policy of German unions. In Denmark there is the general tendency of a focus on SI.

The insights gained from this paper have implications for the study of unions as actors in the contemporary welfare state. They should not be conceptualized as a homogeneous set of narrow interest groups, without explicit exploration of specific unions' actual policy emphases and goals. The diversity of factors influencing what unions want and how they act in the welfare state needs to be considered. The findings further imply that unions may join coalitions supporting expansion of SI policies, in particular if SI is understood as a complement rather than a substitute to traditional compensatory policies.



## Chapter 2

### Paper I

# Lukewarm or enthusiastic supporters? Exploring unions member attitudes towards social investment and compensatory policy

Nona Bledow and Marius R. Busemeyer

#### **Abstract**

Although social investment has become an increasingly important topic in the welfare policy discourse, reform efforts are stalling in many contexts. We examine whether labour unions and their members may be one factor contributing to the varying implementation across countries. In particular, we focus on the difference in the policy attitudes of union members and non-members. Using a new comparative survey, we investigate how union member attitudes toward social investment and classic compensatory policy differ from those of non-members, and how these differences vary across countries. We find that union members appear to be lukewarm supporters: even though union members are generally supportive of social investment policies, they tend to support compensatory policies even more. We also find cross-national variation in these associations, for which we provide some tentative explanations.

## 2.1 Introduction

In recent years, political support for the transformation of European welfare states from a traditional, transfer-oriented model towards a more activating, future-oriented social investment model has been growing across countries (Bonoli 2013; Busemeyer, Porte, et al. 2018; Garritzmann, Busemeyer, and Neimanns 2018; Hemerijck 2018; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012). However, when it comes to concrete reform efforts, the transition from the traditional towards the social investment welfare state has often met political resistance (Nikolai 2012; Porte and Jacobsson 2012). In this paper, we explore the question whether labor unions and their members, in particular, might be one factor contributing to the varying political success of the social investment welfare state across countries. Unions have historically played a crucial role in the construction and expansion of the welfare state (e.g. Calmfors et al. 2001; Esping-Andersen 1990). Given their attachment to the traditional welfare state, unions and their members might be less inclined to support the full-scale transformation towards the social investment model.

In spite of declining membership across the board during the last decades, unions still represent a sizeable number of citizens and thus remain a potentially important actor in the politics of the welfare state. As unions are generally voluntary and democratic membership organizations, one important factor influencing union positions and their behavior are the preferences of their members. Therefore, in this paper, we study to what extent union membership is associated with support for social investment policies on the one hand or rather more traditional compensatory policies on the other. While research on unions and the welfare state in the past is abundant (see below), there is little research focusing on their current role in the politics of welfare state reform, in particular with regard to the question whether they support the turn towards the social investment welfare state or whether they rather defend the traditional, transfer-oriented model.

This paper contributes to filling this gap by addressing two specific research questions. Firstly, we ask to what extent the attitudes of union members and non-members differ with regard to support for compensatory and social investment policy. Secondly, we study how the association between union membership and support for different kinds of social policies varies across countries as well as union types (private and public sector unions). We address these questions by analyzing data from the INVEDUC survey (Busemeyer, Garritzmann, et al. 2018) – a representative survey of public opinion on education and social investment policies, conducted in eight European countries in 2014. In contrast to other comparative social surveys, this survey has the advantage of including a battery of questions explicitly aimed at capturing social investment and compensatory welfare policy attitudes, thus providing us with a much more encompassing measure of support for social investment than previously available.

Our main results suggest that union members are rather “lukewarm supporters” of the social investment model of the welfare state. On the one hand, we find evidence that union members are more supportive of social investment than non union members, controlling for a range of other factors. On the other hand, support for traditional compensatory policy is usually higher among union members than support for SI. We also find evidence for variation of the association between union membership and social investment/compensatory policy support

across countries, but this variation does not seem to follow a clear pattern, although we provide some tentative explanations.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows: we briefly review existing literature on unions and union members in the welfare state, as well as literature on union member preferences. Subsequently, we introduce and discuss our theoretical framework and our expectations with regard to union member preferences and their relation to country-contexts and union type. We go on to present the INVEDUC data set and our methodology, followed by the results and a concluding section.

## 2.2 Existing literature on unions and union members in the welfare state

The classic welfare state literature considers unions as one of the major forces in the construction and expansion of the welfare state (Brugiavini et al. 2001; Esping-Andersen 1990; Huber and Stephens 2001). In particular, power resource theory (PRT) regards strong unions as the ultimate driving force behind the expansion of the welfare state (Korpi 1983, 2006; Stephens 1979). More recent work demonstrates that systems of industrial relations remain deeply intertwined with welfare state policies and politics, indicating the continued importance of unions in social policy (Ibsen, Toubøl, and D. S. Jensen 2017; Trampusch 2007). However, scholarship in this tradition remains very much at the macro level, basically assuming a shared interest among union members for greater redistribution and equality, while neglecting potential variation in union members' preferences across union types and time.

Our paper therefore aims at developing a better understanding of the attitudes and preferences of union members regarding priorities in welfare state policy-making. Our focus is here on the question of how union members perceive the recent transformation of many welfare states towards the social investment model (Hemerijck 2018; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012). Given the wealth of scholarship on the role of unions in traditional welfare state research, there is a surprising lack of studies that explore the association between unions and social investment policies. Tepe and Vanhuyse (2013), for example, find a strong positive association between union density and public spending on active labor market policy. Similarly, Wolf and Zohlnhöfer (2009) finds a positive relationship between union powers and public education spending. Gordon (2015) shows how “inclusive unionism” is associated with both more generous unemployment insurance schemes as well as higher spending on active labor market policies. While this research indicates that unions are still a relevant actor in the welfare state, it does not provide an idea of unions' role in social investment policies more broadly conceived. Moreover, the authors do not take into account the preferences of members in their main empirical analysis, although Gordon (2015) and Tepe and Vanhuyse (2013) actually point to the importance of the micro level of preferences in their theoretical arguments.

Related to the last point, our analysis builds on and extends a small literature that studies policy preferences among union members, as compared to non-members. For instance, research shows that union membership is positively related to support for redistribution (Checchi,

Visser, and Werfhorst 2010; Mosimann and Pontusson 2017), positive views on immigration (Donnelly 2015), as well as support of trade restrictions (Kim and Margalit 2016), among other things. Using a similar research design as we do in this paper, Lynch and Myrskylä (2009) find a positive association between union membership and support for pension expenditure, which varies in strength across countries.

Regarding the nature of the association between union membership and preferences there is an ongoing debate about the direction of causality and the role of self-selection, i.e. does union membership actually change member preferences or are certain individuals with particular attitudes more likely to become union members in the first place. Most of the studies in this domain – including our own in this paper – use observational and often cross-sectional data; hence, no strong claims about causality can be made, given the limitations of this kind of data. The study by Kim and Margalit (2016) probably comes closest to a natural experiment by exploiting variation in the legal framework for joining a union across the US states, which allows them to make a causal statement about the influence of union membership on policy views. Mosimann and Pontusson (2017) also claim an effect of union membership on support for redistribution, although using observational data. In contrast, another strand of research argues the opposite, namely that subscribing to particular attitudes (egalitarian values) influences the likelihood of becoming a union member (Checchi, Visser, and Werfhorst 2010; Hadziabdic 2016). Schnabel (2013) argues that individuals with liberal, post-materialist and individualistic values, which are more prevalent among the young, seem to be less likely to become union members, which contributes to declining union membership rates over time. All in all, the literature does not present clear-cut evidence one way or another, and therefore in this paper, we adopt a pragmatic, but also conservative approach by pointing out the correlates of union membership in terms of attitudes without making strong claims about causality.

Even though the number of papers that explicitly focus on the association between union membership and preferences or attitudes is limited, quite a few researchers have included it as a control variable when investigating welfare policy or redistribution preferences more generally. While many of them find a significant positive relation between union membership and preferences for, e.g., redistribution (Checchi, Visser, and Werfhorst 2010; Finseraas 2009; Kitschelt and Rehm 2014; Rehm 2009), it is seldom analyzed further or theorized. Our paper takes up this challenge by theorizing about the potential effect of union membership on support for compensatory and social investment policies.

## **2.3 Theoretical framework**

### **2.3.1 Union members' attitudes towards social investment and compensatory policies**

Unions are intermediary associations, located between the demands of citizens, workers and individuals on the one hand and political policy-making elites on the other (Ebbinghaus and Naumann 2018b). As participants in the policy-making process, they represent their members' interests in protecting workers' rights and expanding or at least maintaining the welfare state

(Hyman 2001, p.38ff.; Schulze 2012). As partners in collective wage bargaining, they aim to influence the primary distribution of wages in the labor market (Hyman 2001, p.6ff.; Trampusch 2007). In their efforts, they need to balance the interests of their members (as well as different sub-groups in their membership) with strategic concerns of the union leadership aimed at maximizing the influence of unions in decision-making process. Even though we are aware of the complexities regarding the relationship between unions' membership base and union leadership (Baccaro and Simoni 2010), we focus in this paper on exploring the variation of social policy attitudes, comparing union members with non-members as well as members of different kinds of unions.

This is important for two reasons. First, even if the difference is exclusively due to self-selection, attitudinal differences between union members and non-members would still have political consequences as unions as intermediary organizations bundle and amplify their members interests, while non-members have a harder time getting heard in the political process. The mechanism through which welfare preferences are assumed to influence politics and policy outcomes in democracies is often via elections (cf. Persson and Tabellini 2000), yet organized interests, such as unions, present an additional channel. Unions can influence decision-making via lobbying, campaigns, corporatist decision-making structures or strikes (see, for example, Brugiavini et al. 2001; Hyman 2001, p.38ff. Kreft 2006). To the extent that unions selectively represent the interests of their members, union members thus possess an additional potential channel of influence compared to regular voters and non-members (Ebbinghaus and Naumann 2018b).

Second, if there is also a causal component to the association between union membership and welfare policy preferences there is an additional motivation for investigating these differences: Unions may then not only play a role in translating members' preferences into policies, but also actively shape and influence these preferences themselves. Unions as organizations have incentives to influence their members' attitudes and, ultimately, political behavior, in order to recruit and retain members as well as in order to wield influence, e.g. by mobilizing voters. Moreover, unions constitute social groups in which certain types of people interact and these interactions may further contribute to shaping preferences. As a social network, unions encourage norms and set social incentives for members to get involved politically. As information providers, unions (and union leaders in particular) actively try to forge a set of coherent policy preferences among members (Kim and Margalit 2016; Mosimann and Pontusson 2017).

Building on the existing literature cited above, a generic expectation is that union members should be more supportive of expansive welfare state policies compared to non-members, controlling for other individual determinants of welfare state support. Once we move beyond the above cited literature and look at a more differentiated set of welfare state attitudes, distinguishing between attitudes towards compensatory policies (CP) and social investment (SI) policies, the theoretical expectations are less clear-cut.

For CP, the association is still rather straightforward. Union members' characteristics lead them to be likely to benefit from CP, with some degree of variation depending on individual risk exposure and labor market position. Union members are typically in more or less stable employment and increasingly rather old, meaning they should profit from more generous pension policies and other social transfers related to old age. They should also be in favor of status

preserving unemployment benefits, at least to the extent that unions increasingly represent labor market insiders and middle-class workers, as is frequently claimed (e.g. C. Jensen 2013; Rueda 2007).

With regard to SI, expectations are harder to formulate. On the one hand, compared to traditional transfer policies (such as unemployment benefits and pensions), the effects of typical SI policies such as investing in early childhood education, universities or family policies on labor market outcomes are more long-term in nature and potentially less redistributive (Cantillon 2011; Pavolini and Van Lancker 2018). Furthermore, SI policies benefit predominantly younger people, families with children and women – and union members tend to be increasingly old and – on average – male, even though this differs greatly across unions and countries (Visser 2019). Moreover, in times of tight budgets, SI policies are likely to compete with CP for funding and thus more expenditure on one type of policy may come at the expense of the other (Busemeyer and Garritzmann 2017).

On the other hand, SI policies are still part and parcel of the universal welfare state model and can have significant positive effects on redistribution, at least in the long run. Furthermore, some types of SI, in particular active labor market policies and lifelong learning, are of direct material relevance for union members as well. Finally, as already argued by Boix (1998), SI policies that aim at equalizing resources on the supply-side of the labor market are more likely to withstand the pressures of globalization compared to traditional demand-side oriented transfer policies.

Further, it is important to distinguish between skill-enhancing SI policies on the one hand and workfare policies on the other, which primarily rely on work incentives that prioritize labor market participation above other goals (Bonoli 2013, p.18ff.). Concerning workfare policies, expectations for union member attitudes are quite clear: union members should tend to oppose workfare measures more than non-members since they might either be opposed to these measures for ideological reasons or directly and negatively affected by them.

In sum, our core hypothesis is that there should be a clearly positive association between union membership and support for CP, a clearly negative association between membership and support for workfare policies, and a less clear, but still positive association between membership and support for SI policies (Hypothesis 1). In short, we argue (and expect) that union members are certainly supportive of SI policies, but compared to CP, this support is rather lukewarm and less enthusiastic.

### **2.3.2 Differences across union movements and union types**

In the previous section, we developed a broad argument about the association between union membership and social preferences, independent of context. We are, of course, aware that this is a simplifying assumption and that there is a significant degree of variation in terms of country contexts as well as union types.

Starting with different union types, we explore – given the limitations of the data – the potential difference between public and private sector unions. Compared to private sector workers,

public sector employees tend to be in relatively privileged labor market positions, concerning employment security and income (Oesch 2006, p.110ff.). Furthermore, since many public sector employees work in the provision of welfare, educational and other social services, public sector union members have a direct material interest in the expansion of the welfare state, and in particular its SI pillar since this is more personnel-intensive compared to transfer policies. Hence, we expect union membership in unions in the public sector to be more strongly related to SI support than those in the private sector (Hypothesis 2).

Regarding differences of unions across countries, we focus on different characteristics of union movements and the welfare state context. The survey data used in this paper only covers eight Western European countries; hence, our cross-country analysis has to remain somewhat exploratory. In countries with strong union movements, combining high levels of union density with a high degree of centralization, union members should be less concerned about a potential trade-off between CP and SI policies since they have the political power and influence to demand both. In countries with weaker and less encompassing unions, in contrast, members could be more concerned about policies with immediate implications for the labor market, i.e. support for CP among union members should be higher than for SI policies.

To some extent, welfare state regimes, of course, go along with differences in union strength. Still, there is leeway for varying expectations, depending on the welfare state status quo. For instance, in countries, in which SI policies are already well developed, there could be less demand for a further expansion of these policies, including less demand among union members. This kind of saturation effect might be felt quicker for union members compared to non-members, since the former are hypothesized to be lukewarm supporters of SI policies, but enthusiastic supporters of CP (see above), leading them to think of SI policies as being sufficient at a lower level. Furthermore, we expect that support for CP among union members should be higher in those countries, in which unions are deeply entrenched in the administrative architecture of the welfare state, i.e. in the corporatist/conservative welfare states of Continental Europe. Overall, even though we can formulate some reasonable theoretical expectations regarding variation across countries, this issue is too complex and exploratory to be able to formulate a clear-cut hypothesis; hence, we refrain from formulating an explicit hypothesis here and approach this issue more in an exploratory manner in the analysis.

## 2.4 Empirical analysis

### 2.4.1 Data and methods

In order to investigate the research questions discussed above, data on the preferences of individuals with regard to SI and CP is needed. While several surveys include questions on specific policies that can be seen as belonging to either type, most surveys do not include questions that measure support for these two policy types more generally. The exception is the INVE-DUC survey (Busemeyer, Garritzmann, et al. 2018) which we use in this paper. The survey includes a set of questions on attitudes towards several policies (or rather policy reform proposals) which can be related to the different types of policies (social investment, compensatory

policies and workfare). It also contains a second set of questions on preferences for public spending in different areas of the welfare state, which also allows to distinguish between SI and CP spending items. The survey was conducted in 2014, in eight European countries (Sweden, Denmark, Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy) and includes a total of 8,905 observations. Further details can be found in Busemeyer, Garritzmann, et al. (2018).

Our first set of dependent variables are composite indicators for an individual's support for SI, CP and workfare policies. These indicators are constructed by conducting a factor analysis of a set of variables measuring support for different policies, based on the following question:

*“Governments and political leaders like to propose new policy reforms in order to address important social issues. Please indicate whether you would strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following reform proposals:*

- 1. Giving the unemployed more time and opportunities to improve their qualification before they are required to accept a job.*
- 2. Expanding access to early childhood education and improving its quality.*
- 3. Investing more money in university education and research at universities.*
- 4. Forcing unemployed to accept a job quickly, even if it is not as good as their previous job.*
- 5. Increasing old age pensions to a higher degree than wages.*
- 6. Lowering the statutory retirement age and facilitating early retirement.”*

Factor analysis reveals that support for different policies does indeed cluster along three dimensions: SI, CP, and workfare (WF) policies (Garritzmann, Busemeyer, and Neimanns 2018). The first three items (investing in labor market training, expanding early childcare, investing in universities) load heavily and positively on the SI factor, as expected. CP is represented by the items on increasing old age pensions (item 5) and facilitating early retirement (item 6). The workfare factor is mostly defined by strong agreement with item 4 (forcing unemployed to accept jobs), but also loads negatively on the first item (Table A.1 in the Appendix displays the Eigenvalues and the rotated factor loadings). We use the three rotated factor loadings, SI, CP, and WF, as our main dependent variables in the subsequent analyses. In order to look at differences between different types of SI and CP we also investigate models with the separate variables which underlie the composite indicator as dependent variables. In the latter case, we transform the 5-point scale of agreement into a binary indicator of agreement vs. indifference and non-agreement.

As mentioned above, we also employ a set of questions asking for spending preferences on different policy areas as dependent variables in order to probe the robustness of our findings. The wording of this question is:

*“In the following, I will name several areas of government activity. Please tell me whether you would like to see more or less government spending in each area. Keep in mind that ‘more’ or ‘much more’ might require a tax increase.”*

These areas include unemployment benefits, old age pensions, financial support for families, education, and labor market and public employment programs, which are relevant for our research question here. Responses to this question were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (much more, more, the same as now, less, much less spending). We transform this ordinal variable into a binary dummy indicating support for much more or more spending on the one hand and the same as now or less spending on the other.

Our main explanatory variable is an indicator for whether someone is a union member. Unfortunately, as almost all surveys that include a question on union membership, the survey does not ask which union or what type of union someone is a member of. In order to distinguish at least roughly between different types of unions we include an indicator for whether someone works in the public or the private sector, which is explicitly asked in the questionnaire.

Further explanatory variables are measures of material and ideological characteristics such as the respondent's age, income, employment status, whether there is a child in the household, education level, and gender. With regard to ideological predispositions, we look at general social spending preferences, and at the economic left-right dimension as well as at the social values (GAL-TAN) dimension. The latter indicators are constructed using a number of items that tap into attitudes, following the approach of Garritzmann, Busemeyer, and Neimanns (2018).

For our composite dependent variable, we run linear OLS regressions, which include country dummies in order to take into account country-specific confounders. For our other dependent variables, we estimate logit regressions, also including country dummies. To get an idea about how the relation between union membership and welfare preferences varies across countries we estimate separate regressions for the eight countries. In order to investigate the difference between public and private sector unions we include an interaction between the public sector variable and union membership.

## 2.4.2 Results

### *Union member attitudes towards social investment and compensatory policy*

Turning first to our composite dependent variables, our descriptive findings show that the overall support varies for the different policy fields: on average around 70% of respondents support SI reforms (i.e. they agree or agree strongly with the above mentioned reforms), while the support for CP is around 40% (see Figures A.2-A.4 in the Appendix). The variation between countries is markedly greater in the case of CP, SI policies are popular in all country contexts (see also Garritzmann, Busemeyer, and Neimanns 2018). Concerning the differences between union members and non-members, union members are more likely to support both SI and CP in most countries, although the variation in support across countries is stronger in the latter case. The descriptive statistics (Figures A.4 and A.5 in the Appendix) for spending preferences show a similar overall pattern. Overall, SI policies appear to garner substantially more overall support than CP, in particular in the case of expansive education policies, which are supported by large majorities. Union members tend to be more supportive of policies and

increased spending compared to non-members, although not in all cases. We next turn to regression analyses.

Table 2.1 displays the results from our main regression models with the composite dependent variables, i.e., the factor score variables for the factors SI, CP, and WF. For each dependent variable we estimate one model including our complete set of controls as well as country dummies, and one including all explanatory variables except for the ideological controls (economic left-right, GAL-TAN, general attitudes towards social spending). We do this to take into account that people may not only self-select into unions according to these characteristics, but they may also change their ideological positions as a consequence of being a union member. Given the fact that we use observational cross-sectional data, we cannot fully disentangle these effects. Nevertheless, comparing models with and without additional ideological controls at least indicates to what extent the inclusion of these variables, which are also likely to explain trade union membership to some extent, mediate the association between union membership and our core dependent variables.

First of all, we find that the association between union membership and support for SI policies is positive, but statistically insignificant. Excluding the ideological controls (reduced model) the coefficient for union membership is somewhat larger and significant at the 5% level, indicating that either there is self-selection on these variables which is now hidden in the union membership coefficient or that some of a potential effect of union membership runs through these variables. The increase in the R<sup>2</sup> from .06 to .08 in the model including the ideological controls increases our confidence that they are of importance (Oster 2017). For CP as the dependent variable the coefficient for union membership is also positive, but in this case it stays positive and significant even when ideological variables are included. Hence, as expected, the association between union membership and support for CP is stronger and more robust than in the case of SI policies. For WF, the coefficient for union membership points in the expected negative direction, and is significant at the 5% level. Without ideological controls the coefficient more than doubles and is highly significant. For all three dependent variables most of the control variables perform as expected, with the exception of age and having a child in the household for SI, with the former being positive and the latter negative.

In sum, these findings suggests that union members are indeed lukewarm supporters of SI policies. Once we control for general ideological predispositions, the positive association between union membership and support for SI disappears, whereas it remains robust and positive in the case of transfer policies and robust and negative in the case of workfare policies. Hence, a preliminary conclusion is that union membership is a more robust determinant of policy preferences in the cases of transfer policies and workfare policies compared to the case of SI.

In a next step, we disaggregate preferences across the policy fields that make up our composite indicators. Table 2.2 displays the results. In the case of SI, the models reveal a positive association between union membership and SI for all policies, but the coefficient estimate is statistically significant only in the case of support for giving the unemployment more time to get qualified. Hence, these findings indicate that union members support for SI policies is mostly focused on policies that are of immediate relevance for them (i.e. labor market training). With regard to CP, we find that union members are significantly more likely to

**Table 2.1:** Main models with composite DVs, with and without ideational controls

	SI		CP		WF	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
union member	0.030 (0.028)	0.062** (0.027)	0.090*** (0.033)	0.145*** (0.033)	-0.075** (0.034)	-0.137*** (0.034)
age	0.004*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	-0.003*** (0.001)	-0.003*** (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)
income	0.028*** (0.010)	0.019** (0.009)	-0.094*** (0.011)	-0.138*** (0.011)	0.049*** (0.012)	0.061*** (0.011)
public sector	-0.055* (0.030)	-0.051* (0.029)	0.136*** (0.035)	0.146*** (0.035)	0.048 (0.035)	-0.012 (0.036)
unemployed	0.006 (0.046)	0.033 (0.044)	0.073 (0.062)	0.076 (0.060)	-0.364*** (0.065)	-0.356*** (0.064)
social spending	0.221*** (0.024)		0.364*** (0.029)		-0.367*** (0.029)	
economic left/right	-0.030*** (0.011)		-0.113*** (0.013)		0.128*** (0.013)	
GAL-TAN	-0.073*** (0.011)		0.166*** (0.013)		0.244*** (0.013)	
education level	0.043*** (0.008)	0.055*** (0.008)	-0.079*** (0.010)	-0.108*** (0.009)	-0.028*** (0.010)	-0.067*** (0.010)
child in hh	-0.052** (0.025)	-0.063*** (0.024)	-0.045 (0.030)	-0.030 (0.030)	-0.020 (0.031)	0.003 (0.031)
female	-0.039* (0.022)	-0.039* (0.021)	0.111*** (0.026)	0.165*** (0.026)	0.058** (0.026)	0.040 (0.026)
Observations	6661	7367	6661	7367	6661	7367
Adjusted $R^2$	0.090	0.063	0.180	0.128	0.125	0.027

Standard errors in parentheses

Country dummies included (coefficients not shown)

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table 2.2:** Models disaggregated across SI and CP policy fields (full models)

	unemp. opportunities (1)	access to ECEC (2)	investing in universities (3)	increase pensions (4)	lower ret. age (5)	forcing unemp. (6)
union member	0.155** (0.067)	0.106 (0.081)	0.051 (0.079)	-0.151** (0.070)	0.433*** (0.068)	-0.042 (0.067)
age	0.015*** (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.012*** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.002)	-0.012*** (0.002)	0.011*** (0.002)
income	-0.065*** (0.023)	-0.001 (0.027)	0.042 (0.027)	-0.154*** (0.024)	-0.099*** (0.023)	0.063*** (0.023)
public sector	-0.137** (0.070)	0.059 (0.086)	-0.234*** (0.083)	0.158** (0.074)	0.238*** (0.070)	0.024 (0.070)
unemployed	0.310** (0.129)	0.092 (0.170)	0.170 (0.174)	-0.058 (0.120)	0.325** (0.131)	-0.624*** (0.121)
social spending	0.637*** (0.059)	0.573*** (0.070)	0.520*** (0.071)	0.585*** (0.060)	0.506*** (0.058)	-0.549*** (0.058)
economic left/right	-0.121*** (0.024)	-0.064** (0.030)	-0.063** (0.030)	-0.073*** (0.025)	-0.208*** (0.024)	0.213*** (0.024)
GAL-TAN	-0.192*** (0.026)	-0.038 (0.031)	-0.247*** (0.032)	0.245*** (0.027)	0.250*** (0.026)	0.436*** (0.027)
education level	-0.010 (0.020)	0.001 (0.024)	0.078*** (0.024)	-0.103*** (0.020)	-0.132*** (0.020)	-0.075*** (0.019)
child in hh	-0.085 (0.060)	-0.206*** (0.073)	0.018 (0.076)	-0.063 (0.064)	-0.057 (0.062)	-0.028 (0.060)
female	-0.182*** (0.053)	-0.061 (0.060)	-0.184*** (0.065)	0.021 (0.055)	0.208*** (0.054)	0.059 (0.053)
Observations	6888	6888	6903	6846	6881	6916
Pseudo $R^2$	0.047	0.047	0.095	0.078	0.116	0.089

Standard errors in parentheses

Country dummies included (coefficients not shown)

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

support lowering the retirement age. Somewhat counter-intuitively, union members are less likely to support increasing pensions more than wages, which may be related to the fact that this would entail a form of redistribution from current workers (who are often union members) to current pensioners (who may or may not continue to be union members). As before, union members are less likely to support workfare policies, although this effect turns insignificant once other ideological controls are included. In terms of effect size, the average marginal effect (AME, calculated for the reduced model) for being a union member on, for example, support for opportunities for the unemployed is 5.2 percentage points. In comparison, being unemployed increases the likelihood of support for this variable by 7.5 percentage points. The AME for lowering the retirement age is considerably larger: being a union member increase the likelihood of support by 10 percentage points.

Broadly speaking, the findings from regressions with the binary and disaggregated dependent variables confirm the findings using the composite factor variables from above. Overall, union members are more likely so support CP as well as those SI that directly benefit them, such as more generous labor market training policies. They are strongly opposed to policies that could hurt them (e.g. workfare policies) and rather lukewarm supporters of other SI.

The findings from our second set of DVs, the spending questions, are similar (see Tables A.4 and A.5 in the Appendix). As with the policy questions, the coefficient for union membership is positive for all three SI spending areas, and significant across the reduced and full models for education and labor market spending. In the case of education spending and labor market spending, it is statistically significant, while for family spending it is insignificant once ideological variables are included. Regarding support for education spending, the AME (calculated for the reduced model) for being a union member is 4 percentage points, which is higher than the effect associated with having a child in the household (2.4 percentage points). With regard to compensatory spending preferences, union members are significantly more supportive of both spending on unemployment and on retirement, which is broadly in line with the findings from above, where we used support for policy reforms as dependent variables.

When comparing the association between union membership and support for different types of social spending, the crucial take-away in light of our argument is to note that the association between support for typical SI policies (education investments and family policies) is weaker and less robust compared to the association between union membership and support for transfer policies, e.g. pensions and spending on unemployment. Nevertheless, union members do also support SI policies in general, hence they can be considered lukewarm supporters.

#### *Variation across union types and countries*

A major limitation of available surveys – including the data we use in this paper – is that it does not allow a more detailed distinction between members of different unions or union types. To some extent, our analysis captures the diversity of union membership via the inclusion of additional control variables. Regarding union types, we can only reliably distinguish between public and private sector unions, given data limitations. This is what we do in the next step by considering the interaction between being a union member and working in the public vs.

the private sector.

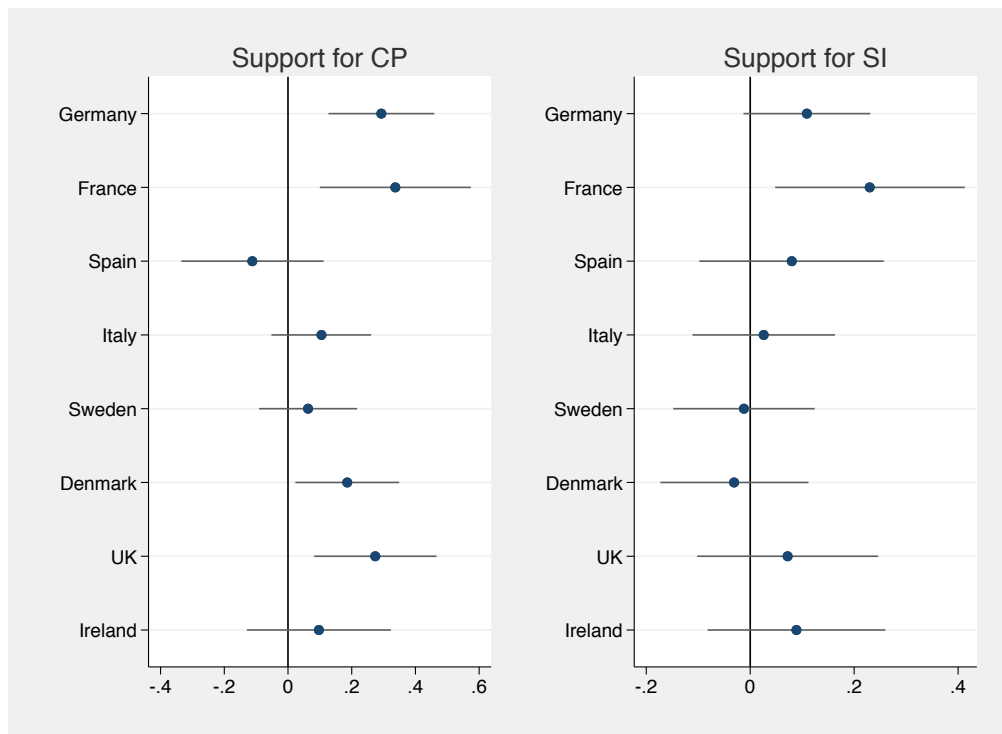
Concerning descriptive statistics, public sector union members tend to have a higher level of education, higher income, and a lower likelihood of being unemployed. They also are somewhat younger on average and more likely to be female. Including the interaction term between union membership and working in the public sector in a regression model (see Table A.3 in Appendix) of policy preferences for SI, CP and workfare policies does not yield any statistically significant results. Hence, Hypothesis 3 from above is rejected. However, this non-effect could also be due to the fact that the specific operationalization of public vs. private sector unions masks a high degree of heterogeneity within the two groups, in particular regarding private sector unions. Therefore, these non-findings should be further investigated with better measures.

Besides varying between different types of unions, the effect of union membership is likely to vary across countries. This motivates analyzing separate regressions for the eight countries included in our data set. Figure 2.1 displays the coefficients for union membership from the basic model with SI and CP applied to each country separately (Tables A.6-A.8 in the Appendix).

Looking at our first set of DVs, for most countries the findings resemble those in the main model with country fixed effects: In the case of SI, the association of union membership and the dependent variables is positive and substantial, but they are larger and significant in more cases (about half the countries) for CP. The association between union membership and the traditional compensatory model of the welfare state is particularly strong in the case of the continental European countries (Germany, France) as well as in the UK and Denmark. Potentially, this is due to the fact that unions are particularly involved in the corporatist governance structure of social insurance (with the exception of the UK). As before, the association between union membership and support for SI is less robust and less clear-cut. Coefficient estimates usually include the zero line, indicating small differences between union members and non-members in these cases. Partly this is due to the lower number of cases in individual countries and therefore less of an issue in the pooled sample used above. A partial exception is France, where support for SI is significantly higher among union members compared to non-member, although the coefficient is smaller than the one for CP. This may be due to peculiarities in French unionism (Milner and Mathers 2013): Union density is particularly low in France, hence union members tend to be concentrated in the public sector, which is associated with an exceptionally low share of working class individuals in the membership of unions (C. Jensen 2013). Hence, French union members are likely to be supportive of a general expansion of the public sector, including both the transfer pillar of the welfare (as they might be more radical in their ideological predispositions compared to union members in other countries) and the public service/SI pillar (since this is a more important source of employment for French union members compared to other countries). In general, however, these findings confirm that the association between union membership and support for social policies is stronger in the case of CP compared to SI policies, and it is particularly strong in the continental corporatist welfare state regime.

A further analysis of the association between union membership and support for different types of spending (the second set of dependent variables we use) for individual countries confirms this broad picture (Table A.9-A.16 in Appendix). The coefficients for union membership are positive

**Figure 2.1:** Coefficients of union membership across countries for SI and CP as the dependent variables



for all spending types for nearly all countries. In the case of CP, they are also significant in half the countries or more. For SI they are significant in fewer countries. Here the Nordic countries (Sweden and Denmark), Germany, and the UK show the highest consistency in the significance of union membership as a predictor of welfare state support. These analyses confirm the broad trends from above, namely that the association between union membership and support for CP is strongest in the cases of Germany – a corporatist welfare state – and the UK, where unions are weaker and therefore more likely to support welfare state expansion. In Denmark and Sweden, the association between union membership and support for SI is weak, which is probably related to the fact that SI policies are already well developed in these countries (Nikolai 2012) and there is less need for further expansion.

## 2.5 Conclusions

This paper has studied the relationship between union membership and support for social investment vs. compensatory policies. Our main finding is that union members as a group are reluctant supporters of the social investment welfare state model. They are not openly opposed (whereas they are deeply critical of workfare policies), but the link between union membership and support for compensatory policies is more robust and larger in magnitude. Furthermore, we found that union members are more likely to support those types of social investment which provide direct and concrete benefits for them, such as giving the unemployed more opportunities to get qualifications as well as spending on labor market policies. The partial exception to this trend is education spending, which is highly supported by union members as well.

In terms of variation across unions we did not find significant differences, which may be due to our indicator for public sector being insufficiently fine-grained. We did find variation across countries: while the picture that emerges is not very clear, a tendency that can be discerned is that, firstly, union membership seems to be a predictor for policy support for both social investment and compensatory policy in particular in countries with relatively strong union movements, and, secondly, in countries with extensive social investment policies there appears to be relatively less support from union members.

In political terms, we conclude that unions and their members are not hostile to the transformation of European welfare states from the traditional towards the social investment model, but they are unlikely to be at the spearhead of this development. Potentially, however, putting a strong emphasis on social investment policies could be a winning strategy for unions to recruit new members, in particular among the educated middle classes as other research has shown that social investment policies are broadly popular across different classes (Garritzmann, Busemeyer, and Neimanns 2018). Hence, in some countries, e.g. Denmark and the Netherlands, unions have started to form new coalitions with other associations or with governmental actors to implement social investment type policies, in particular continuing vocational education and training, in collective wage bargaining agreements (Ibsen, Toubøl, and D. S. Jensen 2017; Trampusch 2007). On the one hand, these kinds of strategies are likely to stabilize public and political support for unions, although, on the other hand, they might lead to a further erosion of the labor market position of outsiders and low-skilled workers.

Future research should focus on exploring the policy positions of union leaders and elites on social investment vs. compensatory policies. In this paper, we focused on the micro-level of individual attitudes and preferences. This type of analysis needs to be complemented with studies on the macro level, focusing on the role of unions in actual policy-making processes and considering how different ways of union action in the welfare state are related to the different policy types. Putting together micro- and macro-level analysis could also reveal potential tensions in the positioning of union leaders vis-a-vis their membership and would therefore provide a more encompassing analysis of the role of unions in the contemporary politics of the welfare state.

## Chapter 3

### Paper II

# Exploring topic salience among labor unions using textual data: social investment, compensatory policy, and the labor market

Nona Bledow

#### Abstract

In the context of shifting labor markets and changing welfare states, unions are often seen as forces representing traditional social policy interests and defending the status quo. Yet the actual contemporary role of unions in the welfare state is insufficiently examined. A changing role of unions can involve a change in their goals and preferences, as well as a change in their power to work towards these goals. Most existing research cannot differentiate between these two. However, in order to understand the role of unions in welfare states today, it is not sufficient to know that their influence has declined; unions still have the capacity for strategic action, making it important to study their goals and strategies. To contribute toward this end I look at union standpoints on policy directly, in particular as concerns social policy. In order to do this, I examine the topic salience of different policies in union newspaper articles of four major unions in Germany. The use of quantitative text analysis methods allows me to look at a large amount of publications, published over the period between 2012 and 2018. The results suggest that there is no clear focus of unions on traditional social policy; the policy focus differs across unions. Newer kinds of social policy, such as social investment, have increased in salience, however, only those kinds of social investment that are closely labor market related.

### 3.1 Introduction

In the past decades welfare states in industrialized societies have undergone substantial shifts, spurred by various socio-economic developments. Labor markets have become increasingly deindustrialized and geared towards a ‘knowledge society’. Along with demographic change, increasing prevalence of atypical employment and female labor market participation, this is putting pressure on welfare states (Häusermann 2010b; Hemerijck 2013; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012). In response to these challenges, various reforms and restructuring measures are on the agenda. Besides attempts to limit expenditures through retrenchment of established policies, other kinds of social policy have become increasingly important, such as activation policies, education, and more generally social investment as a policy paradigm (Hemerijck 2013; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012). In this context of changing welfare states, organized interests are frequently taken to be forces defending status quo interests and opposing reforms. Organized interests in general, and unions in particular, are seen as representing a membership that has relatively narrow interests, which are best served by preserving the status quo. However, it is far from clear to what degree this is, indeed, the role that organized interests play today (Ebbinghaus and Naumann 2018b).

The goal of this paper is to study what policies, in particular concerning social policy, unions currently focus on. Adopting a salience approach, I examine in an explorative way, firstly, to what extent unions focus on ‘new’ kinds of social policy, especially social investment, compared to ‘old’ social policy areas, how this differs across unions, and how this has developed in recent years. Secondly, I examine how salient the social policy role of unions is relative to their industrial relations and labor market role, and how this has evolved. This contributes to investigating how goals of unions differ and whether union focus has changed in recent years. It also contributes insights which are necessary, though not sufficient, for understanding what general strategies different unions adopt and what role they play in social policy today.

In the past decades, unions in Western Europe, as well as in many other country contexts, have suffered a considerable loss of influence. This means that in cases of observing a changing relationship between social policies and union presence, for example, this change may be due to their declining influence or an actual change of their preferences. Considering outputs and outcomes of reforms and relating these to measures of union strength, which is what is usually done, does not allow for differentiating between union goals and the influence they have in achieving these goals. For understanding the strategies of unions and differences between them it is, however, crucial to differentiate between these factors. Accordingly, an important step is looking at goals and policy standpoints themselves. Therefore, in this paper I study the policy standpoints of unions directly, by examining the relative issue salience accorded to different broad policy topics.<sup>1</sup>

In order to do this, I look at union newspaper articles of four major unions in Germany over the period between 2012 and 2018. Germany is an informative case to study: it is a coordinated

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<sup>1</sup>I use the term policy standpoints to encompass both whether and to what degree unions are in support or opposition of policies as well as the salience they accord to issues. As will be discussed in section 3.3.1, this paper focuses on salience. When referring to the overarching attitudes towards policies I use the term standpoint.

market economy, with unions being involved in corporatist structures, including in the realm of social policy. Unions are thus important in Germany – though they have, as elsewhere, seen a significant decline in density. The traditional welfare state was constructed to be status-preserving. Union membership remains relatively traditional, though this varies across unions. At the same time, the increasing divergence of the interests of privileged employees and newly emerging risk groups is very present, which has been a particularly acute issue for unions in the aftermath of the crisis (Dörre 2011; Dribbusch, Lehndorff, and Schulten 2017). Thus, the conditions for conflicting strategies are present, leading to potential variation in salience across unions.

Concerning the selection of unions, the largest unions in Germany are examined, because the arguments best apply to these unions, and union newspapers are consistently available for them. Using textual data rather than in depth qualitative analysis methods allows me to get a systematic gauge of issue salience of broad topics and its development over the past few years, the relative frequency of occurrence of topics providing a measure of salience and how it changes. Union newspaper articles are well suited to study general standpoints, since unions can be expected to use these to present themselves to their members in a comprehensive way. Moreover, because they are published at regular intervals, they are less reactive to specific reforms than other types of publications and therefore capture more comprehensive developments of issue salience and general social policy standpoints. While they are geared towards members, they are, nevertheless, important in the political arena, because they mirror how unions present themselves, how they aim to achieve legitimacy from their members, and partly how they try to mobilize members around issues.

The main results indicate that while labor market topics are dominant for unions, there has been a slight increase in the salience of social investment, in particular, of those aspects of social investment that are closely labor market related. Further, there is a slight increase in the intersection of labor market topics and social policy topics. For some unions the salience of traditional social policies is also increasing – this may be evidence of their attempt to defend existing welfare state structures that they perceive to be under pressure. The variation across unions indicates that while unions need to confront similar challenges to their influence, topic salience is also determined by factors that differ across unions, in particular membership and recruitment considerations. The salience pattern is partly in line with what would be expected, given membership considerations, but not fully. Overall, standpoints differ considerably across unions – there is no clear focus of unions on traditional social policy.

The subsequent discussion is structured as follows. I first describe existing literature, both classic and more recent, on unions in the social policy context, and then outline the shortcomings in this literature. In the succeeding section I lay the theoretical foundation for the latter analysis. I first argue that saliency theory can fruitfully be applied to unions. In the following subsections I introduce the two dimensions along which different kinds of social policy unions may focus on are placed and describe the different logics influencing union standpoints. Subsequently, I proceed to the empirical section: I first discuss case selection and give some context on the German case. I go on to describe the method used, data collection, and the process of constructing a dictionary. I then present the data analysis and a discussion of the

results. Finally, I come to a brief conclusion.

## 3.2 Related literature

The role of unions in the welfare state has been studied from different perspectives in various literatures, the main ones being the welfare state literature, the industrial relations literature and the literature on organized interests. In these literatures the historical role of unions in the construction and expansion of the welfare state is acknowledged and the importance of unions in this phase is largely undisputed (Brugiavini et al. 2001; Huber and Stephens 2001; Katzenstein 1984; Korpi 2006). Theoretical approaches explaining welfare state developments and variation, such as Power Resource Theory (PRT), identify unions as one major actor of the labor movement, through which the working class can increase its power resources and push for the expansion of the welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990; Huber and Stephens 2001; Korpi 1983, 2006). Neo-corporatist and organized interest scholars similarly see an important role of unions in expanding social rights and working towards increasing the different components of the ‘social wage’ (Avdagic, Rhodes, and Visser 2011; Brugiavini et al. 2001; Busemeyer 2020; Hyman 2001; Katzenstein 1984; Rhodes 2001).

Yet with regard to recent welfare state developments, the role of unions is much more ambiguous. Some scholars argue that unions are focusing on new kinds of policies and addressing issues in novel ways to some extent, through evolving social pacts (Rhodes 2001), through shifting social policy issues to the bargaining realm (Trampusch 2006, 2007) or through supporting government intervention, for example, through a minimum wage (B. Meyer 2016). Most strands of the literature, however, claim that unions today primarily defend traditional social policies and established social rights and tend to block reforms (cf. Dörre 2011; Ebbinghaus and Naumann 2018b; Streeck and Hassel 2003a). Relatedly, unions are seen as representing predominantly those people who are well protected by the traditional social policies and in relatively secure labor market positions, often termed insiders. Dualization theorists, for example, treat unions as “virtually synonymous” (Gordon 2015, p.84) with insiders, arguing that they represent predominantly insider interests and that they consent to reforms that protect these insiders, even at the cost of hurting the less privileged outsiders (Davidsson and Emmenegger 2012, 2013; Rueda 2007).

While this is the dominant view in the literature, the role and attitudes of unions in the context of dualization remain ambiguous (Eichhorst and Marx 2011). As Ebbinghaus and Naumann (2018b) observe, there is too little investigation of when and to what extent organized interests and unions, in particular, indeed promote traditional policies and oppose reforms geared towards newer policies – frequently this is assumed rather than shown. Moreover, unions do have space for strategic choices, they are likely to anticipate societal developments and may react in different ways (Busemeyer 2020; Haipeter 2011). Thus, the extent to which unions today are indeed reform blockers and representatives of traditional social policy interests remains unclear. Further, this may vary substantially across unions. Yet in much of the literature mentioned, unions are viewed as a homogeneous actor (this criticism is also raised by Pontusson (2013) and Becher and Pontusson (2011), among others). Accordingly, a first

contribution of this paper is empirically studying what policies different unions are focusing on.

This general gap in the literature can be specified further; there are two aspects lacking, in particular, which this paper tries to address. Firstly, the focus of unions and the policy standpoints they take are generally not looked at directly. PRT has influence at its center and does not consider goals and policy standpoints explicitly. Dualization arguments, in contrast, are more focused on the goals and policy standpoints unions promote. Yet the claim that unions adopt policy standpoints that primarily cater to traditional social policy and, more generally, insider interests is for the most part simply assumed, without explicitly investigating these standpoints. Moreover, both PRT and dualization theory largely base their argumentation on a membership logic, implicitly arguing that unions are mostly a transmission mechanism for their members' interests, without allowing room for strategic agency on the part of unions as organizations themselves. In sum, most recent studies on the role of unions in the welfare state look at union behavior and outcomes of, e.g., reform processes, rather than looking at goals and policy standpoints directly (e.g. Gordon 2015; Häusermann 2010a; Naczyk and Seeleib-Kaiser 2015; Tepe and Vanhuysse 2010). In the literature on organized interests, the policy standpoints and strategies of such groups and the question of which logics influence these are considered more frequently, but unions are generally treated as one type among multiple types of interest groups (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Buss and Bender 2018; Gilens and Page 2014; Klitzke 2018; Naczyk 2013). While providing important insights about the relative policy standpoints and influence of unions, this fails to fully capture the particularities of unions as organized interest associations (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980).

Overall, the existing literature falls short of giving a systematic picture of the goals and standpoints of unions regarding the welfare state and of their development. In order to go beyond assuming unions to be a mere transmission mechanism of their members' interests and studying union agency, union goals and policy standpoints need to be looked at explicitly. In order to get an idea what stance different unions actually take towards welfare policy, why they do this, and how this is changing, it is insufficient to look at outcomes, since changes in goals do not necessarily translate into outcomes, at least not quickly. Trying to explore goals and standpoints directly rather than inferring them from outcomes allows for distinguishing between power and influence on the one hand, and goals and strategies on the other hand. The need to differentiate between unions' policy standpoints and goals, on the one hand, and the success they have in achieving their goals, on the other hand, is particularly acute given the challenges to union strength and influence. It can further help shed light on differences in the strategic approaches distinct unions take with regard to these challenges, going beyond the assumption of unions as homogeneous actors.

A second aspect of the gap in the existing literature is a lack of looking at *general* union policy standpoints and goals concerning social policy. Instead, most of those few studies that look at positions directly look at the standpoints unions take towards specific policy or reform proposals (Buss and Bender 2018; Häusermann 2010b; B. Meyer 2016), with a partial exception being Durazzi and Lee (2018). Similarly, studies that do not directly look at positions but focus on reform processes, outcomes, or the role of unions more generally also look at relatively specific

contexts and particular policies (Gordon 2015; Weßels 2007). However, in order to gain an idea of union strategies, broader standpoints of different unions also need to be considered. The more general role of unions in the welfare state is mostly discussed in the debate on the overall decline of union influence. This decline is observed in the social policy sphere as well (Dörre 2011; Streeck and Hassel 2003b). However, it is rarely explicitly considered what this decline means in terms of changes in general standpoints with regard to social policy and the role of unions as a welfare state actor. Considerations of how these broad positions differ across unions are even rarer. By looking at the salience of general standpoints towards social policy, this paper aims to contribute to addressing this gap.

To summarize, this paper wants to add to the literature by considering explicitly what standpoints unions actually focus on in social policy today, how these differ across different unions and how they have changed over the past few years. This provides necessary evidence for considering to what extent unions predominantly focus on traditional social policy interests, to what extent they block reforms and how unions' social policy role is evolving in line with developments in the welfare state. Two specific gaps in the literature are addressed. Firstly, there is a lack of research focusing explicitly on the *goals* and *policy standpoints* of unions rather than outcomes and influence. Secondly, there is a shortage in studies on what *general* standpoints different unions take with regard to the welfare state today and how this has developed. Going beyond union involvement in specific policies and getting an idea of general union goals and strategies is, however, important in order to understand to what extent unions have adapted to welfare state developments, whose interests are represented by which unions in the welfare state today, what new kinds of social policies they are likely to support, and which coalitions they will possibly be part of.

### **3.3 Changing welfare states and unions' expected policy focus**

#### **3.3.1 Applying saliency theory to unions**

The aim of this paper is to investigate contemporary general union goals and standpoints concerning social policy, how these differ across unions, and how they have evolved over the last decade. There are different possible ways of looking at unions' goals and standpoints. Firstly, one can look at their position on a dimension with regard to a particular issue, i.e., to what degree unions are in favor or against a specific policy. A second way is to look not at opposition or support, but rather at how salient a union makes an issue. The saliency approach stems from the literature on political parties and has been discussed in depth in the context of party competition and policy congruence between voters and parties. Saliency theory was developed partly as an alternative, partly as an addition to positional concepts and spatial theories of party competition (Budge 2015; Dolezal et al. 2014). There is no conclusive evidence on which of the two theories is more important; both appear to matter (Dolezal et al. 2014). The main argument of saliency theory is that in elections, and in particular in election manifestos, parties do not compete by taking different positions on one issue, but by selectively emphasizing different issues. Proponents of the original theory argue that parties rarely talk

about the opposition in election campaigns and that instead of giving distinct answers on one issue, they try to guide attention to certain issues, namely those where they think they have an advantage from the perspective of voters. These are issues that they are perceived to be competent in or those that are linked to their general ideological profile – this is captured by the concepts of ‘issue ownership’ or ‘issue linkage’ (Budge 1982, 2015; Dolezal et al. 2014).

Salience has been looked at from the perspective of individual voters and of parties (Budge 1982; Dennison 2019; Dolezal et al. 2014). Yet the extent to which it has been applied to other collective actors is limited, and, to my knowledge, it has so far not been applied to labor unions. Studying the positions of unions, i.e., the degree of support for or opposition to an issue, undoubtedly provides valuable insights. However, in the context of looking at general welfare policy standpoints, it seems more probable that unions will vary in how salient they make some policies and policy fields rather than others. Unions are unlikely to oppose most kinds of social policy; thus, standpoints are more likely to vary (both between unions and across years) with respect to the importance they accord to policies. Concerning unions' focus on their welfare state role relative to their industrial relations role, the emphasis of one or the other is clearly the concept that fits better, since they will not be opposed in any meaningful sense to either role.

Salience is conceptualized as a relative concept, i.e., which issues are selectively emphasized how much, relative to other issues (Dennison 2019). But it is also mostly used as a relative concept in the sense of different issues being emphasized more by one party than by another; this is how saliency theory is used in party competition studies (Dennison 2019; Dolezal et al. 2014). In the case of unions, competition is less straightforward. Unions do not compete in an electoral arena. Nevertheless, they do to some extent compete among each other for members, yet there is likely to be much less intense competition than in the case of parties. Since unions specialize more on fixed specific constituencies, it is much less of a zero-sum-game in that for unions it is more about gaining members from the pool of non-union members than ‘converting’ members from a different union. Unions tend to work together quite a bit and understand each other as ‘on one side’ with regard to most issues. However, they do compete on a more general level: they compete with ‘opposition groups’, i.e., employer associations and policy makers, and they compete for the attention of people, in particular against them not paying attention to issues and not joining unions.

Comparing salience to positions, i.e., support or opposition, it helps to keep these different types of competition in mind. Concerning competition among unions, it is likely that they have similar positions on most dimensions (although not all), and that the differences among them express themselves more in different strategic emphases, i.e., salience. I expect this to apply in the area of welfare policy in particular, since it is likely to be a ‘valence issue’ (Stokes 1963): it cannot plausibly be construed as an issue on a dimension with ‘pro’ and ‘contra’ ends, as most unions will not be overtly against any type of social policy.

Looking at the competition with the opposition, they are likely to take different positions than the opposition on several dimensions, but not on all. For example, unions and employers are unlikely to disagree on the goal of having skilled employees, although they may disagree on how to achieve this. Further, considering how unions change their stance, also compared to

that of the opposition, this is likely that they rather change emphasis than changing general positions, because it is less likely to be seen as a shift away from a unions' identity. They do change positions on specific policies, as happened in the case of the minimum wage in Germany, for example, where the unions shifted from opposition to support (B. Meyer 2016; Weishaupt 2018). But this type of change is rather a change in means to achieve a goal, than a fundamental change of goals.

The third type of 'competition' is not competition in a usual sense; it simply describes the goal of persuading people to pay attention and join a union. Unions need to attract new recruits, while retaining old ones. Again, it seems likely that unions will not change their stance on policies greatly in terms of opposition or support, but rather in terms of emphasis. Overall, saliency is a promising concept for studying union general standpoints and goals concerning social policy.

### 3.3.2 Social policy topics in union discourse

As discussed in the previous section this paper examines how the topic salience of social policy topics varies across unions and how it has developed in recent years. When considering union strategies and which topics are salient for unions, social policy is one important aspect to look at. This is firstly the case, because besides their role as industrial relations actors, unions are also welfare state actors in the political arena. Secondly, given the developments in welfare policy-making in many countries, in particular the increasing priority of social investment, unions need to take such policies into consideration as well. To what extent they do so and how they accommodate this with their industrial relations role are, thus, pertinent questions. The topics examined here are meant to capture broad aspects concerning social policy along two dimensions: firstly, a relative focus on 'old', traditional and 'new', social investment policies, and, secondly, the general emphasis on social policy compared to directly labor market related issues.

The latter dimension refers to the dual role of unions. Unions as actors are active on the one hand in industrial relations and directly labor market related issues, and on the other hand, in broader social policy. They accordingly have two roles: firstly, an industrial relations or labor market role and, secondly, a role as welfare state actors (Ebbinghaus 2010).<sup>2</sup> The industrial relations role captures wage bargaining and bargaining for other issues related to working conditions, such as work time or quality. It also encompasses exerting pressure on the government concerning issues such as employment protection legislation and labor market policy. Their role as a broader social policy actor, on the other hand, captures their activity regarding other aspects of the 'social wage' besides the market wage that employees are also interested in (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.133), such as pensions. It also comprises all other ways in which unions try to improve the situation of their members that are not directly workplace or labor market related, such as education or family allowances.

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<sup>2</sup>This has some similarities with the distinction between unions as actors in industrial relations and in the political arena (as discussed for example by Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman (2013, p.133ff.) and Streeck and Hassel (2003b)), but the two distinctions cut across each other in some respects. Briefly put, the two roles addressed here differ in terms of *what* issue they address, rather than *how* they address issues.

Besides lobbying the government, unions are also directly active in the welfare state in some countries, through (co-)administration of some kinds of welfare policy, such as unemployment or retirement, and as partners in bi- or tripartite councils (Ebbinghaus 2010; Brugiavini et al. 2001; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.42ff.). Of course, there are many issues which do not clearly fall into one or the other of these spheres. Unemployment benefits, for example, are relatively broad social policies in that they are not directly workplace related, but on the other hand, they affect the labor market and wage levels. Similarly, education can mean both vocational training, which is, at least in some contexts, quite closely related to the workplace and labor markets, but also refers to general education, which is a much broader social policy. Nevertheless, the general idea of separation into these two spheres, from the perspective of unions, is important, because unions have employed different strategies with regard to the spheres and different degrees of focus on one over the other in the past (Hyman 2001, p.1ff. Streeck and Hassel 2003b).

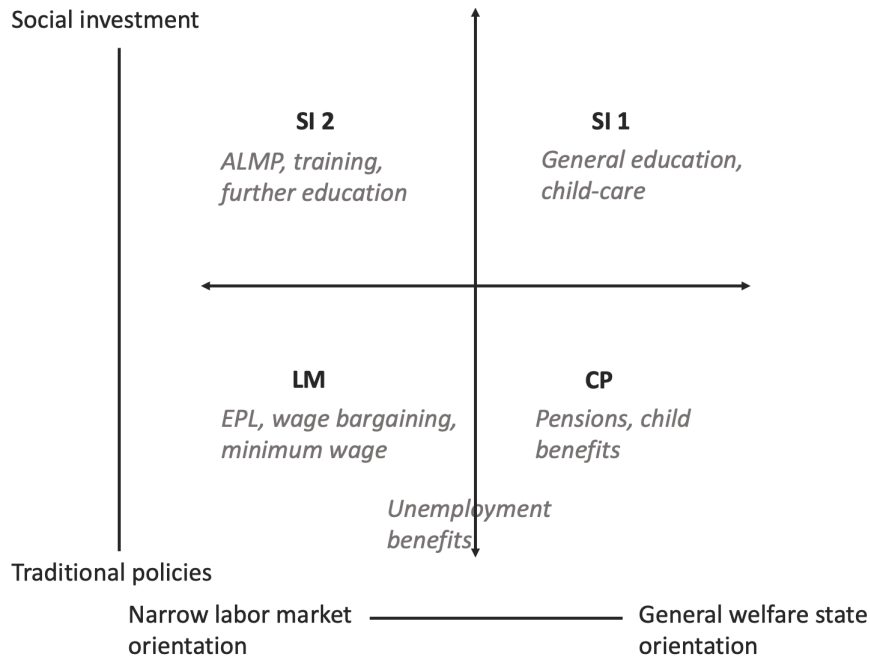
On the second dimension, I differentiate between old and new social policies. In this paper the focus is on traditional, in particular compensatory, policies compared to social investment policies. Social investment (henceforth SI) as a policy type is gaining increasing weight in the discourse, as well as corresponding policies being implemented more and more (cf. Hemerijck 2013, 2018; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012). It is seen as a response to the various internal and external challenges the welfare state is currently facing and constitutes a new way of conceptualizing the basic role of the welfare state (Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012). A core idea of SI is to focus on 'preparing' individuals for the challenges and risks they may face in deindustrialized labor markets, rather than (or in addition to) 'repairing', i.e., compensating them ex-post, when they come upon adverse circumstances (cf. Garritzmann, Häusermann, et al. 2017; Hemerijck 2017; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012, p.9f.). While traditional social policies (in particular compensatory policies, therefore abbreviated as CP), which are part and parcel of the traditional welfare state, comprise more transfer-oriented, passive policies, SI refers to policies focusing on activation, training, and skill formation. In terms of specific policy fields, active labor market policy (ALMP), family policy, in particular early childhood education and care, and education are examples of paradigmatic SI policies. Unemployment benefits and pensions are examples for traditional, compensatory policies.

The two dimensions are conceptually independent and can thus be combined orthogonally, yielding four policy combinations, i.e., four areas unions can potentially focus on. They can accordingly be conceptualized as a two-by-two matrix (displayed in Figure 3.1).<sup>3</sup> The four policy areas are as follows: SI1, which comprises SI policies with a broader focus, such as childcare and general education; SI2, containing kinds of SI directly related to the labor market, such as ALMP; LM, representing traditional policies targeted at the labor market, such as employment protection legislation and collective wage bargaining; and CP, encompassing traditional, compensatory welfare policies, such as pensions and child benefits.

Exploring which of these four topics, SI1, SI2, CP, and LM, is how salient for unions, how this differs across unions, and how it has developed in recent years, is the main goal of this paper.

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<sup>3</sup>Note that the dimensions here capture saliency, i.e. which of the topics is focused on relative to the others. They do not capture support or opposition.

**Figure 3.1:** The two-dimensional space of unions' policy focus

The core aim of the paper is explorative. Nevertheless, as discussed above, one motivation for looking at union standpoints directly is to take a first step in understanding the underlying strategies and goals. Further, the aim is to go beyond simply taking unions to be a transmission mechanism of their members' interests and instead to acknowledge that they have agency. In the following section I consider different logics possibly influencing unions and derive exploratory expectations.

### 3.3.3 Topic salience and the logics influencing union standpoints

As described above, a dominant view in the literature is that unions today are reform blockers who represent traditional social policy interests and this is largely attributed to the composition of their membership. Yet it is not only empirically insufficiently examined to what extent unions tend to promote traditional social policy interests and resist reforms; the theoretical argument leading to this assumption is not unequivocal either. Unions are not a mere transmission mechanism of their members' interests, they do not exclusively have to please their existing members, but, as organizations, must consider other factors as well. Unions have multiple goals, which they have to address simultaneously. They must satisfy their members, recruit new members, and ensure some degree of influence with employers and the government. The first is the logic of membership – as a voluntary membership organization they need to, to some extent, do what their members want (Schmitter and Streeck 1999). The second, the logic of influence (*ibid.*), describes the need to have functioning relationships with the government and employers, in order to influence policy or achieve concessions through bargaining. The third logic is what I term the logic of recruitment: if unions want to sustain their membership, which is one source of union power (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.30f.), they need to recruit new members, whose interests can differ from those of existing members. These

logics can come into conflict with each other. While unions need to take all three into account, deciding which logic to focus on to what extent and how, involves strategic choices.

The aim of this paper is not to rigorously test the logics against each other. But in looking at the salience of different topics, I also consider what this may tell us about the underlying logics. Some information on the underlying strategies can be gained from looking at topic salience, because the logics partly lead to different expectations regarding salience. However, since they also overlap, with multiple logics leading to similar topic salience under certain circumstances, I cannot fully discriminate between strategies from looking at salience. Analysing the results with respect to strategies, is therefore explorative; no expectations regarding differences across unions are derived *ex ante*. In order to gain more knowledge on strategies they need to be looked at directly.<sup>4</sup> The fact that they can conflict and thus partly imply different expectations, as argued below, shows the importance of considering the implications of all three logics for unions' social policy standpoints and strategies.

During the past decades, unions have faced considerable membership decline (Visser 2019). Union composition has shifted somewhat, but not to the extent that it mirrors the changes in the composition of the workforce (Ebbinghaus 2006; Pontusson 2013). Today the workforce looks considerably different from what it was like in the period of union strength after World War II: more of the labor force works in the service sector than in the industrial sector (Gingrich and Häusermann 2015; Oesch 2006, p.29ff.), female labor force participation is higher (Oesch 2006, p.32ff. Thévenon 2013), atypical contracts, such as part-time and fixed term employment, have become more prevalent (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013; Standing 2011, p.29ff.), and, in the emerging 'knowledge society', education and human capital are becoming increasingly important (Esping-Andersen 1993). In contrast, union membership is still predominantly composed of relatively privileged and increasingly elderly white males in stable employment, the majority of whom work in the industrial sector (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.35ff. Oesch 2006, p.160ff. Streeck and Hassel 2003a). With regard to the welfare state, this means that unions' core members, who tend to be in stable employment positions, benefit from traditional social policy, such as pensions and unemployment benefits.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, arguing from membership composition, the logic of membership does indeed lead to the expectation that unions should focus on traditional welfare policy. This should be more pronounced the more the union consists of previously typical core members, i.e. relatively privileged employees in stable employment positions. SI1 and SI2 (new, SI policy) are expected to be less salient than LM and CP (traditional social policy), and if there is a development over the past few years this is expected to be an increase of the latter two. Concerning differences across unions, this should be the case in particular for unions whose membership composition is especially traditional.

The changes that welfare states and unions have undergone make it likely that this has also led to a shift in priorities with regard to the two roles unions play as an industrial relations and

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<sup>4</sup>The logics are more closely examined and the strategies looked at in a somewhat more direct way in the third paper of this dissertation project, see Chapter 4.

<sup>5</sup>I also assume a rational choice logic here: *ceteris paribus* people have an interest in and should tend to prefer those policies that they stand to benefit from. I do not take this to mean that other factors cannot play a role as well.

a welfare state actor. This implies shifts in the salience of LM and SI2 (narrow labor market orientation) compared to SI1 and CP (general welfare state orientation). On the one hand, arguing from the logic of membership that recent welfare state developments emphasize policies that are not those which core union members traditionally benefit from, could entail that unions, especially those that have a traditional membership composition, withdraw somewhat from their general social policy role. On the other hand, precisely this development could also lead to them focusing more on the social policy realm in order to protect the traditional policies from (further) cutbacks.

Besides catering to their existing members, unions also need to recruit new members. The interests of potential recruits can, however, differ from those of established core members. This is particularly important to consider in times of changing workforce composition. A workforce with many women, younger workers, and generally many people in atypical employment may have different priorities than an elderly male workforce in stable employment. Considering first interests in SI compared to traditional policies (SI1 and SI2 compared to LM and CP), SI policies, such as education and childcare, are likely to appeal more to a more young, female workforce. After decades of not focusing on these groups, in many countries unions are now trying to recruit more members with these characteristics (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.58; Tapia and Turner 2018). To the extent that unions are looking to target these groups of potential members, newer kinds of social policy are expected to be comparatively salient. Moreover, given that SI is relatively popular in broad swaths of the society (Garritzmann, Busemeyer, and Neimanns 2018) including union members (Bledow and Busemeyer 2020), making SI policies salient could be a strategy to gain broader appeal and legitimacy, without alienating established members too much. The logic of recruitment thus leads to the expectation that the salience of SI1 and SI2 has increased. In particular with regard to those unions whose membership is especially traditional, the logic of recruitment can explain why they may nevertheless be shifting their focus to ‘new’ kinds of social policy. Accordingly, for these unions the increasing salience of these policies may be particularly pronounced.

Considering the dimension capturing narrow labor market orientation on the one hand, and general welfare state orientation on the other hand, implications from the logic of recruitment are the following: given the need to recruit atypically employed people, it is attractive for unions to focus on broad and popular social policies, such as education and childcare, since it seems likely that the conflict of interest between privileged insiders and precarious parts of the workforce is greater in the realm of labor market policy. Unions have opposed the expansion of precarious work, such as the spread of temporary contracts. But this has entailed excluding precarious workers, restricting the membership of agency workers, for example, because of the worry that this would make this type of employment more legitimate (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.57). Protecting the labor market interests of core members to some extent automatically comes at the cost of the interests of precarious workers. This is less the case with broader social policy; calling for expansions of further education opportunities or child care, for example, entails less immediate trade-offs.

Considering the logic of influence, as new topics such as SI have become increasingly important in policy making, in order to gain and retain a role in the policy discourse, it may be important

to embrace the new developments and new kinds of policy. If unions fail to do this, at least to some extent, they risk not being considered as potential partners or otherwise important voices any more. This, in turn, means that SI policy should become more salient for all unions over time: the salience of SI1 and SI2 relative to LM and CP is expected to increase. With regard to differences between unions, the logic of influence leads to the expectation that there is little variation in the salience different unions accord to the topic fields. This is in contrast to the other logics, which expect variation across unions, to the degree that the core membership and the main recruitment focus varies.

Regarding the focus on the narrow labor market orientation compared to the broad general welfare state orientation, the implications from the logic of influence are ambiguous. If the dominant welfare discourse is changing, unions may need to strengthen their social policy role, in order not to be left behind in the social policy realm. But since unions also face challenges in collective bargaining, the industrial relations and labor market role seems likely to retain prime importance as well. As examined in research by Trampusch (2007), a further strategy is a shift in social policy content to the realm of bargaining, i.e., increasingly including social protection in collective bargaining. This has the potential to protect established social rights while at the same time strengthening union involvement, since unions can influence the bargaining realm much more directly than legislative policy making. In terms of implications for the different policy fields identified above, this implies the topics of CP and SI (SI1 and SI2) becoming increasingly intertwined with LM. Concerning variation across unions, the logic of influence leads to the expectation of little difference between unions on this dimension as well.

To summarize, arguing from the logic of membership, the expectation is that especially those unions with a traditional membership focus predominantly on ‘old’ social policies. Concerning the focus on their industrial relations relative to their social policy role, the implications from the logic of membership are ambiguous. Conversely, the logic of recruitment gives rise to the expectation that unions do also focus on ‘new’ social policies. Especially for those unions that are still relatively traditional in terms of membership composition, it leads to the expectation that focus on SI is increasing. It further leads to the expectation that unions should focus more on their social policy role, because this is a potential strategy of simultaneously catering to different interests. The logic of influence leads to the expectation that the focus on SI policies should increase over time. Concerning the question how salience differs across different unions, the logic of influence implies that there is little variation. One further tentative expectation here is an increasing blurring of the topics across the two realms.

## **3.4 Data, method, and analysis**

### **3.4.1 The German case**

This paper considers the case of unions in Germany. In Germany the conditions for the three logics playing out in the way hypothesized are largely fulfilled. Unions have a relatively important role in the welfare state. Traditional social policy is geared towards people with characteristics shared by typical union members and the composition of union membership

remains relatively traditional (as will be described in more detail below). But, as in most other contexts, welfare states are changing and unions are facing challenges to their influence. Moreover, the labor force is shifting – the pool of potential recruits for unions is thus likely to differ from their membership. In terms of case selection, the German case is thus a typical case (Gerring 2008, 2011) for observing a conflict of logics and investigating whether the logic of membership leads to unions focusing on old social policies, benefiting traditional members, or whether the other logics lead to unions also promoting new social policies and adjusting to welfare state developments. Further, because unionism in Germany is largely committed to the principle of ‘Einheitsgewerkschaften’ (unified unions), ideological goals, which may otherwise dominate the described logics, are less in the forefront. Given that the aim of this paper is largely exploratory, looking at a single country case is useful since it can provide first insights concerning the workings of the logic, but the scope of the insights gained is, of course, limited.

Concerning case selection at the union level, I aim to look at big, encompassing unions rather than smaller unions, because the latter have more particular stakes in the welfare state and are affected in distinct ways by the broad changes in the labor force and social policy. Moreover, for organized interests in the welfare state, members are one power resource; thus larger organizations can be assumed to be comparatively influential in this context (Buss and Bender 2018; Esping-Andersen 1990; Korpi 1983). Among these broad unions, I select those that have a continuously published union membership newspaper, which is available. These are GEW (Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft), IG BCE (Industriegewerkschaft Bergbau, Chemie, Energie), IG Metall (Industriegewerkschaft Metall), and Verdi (Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft). Before going in to methodological details and analysis, in the following I will describe the context of unions and social policy in Germany in somewhat more detail so as to provide background information on this case.

In Germany, as in other continental European countries, the state ‘shares public space’ (Crouch 1993) with both unions and employers. According to the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) approach, Germany constitutes a typical example of a coordinated market economy, in which unions are involved in coordinated bargaining and other corporatist structures (Hall and Soskice 2001). Unions have long been involved in the German welfare state, as one of the actors in tripartite concertation as well as participating in self-administration (Brugiavini et al. 2001; Ebbinghaus 2010; Ebbinghaus and Visser 1997). Unions worked in particular towards expanding important types of social insurance covering the ‘old’, i.e. industrial era, risks, notably pensions and unemployment insurance (Ebbinghaus 2006, 2010). Accordingly, unions are an important actor in Germany, both in the industrial relations as well as in the political arena.

However, like other advanced welfare states, the German welfare state has faced increasing challenges and budget pressures. In response to such pressures even the stable continental welfare states have undergone change, although the developments are too complex to be simply summed up as retrenchment (Palier 2002; Palier and Thelen 2010). In the past decades, with governments attempting to cut costs in social policy and unions resisting, concertation became difficult to attain, notably in the course of the Hartz IV reforms, and the state assumed a more dominant role (Ebbinghaus 2010; Streeck and Hassel 2003a). On a more general level, similarly to unions in many other countries, German unions have experienced declining density over the

past decades (Visser 2012).

As a corporatist welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990), the German welfare state has relatively high levels of stratification, protecting some people much better than others and overall supporting the model of a full-time employee with few breaks in their career. The traditional German welfare state can thus be seen as being geared towards traditional union members (males in full-time employment with permanent contracts). In the context of welfare state recalibration, this focus is shifting as discussed above.

As in many other countries, the composition of the labor force has changed as described in section 3.3.3. The membership composition of German unions, on the other hand, has not kept pace with these changes (Ebbinghaus 2006). On average, union membership still predominantly consists of male blue-collar workers while they underrepresent private service sector employees, people in part-time or atypical employment, the low-skilled, women, and young people (*ibid.*). This varies substantially across unions, however. Looking at the indicators that are available, the composition has not changed by much in recent years, though the proportions of women and of non-typically employed have slightly increased (details on this will be given below at the union level). Accordingly, the logic of membership and the logics of recruitment and influence should, in the case of Germany, play out in the way expected in section 3.3, with the logic of membership leading to the expectation that unions predominantly focus on ‘old’ social policies, while the other two logics lead to the opposite expectation.

Despite these general developments, the membership bases of the four unions considered in this paper differ. IG Metall has its membership base in the metal, electronic, and automotive industry, with a diverse membership ranging from workers employed in small garages to those in big, export-oriented companies. Verdi combines a broad variety of service sector workers, including public sector service employees. The IG BCE primarily represents workers in mining, chemical companies, and energy, as well as material production (paper, plastics etc.) and recycling. The GEW represents teachers and university employees, but also social workers and employees in similar professions. There is not much publicly available data capturing the socio-economic composition of separate unions in Germany. Two sources are used in the following: first, the main union confederation DGB (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund) publishes data on the gender composition and on the proportion of civil servants and regular employees (see Table B.1 in the Appendix). Second, representative surveys can be utilized to get some information on the union membership composition of different unions if they capture whether someone is a member in a union (which many do) and if they ask which union someone belongs to (which very few do). I use data from the Inequality Barometer, a representative survey conducted in Germany in 2020 that includes both questions (see also Table B.1 in the Appendix). As mentioned above, union membership has shifted during the past two decades, but not drastically. According to the data from the DGB, the proportion of women in the German unions considered in this paper increased for all unions between 2001 and 2018, except for the IG Metall, where it remains relatively stable. Comparing the unions, the proportion of women is highest in the GEW, with 71%, followed by Verdi, with 53%. This is followed by 21% for the IG BCE, and 18% for the IG Metall.<sup>6</sup> Looking at the survey data (see Table B.1 in the appendix), the GEW and Verdi

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<sup>6</sup>In the survey data the gender composition is somewhat different, the values diverge less, but the ranking is

also have the highest proportion of people in part-time employment. For these two unions it is above the sample mean, while for the IG Metall and the IG BCE it is substantially lower. In terms of education and income, the GEW and the IG BCE have the more highly educated and higher-income membership, according to the survey data.<sup>7</sup>

Concerning the temporal setting, the period under study (2012 – 2018) is set only a few years after the financial, economic and debt crises starting in 2008. In the context of the crises, unions in Germany appear to have regained strength and legitimacy, largely through being perceived as having successfully contributed to handling the crises (Dörre 2011; Dribbusch, Lehndorff, and Schulten 2017). However, in this phase of resurgence, some scholars observe an increased tendency to cater to narrow interests and a further fragmentation of interest representation (*ibid.*). This makes it a particularly interesting time period to study with respect to the salience of different social policy topics.

### 3.4.2 Methodological strategy and data collection

In order to investigate the goals and policy standpoints of unions, I examine the salience of topics in union publications over a period of seven years. I study four major unions in Germany (the GEW, the IG Metall, the IG BCE, and Verdi) and conduct quantitative text analysis (QTA) of articles published in these unions' membership newspapers.

Using content analysis of texts enables me to look at the salience of topics across multiple years in a way not possible through interviews or surveys, which inadvertently tend to focus on present issues and face problems of recollection with regard to past developments. Moreover, with textual data there is the possibility of reanalyzing and replicating research using the same data base (Laver, Benoit, et al. 2003). This could be of particular importance if, as in this paper, the research question refers to broad, hard-to-grasp contexts, such as general welfare state orientation, which would benefit from being looked at from different angles in future research.

Regarding the type of text under investigation, union membership newspapers are suitable for this paper's aims. Firstly, membership newspapers are a form of communicating with the members and to some degree with potential members, representing the union and its agenda to them. It therefore seems likely that here they have quite a general focus on a wide range of topics, so as to represent their program as a whole to their members. This is precisely what I want to examine. Secondly, compared to press releases and position papers, membership newspapers appear regularly and not as reactions to specific developments; thus they depend less on externally induced short term political events, such as policy reforms. This strengthens the argument that they portray the more general program unions have, rather than reflecting specific reform debates. On the other hand, examining union newspapers also restricts the analysis: because they are directed at members, it captures how unions want to be seen in particular by their membership. Thus, there may be a bias towards the logic of membership,

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similar. The IG BCE and the IG Metall switch places in the ranking, but their values are quite close.

<sup>7</sup>However, the number of observations differs greatly across unions, ranging from 45 observations in the case of the GEW to 525 for Verdi. This is expected and in accordance with the different member numbers of the unions, but means that the insights are not very robust and can be seen at best as a tendency.

because unions may emphasize what they think their members want to hear. This, however, means that if evidence for other logics is found, these findings are particularly strong.

Using computerized techniques of QTA instead of manual text analysis has a range of advantages, the main one being its efficiency for investigating large amounts of text (Brier and Hopp 2011; Laver and Garry 2000). Clearly, including all union newspaper articles of four unions across a span of several years would amount to a huge effort if these articles were to be hand-coded. Yet for getting at the general goals and policy standpoints as well as potential shifts across multiple years, large quantities of data are needed. Moreover, QTA has the advantage of achieving more reliability and higher consistency across large amounts of texts, which can be a challenge for manual coders (Laver and Garry 2000; Watanabe 2017a,b). Comparing relatively simple and straightforward methods of computer coding, such as dictionary analysis, to expert coding and expert surveys yields good results; particularly for looking at the salience of topics it seems fitting (Budge 2015) and the benefits of efficient coding appear to outweigh potential costs (Laver and Garry 2000).

Concerning the choice of QTA strategy, I need a QTA approach that classifies texts into known categories, which are based on the theoretical reasoning above. While unsupervised categorization is also possible, it is likely that the categories identified via such methods will not be the ones defined above, since more salient differences between the focus of texts are likely (such as positive or negative texts). Moreover, the aim of this paper is not on investigating which or how many categories exist, but rather on looking at developments within the defined categories.

There are two main types of possible methods for sorting texts into known categories: dictionary methods and supervised learning. I use dictionary methods for the main analysis. However, in constructing a dictionary I use semi-automated methods, which employ supervised learning tools. To classify the texts, dictionary methods use the rate at which certain words, defined in a dictionary as indicating a high probability of a text belonging to a certain category, occur in them (Grimmer and Stewart 2013). This ‘bag of words’ approach has been shown to capture a substantial amount of information about texts, even though grammar is largely disregarded (Grimmer and Stewart 2013; Laver, Benoit, et al. 2003; Laver and Garry 2000). In fact, including longer conjunctions of words in a dictionary can have problems of its own, reducing the amount of data produced, and leading to reliability issues when coding texts by different authors, since the use of word strings tends to be more idiosyncratic and linked to an author’s particular writing style (Laver and Garry 2000). Since many different authors are involved in the texts under study in this paper, care is taken not to include complex word conjunctions.

While dictionary methods work with preselected words that are taken to separate classes, supervised learning uses a set of hand-coded documents directly as an input. From these hand-coded documents the supervised learning model applied ‘learns’ which characteristics of documents are related to which category. The assumption is that there is a function relating the text in the document to the categories, which the algorithm attempts to estimate. This estimation is then used to classify the bulk of the documents in the corpus, which were not hand-coded (Grimmer and Stewart 2013).

The main analysis uses dictionary methods, because these appear to be especially suitable to assess policy positions (Albaugh, Sevenans, et al. 2014). Moreover, unlike supervised learning methods, dictionary methods work in the same way for different types and different numbers of documents being coded (Albaugh, Soroka, et al. 2014), making it possible to, for example, enlarge the corpus. Relatedly, dictionary methods are transparent in what they are counting, which makes analyses using these methods reproducible and clear (Albaugh, Sevenans, et al. 2014). While in the main analysis dictionary methods are employed for these reasons, I use supervised learning tools in constructing the dictionary, in a framework suggested by King, Lam, and Roberts (2017) (discussed in more detail in section 3.4.3).

My corpus consists of the publications of the four German unions: IG Metall, Verdi, IG BCE, and GEW. The time span covered is between 2012 and 2018. One newspaper contains between 30 and 60 articles. After cleaning and excluding several types of articles (such as event announcements and advertisements) the N is somewhat above 10,000.

The union newspapers are in part publicly available, in part available upon request. They are only available as PDFs or on the webpage, and there is no generic way to extract structured text from PDFs in an efficient fashion; therefore a time-consuming process of splitting the entire newspapers into single documents (by article) and transforming them into a format that can be used for analysis is necessary. Once this is accomplished the texts are further pre-processed (one version using stemming, one using lemmatization), numbers and stop-words are removed. The numbers of documents vary quite a bit by union and year, with Verdi having most documents and the GEW the least. This is partly due to the average length of articles, which differs across unions.

### 3.4.3 Computer-aided dictionary construction

The main challenge in applying dictionary methods for QTA, especially if it is to be used in a field not previously studied with QTA methods, is to find a suitable dictionary which fits the particular context (Brier and Hopp 2011; Grimmer and Stewart 2013; Laver, Benoit, et al. 2003; Watanabe 2016). None of the existing dictionaries fit the object under study in this paper: there is no available dictionary, neither focusing on the specific topic looked at in this paper, i.e., the broad social policy orientation of unions, nor on the particular type of document, i.e., union membership newspaper articles.

Accordingly, I construct a dictionary with entries for the four categories LM, CP, SI1 and SI2. In the subsequent analysis, for each document the dictionary is applied to classify whether it belongs to any of the four categories. The categories are not exclusive, i.e., a document can be classified as belonging to more than one category. Clearly, for a dictionary to work, the words entered into the dictionary need to be chosen carefully: the key words must separate well between the categories they are said to reflect or not to reflect, and the categories defined have to correspond closely enough to the statement intended by the author and perceived by the listeners (Brier and Hopp 2011; Grimmer and Stewart 2013; Watanabe 2016). Constructing a dictionary relying on fully-supervised models or fully on hand-coding is very time-consuming and resource intensive (King, Lam, and Roberts 2017; Laver, Benoit, et al. 2003; Watanabe

and Zhou 2020). A promising solution is to combine human coding and automated methods (Laver and Garry 2000; Watanabe and Zhou 2020). This allows for efficiently looking at many texts, while still using human input in order to check the substantive meaning of words. King, Lam, and Roberts (2017) suggest a method of finding keywords through such a combination of automated methods and human input, and I use their keyword search algorithm as the main strategy for constructing the dictionary for this paper. I implement this with python, since this is what they use and their code is available. The core idea is to combine automated and human selection. The algorithm works as follows: a sample of texts, hand-coded as belonging to the categories identified above, are handed to the algorithm. For this I hand-coded a set of 200 texts. Using this data, several machine learning classifiers are used to build models to classify a different set of texts as belonging to specific categories (the classifiers used are, among others, Naive Bayes, Nearest Neighbor, Support Vector Machine, Gradient Boosting, and Random Forest)<sup>8</sup>. The algorithm then goes on to suggest a list of new keywords for the different categories. From a long list of keywords, I choose those that substantively fit the categories. The core idea behind this is that while humans are bad at coming up with or recalling all relevant keywords tied to a category, they are good at recognizing those that are fitting to a category – while automated methods may sometimes yield words that do not relate to a concept but are picked up for some other reasons (cf. King, Lam, and Roberts 2017). The sample used to construct the dictionary is excluded from further analysis.

In a second step I further investigate the terms selected for the dictionary in R using *Quanteda*, which is also what I use for the main analysis. I look at the keyness<sup>9</sup> of the terms for each category and further reduce the set by eliminating those words that have low values of keyness according to this measure. I further check the validity of the dictionary by randomly selecting a set of texts from the general corpus<sup>10</sup> and checking whether they are correctly categorized (the criterion for categorization will be further explained below). It appears that miscategorized cases often contain terms that have a very high frequency overall. This leads me to further refine the dictionary by excluding very frequent terms (even though they have medium keyness values). In a final step I look at keywords in context, which gives me the dictionary terms embedded in the groups of words they are found in, to make sure that I do not include highly ambiguous terms (cf. Brier and Hopp 2011; Laver and Garry 2000). I also look at what other terms the keywords are frequently used with, to check whether there is a relation between them and the concept they are meant to measure. Overall, this method of constructing the dictionary combines theoretical criteria, through human selection of those words which fit the substantive meaning from the keyword list produced by the algorithm, and empirical criteria, through using supervised learning and investigating keyness (which is advisable, see Brier and Hopp (2011)).

The dictionary constructed in this ways has the following four entries:<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>These are different, mostly iterative, algorithms predicting which category an object belongs to, given a set of characteristics derived from training objects. I use a range of classifiers in order to make use of the strengths of the different classifiers. Since in a latter step those keywords that fit are selected, it is good to have a broad, inclusive set of suggestions.

<sup>9</sup>Keyness is a measure calculating the differential occurrence of terms across different categories using the chi-squared value.

<sup>10</sup>This set excludes those that were used for constructing the dictionary.

<sup>11</sup>The fact that the dictionary entries contain different numbers of key words may seem problematic at first

LM: betriebsrat, betrieb, verhandlungen, verhandlungsrund\*, verhandlungen, verhandlung, entgelt, entgelterhöhung, beschäftigt, erhöhung, erhöhen, tarif\*, loohnerhöhung, lohnausgleich, gehaltserhöhung, betriebsvereinbarung, betriebsrat, betriebsbedingt

CP: alterssicherung\*, renten\*, erwerbstätig, sozialamt, sozial, altersarmut\*, gesetzlich\*, rentner\*, riester\*, beitrags\*, beitragszahl\*, altersv\*, finanzieren, alter, alterssicherung\*, altersrent\*, grundsicherung\*, regelbedarfsstuf\*, regelalters\*, betriebsrent\*, ruhestand, vorruhestand, hinzuverdien\*, erwerbsminderung, lebensstandard

SI1: elternbeitr\*, betreu\*, kindertagesstätten, kind, bildungswege, weiterbildungen, berufsausbildung, hochschulabsolventen, kommunen, kitagebühren, kita, kitaplatz, kita-träg\*, frühkindlichen, studieren, bachelor, gebührenfrei

SI2: digital\*, ausbildungsplatz\*, berufsabschluss\*, qualifizierung, dual, dualen, auszubildenden, auszubildend, ausbild\*, fortbild, qualifikation\*

### 3.4.4 Analysis

#### *Categorization and descriptive analysis*

Once the dictionary is defined, it is used to classify documents as belonging to categories. The categories are not defined exclusively, meaning one document can be classified as belonging to more than one category. In applying the dictionary, occurrences of the dictionary terms in documents are used to indicate whether a document belongs to a specific category. However, even if a term is related quite closely to a category, single term occurrences are likely to also appear in documents not belonging to the category. A more narrow criterion is needed. One possibility is setting a specific number of term occurrences that needs to be reached in order for a text to be categorized into a specific category. A second possibility is to look at the share of dictionary terms, i.e., the occurrences of these terms divided by the number of tokens<sup>12</sup>. The former is clearly biased against sorting short texts into a category. The latter, however, may fail to correctly categorize longer texts, since it needs to be taken into account that in long texts on a topic authors may try to vary their vocabulary and give detail using different words, which could lead to a low share. For both possibilities, a specific value for either the number of term occurrences or the share needs to be defined. I try both strategies, as well as the combination of both, and use performance measures to decide which strategy and what value to utilize.

In order to test performance, i.e., categorization accuracy, I use the  $F_1$ -score, which indicates better performance the closer it is to 1 (on details see Tharwat 2018). This takes into account both precision, i.e., how many of the positive results are correct positive results, and recall, i.e.,

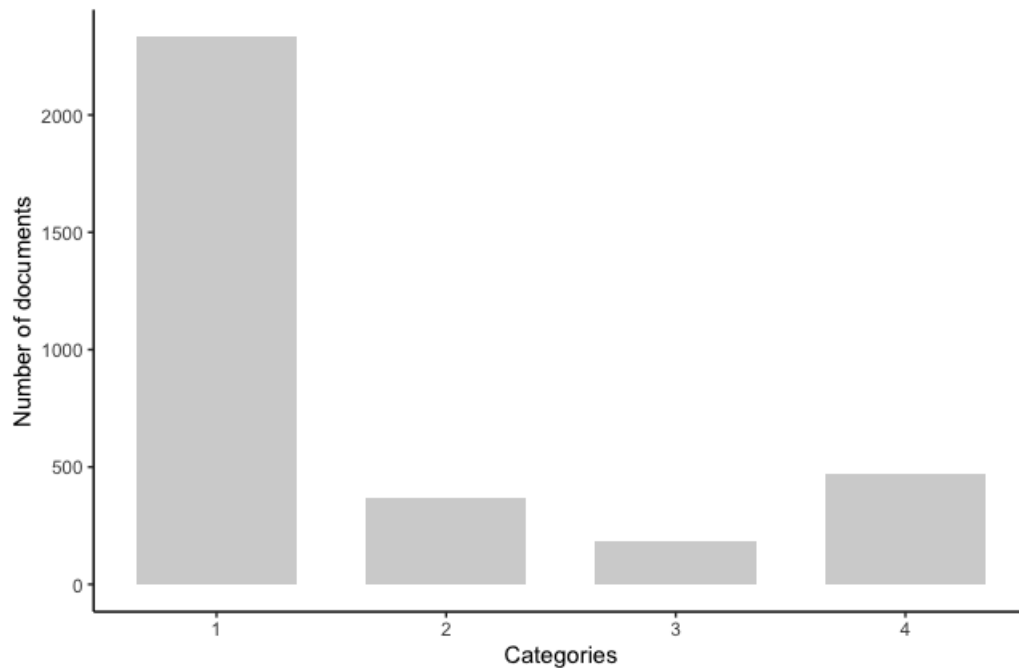
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glance, because it could lead to mechanically finding more documents belonging to those categories. On the other hand, it may also be the case that some subjects are talked about with a more diverse vocabulary than others. Moreover, some categories may simply be broader than others. However, the main reason why this is unproblematic for the concern of this paper is that all categories are applied for all unions in the same way and the core concern is with the difference between unions and across years rather than between categories.

<sup>12</sup>The number of tokens counts every word occurrence, irrespective of whether they occur multiple times.

how many of those results that should be positive are indeed positive.<sup>13</sup> For testing accuracy I need to know whether a text should belong to a specific category, meaning I need a set of hand-coded texts. I use two sets: firstly, one set including those texts used for the first step in dictionary construction. The list of keywords produced by the application of the keyword search algorithm was only the initial step. The list of words was then repeatedly modified before creating the dictionary; therefore looking at this set is informative. Nevertheless, I also use a second set of additional hand-coded texts not used in dictionary construction. I check the  $F_1$ -score for multiple values, with two resulting candidates each for word count and share, one stricter and one more permissive criterion. For the stricter criterion, 10 term occurrences and a share of 0.02, performance is better in terms of precision than recall for both word-count and share, for almost all categories. This indicates that it could be appropriate to use a more permissive criterion. Since this paper is interested in the developments of relative salience of different categories, both false positives as well as false negatives are equally problematic. I therefore test the performance of the word-count criterion 5 and the share criterion 0.015. Recall is indeed improved as are the overall  $F_1$ -scores. It is highest for the joint criterion, i.e., to be categorized as belonging to a category, a document needs to fulfill either criterion or both. The  $F_1$ -scores by category are:  $F_1^{LM} = 0.58$ ,  $F_1^{CP} = 0.73$ ,  $F_1^{SI1} = 0.6$ ,  $F_1^{SI2} = 0.64$ . Accordingly, I use this joint criterion for my main analysis. To probe robustness, the same models are analyzed using the stricter joint criterion as well, the results do not differ greatly (see Tables B.5 and B.6 in the Appendix).

**Figure 3.2:** Document frequencies by category



Using the permissive joint criterion, a first analysis of the document frequencies for the different topics shows that LM is the topic that receives the most attention in the union newspapers of all four unions and across all years, with 64% (of the texts belonging to any of the four cat-

<sup>13</sup>The  $F_1$ -score is the harmonic mean of precision and recall.

egories) being categorized as LM.<sup>14</sup> This is also the case for each separate union. Given that the industrial relations role is of great importance for unions, this is not unexpected. It also is plausible that information on wage bargaining, strikes, and directly workplace related issues is of primary importance in communication with the members. Given that the newspapers are nation-wide, they present a tool to update members on developments in other regions, such as the founding of workers councils, plant closures, etc. The topic with the second highest document frequency is SI2 (18%), followed by CP (12%) and finally SI1 (6%). This ordering varies across unions however: for Verdi CP is more salient than SI2, while for the GEW CP is the least salient (see also Figures B.1a-B.1d in the Appendix). Accordingly, the ordering by unions is as follows. GEW: LM>SI2>SI1>CP; IG Metall: LM>SI2>CP>SI1; Verdi: LM>CP>SI2>SI1; IG BCE: LM>SI2>CP>SI1. Over the years the document frequency of LM declines somewhat, while CP remains stable. The document frequency of SI1 and SI2 increases slightly up to 2017, afterwards it decreases slightly again.

Since the categories are not constructed as being exclusive, there can be documents belonging to more than one category, giving an idea of how much the categories are intertwined. This does occur, but not very frequently.<sup>15</sup> The most frequent combinations by far are LM with SI2 and LM with CP (with 8% and 3% respectively). For both combinations the frequency increases over time; for the other combinations no clear development over time is observable.

### *Regression analysis*

For regression analysis, I create separate dummies for each category, since the categories are not fully exclusive, and use these as dependent variables in separate models. I also create a dummy for a text being categorized as belonging to any one of the four categories, to explore the salience of these four topics relative to all other texts. In the main models I look at relative category salience, i.e., at a subset of documents excluding those categorized as ‘other’. These models give a more direct picture of the relative salience of the four categories to one another, independent of the importance of other topics in the union membership newspapers.<sup>16</sup> Since the outcome variable is a binary classification variable, I estimate logit models. The GEW is used as the reference category.

Looking at the chance of being categorized as being about any of the four topics compared to being about other topics (see Table B.2 in the Appendix), the results show that all unions are significantly more likely than the GEW to talk about the four categories examined. Over time the salience of the four topics taken together increases.

Disaggregating the four topics, the results of the main models, as shown in Table 3.1, indicate that, compared to the GEW, all other unions appear to write more about LM. Looking at

<sup>14</sup>Those texts not belonging to any of the four categories are excluded in the descriptive analysis and for the main analysis below. This reduced the N to about 4000. The texts belonging to the category ‘other’ include all texts about organizational union matters (e.g., meetings, elections), accounts of meetings and celebrations, other topics of interest, international news stories and workplace features.

<sup>15</sup>All combinations of two categories account for 14% of all texts coded as belonging to any of the four categories.

<sup>16</sup>I conduct the same analysis for all documents including the category ‘other’; for the results see Table B.3 and B.4 in the Appendix. With regard to the four substantively important categories, results do not differ substantially.

**Table 3.1:** Regression results for relative category salience

	LM Model I	CP Model II	SI 1 Model III	SI 2 Model IV
IG BCE	2.377*** (0.133)	-0.891*** (0.185)	-4.117*** (0.394)	-0.775*** (0.131)
IG Metall	1.258*** (0.109)	0.184 (0.150)	-1.800*** (0.147)	-0.057 (0.117)
Verdi	1.661*** (0.114)	0.150 (0.151)	-2.906*** (0.214)	-0.987*** (0.131)
year	-0.085*** (0.022)	0.048* (0.027)	-0.017 (0.037)	0.142*** (0.024)
Constant	170.390*** (44.081)	-99.530* (55.165)	34.381 (73.721)	-286.262*** (48.109)
N	3,957	3,957	3,957	3,957
AIC	4,281.392	3,011.896	1,638.771	3,914.260

*Note:* \*\*\*p < .01; \*\*p < .05; \*p < .1

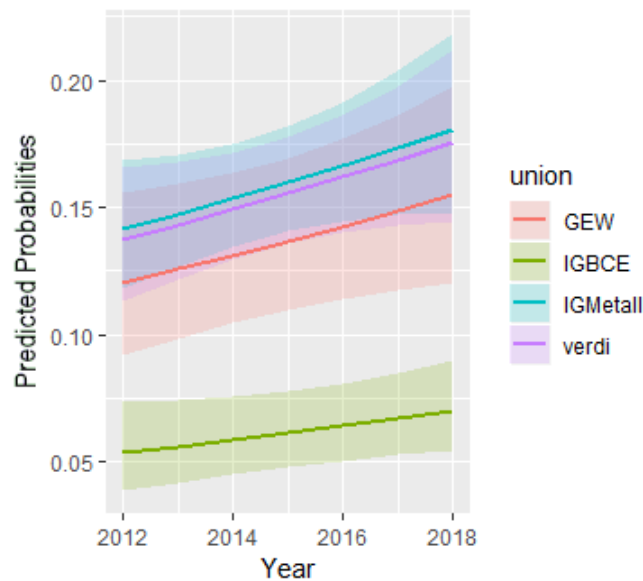
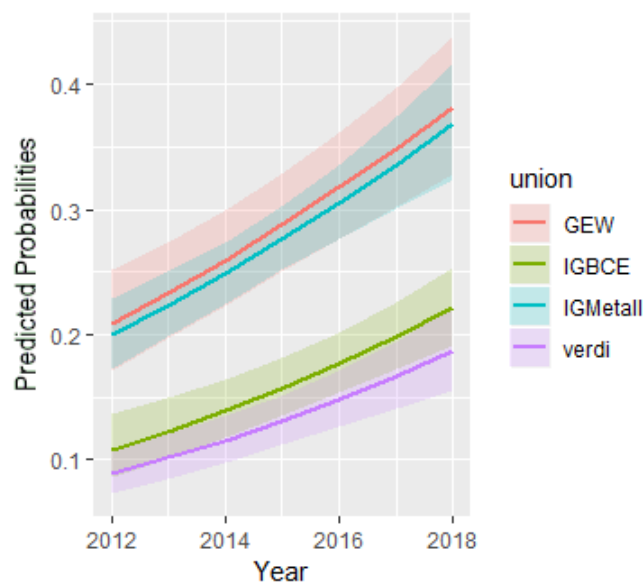
predicted probabilities across years and unions, the probability of a text being categorized as LM is around 0.3 for the GEW and between 0.7 and 0.85 for the other unions. CP, in turn, is written about substantially less than LM by all unions. Comparing the other unions to the GEW, Verdi and the IG Metall write about CP significantly more often, while the IG BCE does so less. Predicted probabilities range from around 0.05 for the IG BCE to around 0.18 for Verdi.

Turning to the SI categories, unsurprisingly given the focus on education, the GEW writes more about SI1 than all three other unions. The predicted probabilities for the GEW are between 0.34 and 0.3 over the years, while for the IG Metall they are around 0.07 and even lower for the IG BCE and Verdi. However, while the GEW writes more often about SI2 than the IG BCE and Verdi, for the IG Metall SI2 appears as salient as for the GEW. Predicted probabilities are relatively close, with those for the IG BCE and Verdi ranging between 0.10 and 0.20 and those for the GEW and the IG Metall being somewhat higher (up to 0.35).

As regards the developments over the years, the incidence of CP and SI2 documents appears to increase. Examining the predicted probabilities provides a first idea about how the developments over time diverge by unions, as displayed in Figures 3.3 and 3.4 .

For CP, the salience increases somewhat for all unions, though only slightly for the IG BCE, and starting from a lower level. For SI2, the predicted probabilities increase over time for all unions as well, the highest increase being for the GEW and the IG Metall, from 0.2 in 2012 to around 0.37 in 2018.

In order to explore the interaction of unions and years more systematically, I also estimate regression models with interaction terms (see Table 3.2). Concerning LM, the development of salience over time is significantly more positive for the IG Metall than for the other unions.

**Figure 3.3:** Predicted probabilities by year and union for CP**Figure 3.4:** Predicted probabilities by year and union for SI2

The development for the GEW is negative.<sup>17</sup> Moving on to the salience of CP, it increases for the IG BCE and for Verdi over the years, relative to the developments in the other two unions. For SI2 this is the case for the GEW. For the IG Metall and Verdi, on the other hand, there is a negative development (though only significant at the 10% level). For SI1 there are no significant interactions.

<sup>17</sup>In the model this is displayed in the baseline effect of the variable year, since the GEW is the reference category and the baseline effect shows the effect of year when the other variable values are 0, i.e. the reference category GEW in the case of the variable union.

**Table 3.2:** Relative category salience with interactions

	LM	CP	SI 1	SI 2
	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
IG BCE	66.613 (192.028)	-629.368** (266.811)	1,281.359 (929.769)	207.320 (183.281)
IG Metall	-309.681** (120.552)	62.957 (162.612)	140.111 (163.776)	242.145* (129.843)
Verdi	-111.401 (125.285)	-275.671* (163.520)	-329.305 (237.595)	247.280* (144.835)
year	-0.162*** (0.049)	-0.009 (0.068)	-0.008 (0.050)	0.236*** (0.053)
IG BCE*year	-0.032 (0.095)	0.312** (0.132)	-0.638 (0.461)	-0.103 (0.091)
IG Metall*year	0.154*** (0.060)	-0.031 (0.081)	-0.070 (0.081)	-0.120* (0.064)
Verdi*year	0.056 (0.062)	0.137* (0.081)	0.162 (0.118)	-0.123* (0.072)
Constant	326.653*** (98.200)	16.921 (136.409)	14.828 (101.485)	-476.499*** (107.802)
N	3,957	3,957	3,957	3,957
AIC	4,277.835	3,004.905	1,638.800	3,916.192

*Note:* \*\*\*p < .01; \*\*p < .05; \*p < .1

### *Discussion of results*

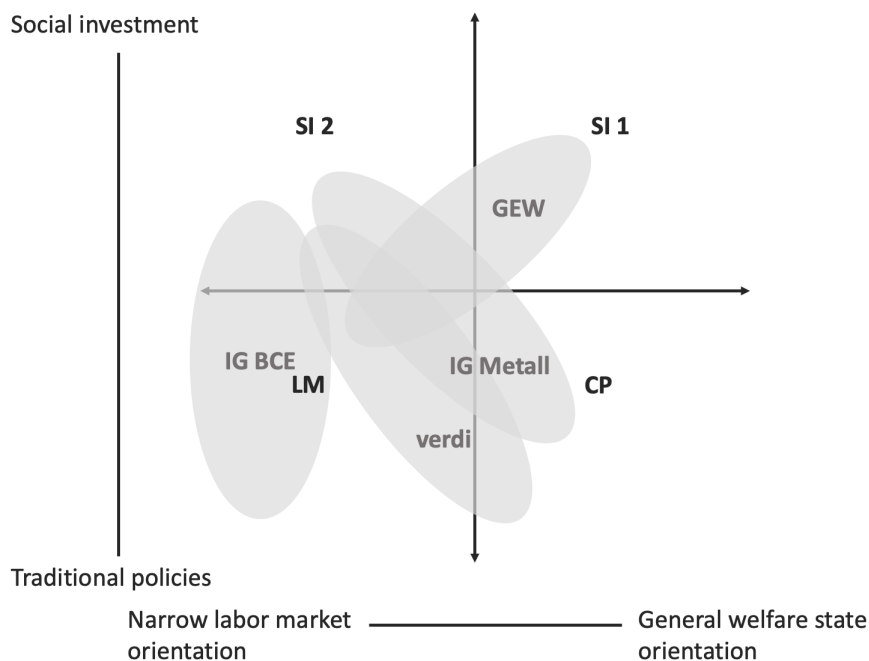
As discussed in part 3, the four categories examined are split along two dimensions: the first is the dimension of a narrow labor market focus vs. a focus on broad social policy, the second the dimension of old, traditional policies vs. new, in particular, social investment policies. The first dimension considers LM and SI2 together (narrow labor market orientation) and compares them to CP and SI1 (broad welfare state orientation). In Figure 3.5 this means comparing the left half of the matrix to the right half. On the second dimension, SI1 and SI2 (new SI policies) are compared with LM and CP (traditional policies), i.e., the upper and the lower half of the matrix (see Figure 3.5).

A first set of results concerns shifts on dimensions over the years. Since this paper looks at a short time span only, the inferences that can be drawn here are limited. Yet given the amount of data and the breadth of categories considered, shifts across years are likely to be somewhat informative. The salience of LM decreases to some extent compared to the other three categories; SI2, on the other hand, increases. Accordingly, there appears to be no uniform development for the narrow labor market focus, but rather a shift within, from traditional bargaining topics towards more topics such as further education. Notwithstanding these developments, LM remains the topic with the highest overall document frequency. Considering the other side of the first dimension, i.e., social policy, as in the case of labor market orientation, the two categories diverge in the case of broad welfare orientation. The classical social policy topics, captured by

CP, increase in salience over time. Yet this does not seem to come at the cost of a diminished focus on SI1, which remains stable. The increase of SI2 signals an increased focus on those kinds of SI policy that are directly labor market related. This fits the expectation that the role of a labor market actor is the main role of unions. Conversely, in the case of traditional policies the salience of those policies that are not directly labor market related, namely CP, is increasing. In terms of changes in predicted probabilities, the increase is stronger for SI2 than for CP. This leads to the, albeit tentative, inference that the salience of new social policies has increased somewhat more than that of old policies – yet with respect to both dimensions, only one of the elements changes.

Looking at the intersection of the categories, the frequency of documents categorized as both CP and LM as well as SI2 and LM is substantially higher than for the other combinations, and the frequency is increasing over time. This provides some evidence that these topics are becoming more intertwined, possibly indicating an increased importance of SI and social protection issues in collective bargaining.

**Figure 3.5:** Union placement in the two-dimensional space



A second result that emerges quite clearly is that the focus on topics along the two dimensions differs substantially across unions. This is visualized in Figure 3.5.<sup>18</sup> The differences in the salience of topics across unions indicates that, while unions may need to confront similar challenges related to the influence logic, the salience of topics is also influenced by factors that differ across unions, such as membership and recruitment.

IG Metall and Verdi are relatively similar in that LM is very salient, but – in contrast to the IG BCE and the GEW – CP is also relatively salient. IG Metall and Verdi differ in the extent to which they represent non-traditional union members, such as part-time employees

<sup>18</sup>Note that this Figure is not generated directly from the data. Instead, it is an approximate visual representation of union positions as they can be inferred from the results discussed. Appropriate care needs to be taken concerning its interpretation.

and women (see Table B.1 in the Appendix): these groups make up a higher percentage of Verdi's membership than is the case for the IG Metall. Following the logic of membership a stronger focus on new social policies would be expected for Verdi than of the IG Metall, yet I do not find this. In fact, for both unions SI is not very salient, especially not SI1, and this is even more strongly the case for Verdi. For the IG Metall this focus is in accordance with the logic of membership being at work. But what is happening in the case of Verdi? Verdi represents less privileged members in terms of income and education (again, see Table B.1 in the Appendix). For Verdi, an increase in the salience of CP over the years is observable as well. The results suggest that Verdi may be following a strategy of focusing on protecting established areas of the welfare state. This could also be due to its members partly being relatively less well-off. Ultimately, in order to discern what lies behind this pattern, direct information on the strategies is needed.

The IG Metall is located somewhat more towards general welfare state orientation than Verdi. While for the IG Metall CP is also relatively salient, it does not exhibit an increasing focus over time. Instead, the salience of SI2 is increasing over the years. The IG Metall is focusing on newer kinds of social policy, but especially on those within the labor market realm. Given that the IG Metall does also focus on social policy, it is interesting that the increasing salience in new social policy is tied to the labor market focus. A strategy that could lie behind this is to follow the logic of membership with respect to social policy and focus on the traditional policies in this domain, while attempting to account for recruitment pressures in the labor market realm, via SI2.

The IG BCE exhibits a clear focus on the narrow labor market side of the first dimension, spanning both LM as well as SI2. In the case of the IG BCE, one of the unions that has the largest share of full-time employed industrial male union members, this pattern is in accordance with following the logic of membership through focusing squarely on the labor market. Similarly to the IG Metall, SI policies appear to be salient for the IG BCE as well, however within the narrow labor market focus. Given the general focus on the labor market this is hardly surprising. It may partly fit a logic of recruitment as well.

For the GEW on the other hand, SI1 and SI2 are salient, while LM is less salient than for all other unions; the GEW thus exhibits the clearest focus on SI. Of course, for the GEW the members' labor market interests overlap with policies belonging to SI, such as education; accordingly, this is to be expected and speaks for the logic of membership being at work. The GEW further exhibits the strongest increase in the salience of SI2. This indicates an increasing importance of topics such as training and further education, even for a union for which the knowledge sector is a central topic anyway. It is further notable that CP is not a salient topic for the GEW.

The general aim of this paper is to investigate broad union policy standpoints concerning social policy, how they differ across unions and how they have developed during the past years. With respect to this general aim, the findings can be summarized as follows: the findings discussed above indicate that unions differ in their focus on different kinds of social policy. This underlines the necessity of looking at union standpoints explicitly and separately across unions, instead of making assumptions about the goals that labor unions, considered as a

homogeneous actor, have. Concerning developments over the past years, the saliency of SI policies that are closely labor market related has increased, while LM has become slightly less salient. Consequently, a shift towards concerns such as further education can be discerned. Simultaneously, however, the saliency of traditional, ‘old’ social policies, CP, has also increased. On the one hand, this increasing focus on traditional policies can signal a lack of adaptation to welfare state developments. On the other hand, it has to be considered that as a reaction to traditional policies coming under threat (e.g. pensions), this may also indicate a different kind of adaptation to welfare state changes, the changes in this case being increasing threats. The relative increase of focus on CP rather than on LM could be interpreted as showing that unions are not merely focusing on the directly labor market related interests of their traditional members, which could also be served through focusing more on LM, but instead are increasingly reacting to retrenchment developments in the welfare state.

### 3.5 Conclusion

The main goal of this paper was to explore the salience of social policy and labor market concerns as well as for new and old kinds of social policy for different unions. Results show that this differs considerably; there is no simple focus on traditional social policy. Labor market topics have the highest salience, but this has been slightly decreasing in recent years, relative to the other categories. Simultaneously, there has been some increase in the salience of new social policy kinds such as SI policies, particularly those that are directly labor market related. Further, in the documents an increased intersection of labor market topics and social policy topics can be observed. This may indicate an increased importance of the latter in such domains as collective bargaining.

With regard to differences across unions, the logic of membership appears to be dominant for most unions with respect to SII: for the most part, union members are still employees in relatively secure positions, which should increase their stake in CP and LM, but not necessarily in SI – for most unions SI policies located in a broad social welfare focus are indeed not salient. The exception is the GEW, for which this focus (given the dominance of topics such as education and childcare) is likely to be a manifestation of membership focus. However, turning to SI that is directly labor market related, the situation is different: several unions accord it a relatively high importance in their newspapers, and the relative salience has increased over the past years. A focus on SI, but particularly on those SI policies that are immediately labor market related, may be easier for unions to integrate, given their role as labor market actors. It may, after all, be a way that allows them to integrate recruitment considerations, while not risking conflicts with their core membership. Nevertheless, there is also an (increasing) focus on broad social policy, in the form of CP salience. This could speak to unions trying to defend existing structures that are under pressure.

One main contribution of this article is adding to the consideration of unions’ role in the welfare state today: a necessary step in understanding this role is looking at union standpoints and goals, for which saliency theory can be applied. The analysis in this paper goes beyond much of the existing literature by looking at policy standpoints directly and by differentiating between

unions. A further contribution is of a methodological nature: the application of quantitative text analysis to a new field of study, namely labor union publications. This also entailed creating a large database of union articles and a new dictionary, focused on social policy topics discussed by labor unions.

The analysis conducted in this paper is, of course, subject to several clear limitations. I do not look at strategies directly but focus on topic salience. Since I cannot clearly differentiate between the implications of different logics, what can be concluded about potential strategies remains tentative and exploratory. A further constraint arises through looking at union newspapers. While this has several advantages (as discussed above), it also captures primarily how unions want to be perceived by their members. Consequently, there could be a bias towards the logic of membership, because unions may write in particular about topics their members are interested in. However, this, in turn, also means that the results indicating partial deviations from the logic of membership are particularly informative. Given that the salience results are not always in line with what the logic of membership would lead us to expect, other logics appear to matter as well.

There are multiple areas of related research that this paper motivates examining further. A first avenue for future analysis is looking at the strategies and logics behind union standpoints and goals more directly and finding ways to test their relative importance. An important next step is to also bring together the study of union goals with their actual engagement in reforms. A third avenue is exploring other questions that may benefit from being studied using quantitative text analysis of union publications. One aspect that the research done in this paper could be extended to look at, is disaggregating what is summarized here under the category LM. As discussed above, this is by far the most salient topic, which is perhaps unsurprising, given that it encompasses central issues such as employment protection legislation and collective wage bargaining. Studying saliency of these sub-topics may also be very worthwhile. A general insight provided by this article is that quantitative text analysis of union publications as a methodology can provide a new and valuable perspective on what standpoints unions adopt and how this differs.



## Chapter 4

### Paper III

# Whose interests do unions represent in today's welfare state? Investigating social policy positions of labor unions

Nona Bledow

#### **Abstract**

While labor unions are traditionally seen as promoting social policy, in recent literature this assumption is called into question. Unions are seen as failing to support new social policies and instead defending old social policies and catering to their traditional core members, turning them into increasingly narrow interest groups. Yet current union positions on social policy are rarely examined directly nor is the assumption that with regard to social policy positions unions function largely as a transmission mechanism of their members' interests. I examine what positions unions take towards social policy today, with regard to different policy fields and different policy types, in particular social investment as compared to compensatory policy. I argue that positions and strategic choices are not only influenced by membership considerations, but also by union goals related to recruitment and influence. Together, these considerations can help explain variation in positions across unions and countries. Conducting expert interviews in three countries, Denmark, Germany, and the UK, I find that positions differ across unions and countries and that unions appear to be more supportive of social investment than generally assumed. Moreover, besides the membership logic, recruitment and influence considerations appear to play a substantial role as well and should be taken into account when studying the role of unions in social policy today.

## 4.1 Introduction

Unions historically played a central role in the creation and expansion of the welfare state (see, for example, Brugiavini et al. 2001; Esping-Andersen 1990; Streeck and Hassel 2003b). For a long time unions were seen as a force not only advancing employee interests in the labor market but also in the social policy realm. Generally, a high degree of unionization was said to be associated with generous welfare states (Brugiavini et al. 2001; Korpi 1983).

In the last few decades, however, the role ascribed to unions as welfare state actors has become less clear. The image of unions as generally being supportive of social policy is questioned in the literature. Many scholars seem to see unions as supporting certain types of social policies, traditional policies targeted at ‘old social risks’, but not ‘new’ types of policies aimed to mitigate ‘new social risks’. This is generally argued to be due to unions’ membership structure: various studies argue that unions primarily represent the interests of an elderly, male workforce, in traditional full-time employment, which still makes up the core of their members, while only weakly representing young employees, white collar employees in the private sector, atypical employees, and women (see also Häusermann 2010a; Palier and Thelen 2010). This purportedly leads to unions having a status quo bias, opposing necessary reforms, and advancing the narrow interests of particular groups (e.g., Anderson and T. Meyer 2003; Brugiavini et al. 2001; Emmenegger et al. 2012; Häusermann 2012; Naczyk and Seeleib-Kaiser 2015; Rueda 2007). Some argue that unions not only go along with retrenchment of some types of social policy and tendencies such as labor market dualization, but that they are complicit in sustaining the uncertain situation of people facing new risks and precarious workers, because this secures their members’ interests (cf. Davidsson and Emmenegger 2012, 2013; Durazzi and Lee 2018). The claim is essentially that if tough choices are to be made unions will represent narrow interests of their traditional core members, leading to them being supportive of some social policies while being neutral or implicitly oppositional to other social policies. This perception is not restricted to the academic discussion; unions appear to be organizations “whose membership base is shrinking and whose policies are perceived by a growing share of the public as serving only union members, sometimes at the expense of the rest of society” (Streeck and Hassel 2003b, p.346).

While this view of unions applies to collective bargaining and the industrial relations role of unions in general as well as to social policy, this paper looks exclusively at the latter. There is little systematic research on the general positions unions actually hold with regard to social policy today, in particular concerning newer developments such as social investment, and on whose interests they represent in this realm; the role of unions in newer types of social policy is under-researched. A first goal of this paper is, accordingly, to examine what positions unions take with respect to different types of social policy today, which policies they focus on, and whether these conform to expectations of unions as representing increasingly narrow interests of their traditional members. While new social policies do not automatically entail a broad societal focus, given that unions are historically more involved in other types of social policy and that their traditional membership is not the core target of most newer types of social policy, for them to (also) focus on these policies presents a broadening of focus. Moreover, a focus on

traditional social policy at the cost of new social policies is part of the accusation that unions are catering to narrow interests described above. Further, what is taken to lead to unions' narrow focus is generally the composition of their membership. While this logic of membership is, doubtlessly, important for a union's focus in social policy, other considerations also need to be taken into account. This is the second goal of this paper. These considerations can be condensed into the following three core questions: What positions do unions take with regard to social investment and compensatory policy? Which policies do they focus on? What role do membership considerations compared to other goals of the union play in determining these positions? In investigating these questions, it is important to take variation across unions as well as across unionisms, i.e., union movements at the country level, into account. Characteristics such as membership structure differ both across unions as well as across countries. Further, institutional characteristics, such as density, the degree of centralization, and how unions are embedded in the welfare state also influence both union strength and policy positions.

Accordingly, in order to answer these questions, I explore positions across unions and in three country contexts, conducting expert interviews in Denmark, Germany, and the UK. This adds a new, further angle to work done in the context of this dissertation project, which looks at attitudes of union members towards social investment in several European countries (Paper I) and compensatory policy and the salience of different social policy topics for unions in Germany (Paper II). In the present paper I find that the importance accorded to social investment and compensatory policies varies across unions and countries. Unions appear to be somewhat more supportive of 'new' social policies and social investment than is generally expected. Further, the logic of membership does appear to be at work, but in somewhat unexpected ways. Moreover, other considerations, namely recruitment and influence, are also important and partly conflict with the membership logic.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows: I first discuss classic as well as more recent literature, firstly, on union positions on the welfare state and, secondly, on what influences union positions. I go on to explain my underlying theoretical considerations, arguing in the first part that additional goals besides membership factors influence union positions and strategies. In the second part of the theoretical base I examine 'new' and 'old social risks', social policy developments, and how this relates to union members. I then put these two parts together and formulate expectations of what the different logics entail with regard to union social policy focus. I go on to briefly explain my methodology. Subsequently, I present my results, first giving a descriptive overview of unions' social policy positions and then discussing what considerations appear to be behind these positions. Finally, I conclude.

## 4.2 Literature review

### 4.2.1 Existing literature on unions' social policy stance

The classic welfare state literature considers unions as one of the major forces in the construction and expansion of the welfare state (e.g., Brugiavini et al. 2001; Esping-Andersen 1990; Huber and Stephens 2001; Streeck and Hassel 2003b). In particular, power resource theory

(PRT) regards strong unions, alongside the electoral success of left parties, as one main driving force behind welfare state expansion (Korpi 1983, 2006; Stephens 1979). PRT understands capital and labor as standing in opposition, with capital generally opposing the expansion of the welfare state. Variations of this general thesis include the role of Christian Democratic parties and cross-class alliances, e.g., between the working class and farmers (Huber, Ragin, and Stephens 1993; Swenson 1991). Modifying the assumption that capital tends to oppose social policy, corporatist theory as well as the varieties of capitalism approach argue that, in certain settings, capital promotes certain types of social policy, partly working alongside organized labor as social partners (Crouch 1993; Hall and Soskice 2001). Accordingly, in the classic literature on the welfare state, while the role of employers is ambiguous and context dependent, the general role of unions is quite clear: unions promote social policy and welfare spending, sometimes alongside, sometimes in opposition to capital.

In recent literature this assumption is no longer uncontested. Unions are seen as protecting specific ‘old’ social policies, while accepting or being complicit in cutbacks in other types of social policy. This is argued to be due to traditional union members increasingly differing in their interests from the workforce at large, in which ‘new social risks’ are becoming more and more important and are insufficiently addressed by ‘old’ policies. Unions are argued to mainly represent the increasingly narrow interests of their traditional core membership, neglecting the interests of other, frequently more vulnerable, parts of the workforce. As Naczyk and Seeleib-Kaiser (2015) put it in the course of discussing union involvement in pension reforms: “Taken together, these studies suggest – or at least convey the impression – that instead of trying to prevent dualization, organized labor may on the contrary have exacerbated it” (p.365). This tendency in the literature similarly applies to other policy fields. Examining different policy areas, the following studies argue that general support for social policy cannot be expected from unions and that they support mainly policies targeted at ‘old social risks’. I first consider papers on union support for social policy and the narrowness of interests represented by unions in general and then go on to papers looking at unions and ‘old’ vs. ‘new social risks’. Nijhuis (2009) questions the traditional assumption of unions as welfare state promoters and argues that union support for social policies is contingent on organizational structures and union membership. Focusing on pensions, he claims that occupationally organized unions do not support social policies that do not directly benefit their membership. Looking at the general issue of unions representing narrow interests with regard to public policy, Anzia and Moe (2015) find that in the US, public sector union strength is related to increased costs of government – implicitly advancing the argument that public sector unions represent narrow interests of those working in this sector at the cost of the general public. Several other studies considering the purported narrow focus of unions build on the assumption of such a focus rather than investigating its existence (e.g., Brugiavini et al. 2001; Palier and Thelen 2010; Rueda 2007). Looking at ‘old’ and ‘new social risks’, Häusermann (2010a) argues that because their core membership does not have an interest in policies catering to ‘new’ post-industrial risks, such as pensions covering interrupted employment careers, unions in Continental European countries attach less importance to these types of policies. The main reason for this, according to her, is that the young and women are still only weakly represented in unions. Since addressing post-industrial needs is becoming increasingly important in the policy discourse, and particularly

for Social Democratic and Green parties, Häusermann (2010a) concludes that the focus on the interests of their traditional members is weakening union influence. In a subsequent study, Häusermann (2012) is ambiguous on the role of unions. She sees unions as representatives of the ‘old left’, which she expects to be neutral with respect to activation (‘new’ policies). Yet, she finds that unions support activation policies as well as the expansion of benefits (‘old’ policies); this divergence from expectations is not discussed, however. Another feature in which union membership differs from the overall workforce is that union members are relatively old. Anderson and T. Meyer (2003) study whether unions focus disproportionately on the specific social policy interests of the elderly. While they argue that German unions do indeed represent narrow, pro-elderly interests with respect to pensions (Anderson and T. Meyer 2003), Anderson and Lynch (2007) find that whether unions display a disproportionate focus on these interests depends on factors such as encompassingness and how the representation of pensioners within unions is structured. In sum, these studies argue that unions do appear to represent relatively narrow interests and support ‘old’ social policies, though to what extent this is the case may vary according to factors such as organizational structures and encompassingness.

Other studies, however, find union support for ‘new’ social policies. Engeman (2016), for example, looks at the US case and finds that union strength is positively associated with the legislative adoption of family leave policy. There is also evidence for unions representing broad rather than narrow interests. Studying old-age pensions, Naczyk and Seeleib-Kaiser (2015) find that even though different groups within labor have distinct interests, trade unions increasingly cooperate to achieve wide coverage with occupational pensions, even those unions representing privileged employees. According to the authors, reasons for this are, on the one hand, protecting schemes which these unions’ members also benefit from, but on the other hand, also the goal of retaining influence and a role as pacesetters (Naczyk and Seeleib-Kaiser 2015). Durazzi (2017) finds that, in the dualized labor market setting of the Italian case, unions have adopted inclusive strategies towards temporary agency workers.

### 4.2.2 Gaps in the existing literature

Overall, there is disagreement as to what role unions have in social policy making today, to what degree they support ‘old’ vs. ‘new’ social policies and to what extent they have increasingly turned into supporters of only those policies that cater to narrow interests of their core membership. We know little about what positions unions hold with regard to newer policy types meant to target ‘new social risks’, such as social investment, and what influences these positions. This is the general gap in the literature this paper aims to address. The ambiguity concerning the role of unions may be due, at least partly, to further shortcomings in the existing literature. Several aspects concerning the general role of unions in social policy have received too little attention. For the most part, the studies discussed above do not look at the positions of unions, but instead at policy outcomes and the involvement of unions in particular reforms. There is a shortage of studies directly investigating *general positions*, across different social policy types, that unions actually take towards social policy. Both looking at *positions directly* rather than at policy outcomes and examining the *general* positions is, however, important. It is crucial to look at positions directly, for two main reasons: firstly, this

way one can distinguish better between different unions, which in turn helps to identify the roles of membership, recruitment and influence considerations. Secondly, looking at positions directly makes it possible to distinguish between union preferences and the power unions have to work towards these preferences, which is of particular importance in the context of declining union power. This can further help compare the arguments from different theoretical approaches: while PRT arguments build on union influence, dualization perspectives argue more from union positions. Further, looking at general positions rather than involvement in specific policies is also important. While studying union involvement in specific policies and particular reforms is doubtlessly informative, broader positions can provide insights into unions' overall agenda, how unions strategically position themselves, and how they want to be perceived.

In order to address what positions unions are actually taking and the strategic reasoning behind this, a further strand of existing work provides important insights: this is work on general goals behind union behavior and how this has evolved in times of declining density and the need for revitalization strategies. As mentioned in the introduction, when making statements about unions' social policy stance, many authors assume a membership logic to be driving it. As Streeck and Hassel (2003b, p.362) put it: "the political interests of unions will naturally be defined by their remaining core membership". However, there are also other concerns that influence union positions and behavior. Schmitter and Streeck (1999) consider organized interests generally and distinguish between the "logic of membership" and the "logic of influence". The former refers to one important goal a voluntary membership organization with democratic structures has: keeping its members sufficiently happy. The latter captures the need to have influence and a functioning exchange relationship with external actors, such as the employers, the government, and parties (Schmitter and Streeck 1999). Kremer and Olken (2009) pit the interest of the organization against that of its members. Arguing, in evolutionary biology terms, that unions, which extract less rents from firms or spend more on recruitment than preferred by their members, have a higher chance of survival. This does not mean that unions are not constrained by what their members want, but it does indicate that satisfying member interests is not their only concern.

Survival and recruitment strategies are also at the core of recent work on union revitalization strategies. In the context of declining union density, recent literature has made out 'social movement' unionism as a potential strategy of union revitalization (see, for example, Ibsen and Tapia 2017). The term describes a turn towards influencing public opinion and relying on strategies shaping policy from the outside, via the general public (Ibsen and Tapia 2017; Streeck and Hassel 2003a). This links to two somewhat conflicting roles and self-conceptions of unions, which have co-existed for a long time: unions as representatives of particular, relatively narrow vested interests, and unions as a movement that goes beyond a mere lobbying group and represents the working class as a whole, as defenders of broader societal interests and justice issues (as summarized by Hyman (2005) and Streeck and Hassel (2003b), see also Busemeyer (2020)). In contrast to the focus on the logic of membership dominant in the work on unions' social policy role described above, these perspectives imply that unions take interests besides those of their existing members into account, when formulating social policy positions.

Taken together, the strands of literature on union logics and revitalization display a further gap

in the literature on unions in social policy. The goals unions have regarding influence as well as recruitment and the general impulse of addressing groups other than traditional interests appear important – but are rarely considered in the literature on the current role of unions in social policy. The two literature gaps I want to contribute to addressing in this paper are, accordingly, firstly, the lack of systematic knowledge as to what positions unions hold in the social policy realm today, in particular concerning newer policy types such as social investment, and, secondly, the shortage of studies investigating which factors, besides the membership logic, explain why unions focus on certain policies and choose the strategic approaches they choose.

## 4.3 What determines unions' social policy positions?

### 4.3.1 Unions' competing goals

The objects of study of this paper are union positions concerning social policy, and strategies underlying these positions. I understand positions as closely related to the preferences of a union as an organization. The preferences of the union as an organization, i.e., union positions, are shorthand here for the preferences of union leaders and officials. The understanding of positions is broad in that it encompasses both the supportive or oppositional stance towards issues, as well as the importance accorded to them. In order to formulate expectations about union positions and strategies, it is necessary to examine what unions derive utility from, i.e., what the goals of a union as an organization are and what expected preferences this entails. A core argument of this paper is that unions have multiple goals, which they attempt to work towards simultaneously. In this I follow the literature on another type of aggregate interest association, namely parties. According to Strom and Müller (1999), parties, or, more specifically, party leaders, pursue three different goals, which can come into conflict: office, policy, and votes. Parties seek to be in office, because this bestows them with certain benefits, either intrinsic or instrumental in attaining other goals (Strom and Müller 1999). Parties also attempt to influence policy to shift it towards their preferred positions – again either for intrinsic reasons or because it helps them work towards other goals (*ibid.*). Third, parties try to gain votes. Here the value is instrumental: gaining sufficient votes helps them achieve either policy goals or gain office (*ibid.*).

While the goals unions work towards are different, there are also similarities. Building on the literature discussed in section 2, I argue that a union has three general goals that it must balance: the first goal is representing its members, the second is gaining and retaining influence, and the third is recruitment of new members. Looking at the first goal, it essentially describes the necessity of keeping members sufficiently happy. This is the role of a union as a voluntary membership organization with democratic structures, captured by the logic of membership (Schmitter and Streeck 1999). If a union fails to do, to a sufficient degree, what its members want, they may exit the organization (Hirschmann 1970). Similarly, competitors for elected positions, as well as incumbents, have an incentive to do what members, or their constituencies within the membership, want. This is analogous to intra-party democratic structures, where, if members have the power to replace leaders, these leaders need to take into account what

their supporters want, to some extent (Laver 1997, chapter 4). Thus, one important goal for the union is to retain existing members and to build legitimacy and justify to their members what they are doing. This has similarities to vote seeking behavior in the case of parties, as described by (Strom and Müller 1999), since the members are a necessary power resource that allows unions to attain other goals, similar to votes in the party case, and they are important for legitimacy. Yet it differs in that the pressure of retaining members (and gaining new ones) is continuous, rather than occurring (in full strength) cyclically in the run-up to elections. The need to justify what they do to members applies both to collective bargaining as well as to union engagement in social policy.

The second goal is to ensure influence of the union and its leadership. Unions want to have functioning relationships with external actors such as employers, the government, and parties, in order to influence policies, achieve concessions and obtain benefits related to having influence. This aspect is captured by the logic of influence (Schmitter and Streeck 1999). The logic of influence is comparable to office-seeking behavior of parties, in that it is about gaining a position of power and control. This in turn is likely to be related to benefits of different sorts, such as control over policy, or private benefits that come with a position of power, or may be important for other intrinsic or instrumental reasons (Strom and Müller 1999, p.5f.). The type and degree of influence is shaped by the institutional structure of unionism within a country. The level of density, the degree of centralization, and the institutions governing how unions interact with employers all matter. More centralized union movements with higher density and corporatist structures are related to greater union influence, more political involvement and support for more universal policies (Ebbinghaus 2010; Gordon 2015; Olson 1965). With regard to influence in the social policy realm, in addition to these characteristics, the type of welfare states and to what extent and in which ways unions are embedded in it are of particular importance (for different types of embeddedness see, for example, Crouch 1993; Ebbinghaus 2010; Ebbinghaus and Visser 1997). For example, to the extent that unions are involved in certain types of policies, they are likely to put a focus on these in particular.

The third goal is closely related to the survival goal a union has as an organization: recruitment. Unions have an interest in recruiting new members, firstly, because they want to survive as organizations and, secondly, they want to sustain membership levels or grow, because members are a source of legitimacy and organizational power (e.g., through strikes) and thus a power resource (cf. Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.30). I term this the logic of recruitment.<sup>1</sup> This interest in recruiting new members is also somewhat similar to vote-seeking in the case of parties. However, for unions the two logics, the logic of membership and the logic of recruitment, can be distinguished, because the group of ‘supporters’ that functions as a power resource and gives legitimacy is more clearly split into those that are already members and those that potentially can be recruited. For parties, the line between core supporters and potential supporters is less clear, because it depends on propensities of voting for a party, which is important in repeated elections. In the case of unions, supporting a union in most contexts means becoming a member. Becoming a union member is (generally) a one time decision and

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<sup>1</sup>In addition, union leaders may also have policy goals, similarly to parties. However, since policy goals are even harder to get at and since they are unlikely to contradict all other three goals and constitute an own dimension, they are not considered separately in this paper.

involves a fixed commitment in the form of membership fees, which is an important resource for unions;<sup>2</sup> the two groups can thus be more clearly distinguished. As discussed in the following, it is especially important today to distinguish these groups and the corresponding logics.

All three goals are, of course, related. Members have an interest in the union wielding some degree of influence; for influence, in turn, a certain level of membership and thus recruitment is necessary; union officials rely on members for power resources which give them influence, and in order to survive as a legitimate organization. However, the logics can also come into conflict. The logic of influence and the logic of membership can conflict, for example, if it is in the interest of the union as an organization to extract fewer concessions from the state than would be optimal for its current members, in order to keep a seat at the table and thus retain influence (for a similar strand of reasoning see Kremer and Olken 2009). This can occur, for example, in wage bargaining, but also in policy making contexts, when unions give support to certain policy aspects, even though many members may have no interest in these. The logic of membership and the logic of recruitment will conflict if interests of potential recruits are sufficiently different from those of existing members: in order to become attractive to potential recruits, a union may try to advance their interests. If resources are scarce or if the interests of potential recruits are different enough from the preferences of current members, this involves a trade-off. An example is fighting for the regulation of temporary or agency employment, which those employed in these types of jobs may want, but which to some extent goes against interests of securely employed union members, since agency and temporary employees can provide a 'flexibility bolster'.<sup>3</sup> In the social policy context, young, precariously employed workers may want the union to focus on education and skill-enhancement, while older securely employed workers perceive this as unnecessary, and would prefer effort to be exerted on other things. Moreover, as Kremer and Olken (2009) point out, there is also a general conflict between the logic of membership and the logic of recruitment, in that unions as an organization have an incentive to spend more on recruitment than would be optimal for their members, because long-term union survival is more important to the union as an organization and its leadership than to its members. I hold it to be particularly important to distinguish recruitment as a distinct aspect today, because, given societal developments, the interests of potential recruits are likely to differ substantially from those of existing members. For example, while the bulk of current union membership still consists of people in full-time secure employment, unions are increasingly trying to recruit part-time temporary employees; these groups have distinct interests in employment regulation and unemployment policy. Additionally, given declining density and ageing membership in the past decades, recruitment is of particular importance.

Overall, given the reasoning above, it is implausible to see unions as mere transmission mechanisms for the will of their members. Unions have multiple goals and considerations they need to take into account and conflicts between these they need to consider. In many cases it is hard to distinguish the pursuit of which goal leads to which specific behaviors. Nevertheless, having a clear conceptual idea of how different logics and underlying strategies bear on leader-

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<sup>2</sup>Party members normally also pay fees, of course, but compared to the importance of elections this is less central. A further difference is that union members often have access to (sometimes extensive) member-only services. This also tightens the tie between members and unions.

<sup>3</sup>On the other hand, inferior working conditions of temporary employees may also exert downward pressure on the standards of the permanently employed – the interactions are varied and complex.

ship choices can help derive general expectations, explain differences, and gain an idea of what strategies unions are likely to adopt.

Looking at these goals and related logics in the context of social policy, the reasoning above has the following general implications: to the extent that the membership logic drives union positions, they should focus on policies that benefit existing members. If the logic of recruitment or influence considerations drive union positions, they should tend to focus on policies benefiting potential recruits and strengthening their influence. Which logic is how important is likely to vary across unions as well as across country contexts. Before deriving more detailed expectations regarding the workings of the three logics in social policy, in the following section I will briefly discuss the social policy context and how it relates to union member interests.

### 4.3.2 Developments in social policy and union member interests

Socio-economic developments such as continuing deindustrialization, the increasing prevalence of atypical employment and general societal changes such as increased female labor market participation have led to shifts in the risks social policies need to address. ‘New social risks’ include problems in reconciling work and family, youth unemployment, long-term unemployment due to obsolete skills, and insufficient social security coverage for people in non-standard employment positions (Bonoli 2005; Hemerijck 2018; Taylor-Gooby 2004). These risks are contrasted to ‘old social risks’ that dominated in the industrial era, such as job and income loss through old age, unemployment or sickness, mostly of the male-breadwinner (Bonoli 2007; Häusermann 2012). With the new risks, the interests which different groups have in social policies are changing and they diverge across different parts of the population (Garritzmann, Busemeyer, and Neimanns 2018; Häusermann 2018). Simultaneously, the social policy landscape is becoming increasingly complex (Häusermann 2012).

A general type of social policy that is becoming increasingly important is social investment. Social investment encompasses policies such as early childhood education and care, ALMP, and education, which invest in the skills of people *ex ante*, trying to prepare them for risks they may face (cf. Hemerijck 2018; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012, p.9f.). Put concisely, the aim of social investment policies is “skill creation, mobilization, and preservation” (Garritzmann, Häusermann, et al. 2017, p.39). These stand in contrast to policies that compensate people *ex post*, once they are in an adverse life situation (such as unemployment benefits and pensions). Concerning the implementation of social investment policies, a partial turn towards social investment can be identified in Europe, with substantial variation across countries (Hemerijck 2018). The Scandinavian countries have the longest history and the most extensive implementation of social investment policies (*ibid.*). However, recently there have been several reforms with elements of deuniversalization and cutbacks in Sweden and Denmark (Van Kersbergen and Kraft 2017). Continental welfare states long appeared very stable in social policy terms, but recently there has been an expansion of social investment in some countries, such as expanding care and family policy in Germany (Fleckenstein 2011; Seeleib-Kaiser 2017). In the wake of the 2008 financial and the ensuing debt crisis, there were shifts away from social investment in some countries. In others however, there were interventionist responses partly also expanding

social investment; there was in particular an expansion of childcare and family friendly work policies (Taylor-Gooby, Leruth, and Chung 2017).

As Häusermann (2018) points out, the two types of social policy are quite different: “the very logic of social investment deviates clearly from traditional welfare policies, i.e., it seeks to enhance labour market participation, rather than decommodifying welfare recipients” (p.863). The policies also affect different groups in different ways. This makes it likely that support and support coalitions for the two types of policy differ (Häusermann 2012, 2018). Indeed, support appears to be distinct at the individual level (Garritzmann, Busemeyer, and Neimanns 2018), as well as at the level of collective actors (Häusermann 2018). In the case of unions, traditional union members appear more likely to have an interest in compensatory policy than in social investment, as will be discussed below. Since social investment has become an important topic in the welfare discourse in Europe, as well as an important aspect of reforms and reform proposals, examining what positions unions – still a potentially important actor in the welfare state – take towards it is essential.

New policies, such as social investment, are meant to address new risks and provide welfare in a new way, realigning social policy focus. Social investment in particular is meant to address risks such as atypical employment, working poverty, family instability and skills becoming obsolete (Garritzmann, Häusermann, et al. 2017; Häusermann 2012; Hemerijck 2018). Compensatory policies on the other hand address old risks, such as income or job loss, often through schemes tied to previous income (Häusermann 2012). Social investment is thus likely to be less in the interest of traditional core union members, who still tend to face old risks and benefit instead from compensatory policies. Moreover, social investment policies are intended to be relatively universal (Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012) and thus have the potential of benefiting groups outside of unions' core members, such as individuals facing new risks and those employed precariously.<sup>4</sup> This differs from compensatory policy, especially in conservative welfare states, in which traditional social policies tend to be income dependent and status preserving. Similarly, in terms of policy fields, pensions, old age care, and unemployment benefits should align more closely with traditional union member interests than childcare, ALMPs and education, which should appeal to other groups more strongly. Further, a focus on pensions and health is identified in the literature as catering more to the interests of the elderly because these factors benefit this group more (see Busemeyer 2009; Lynch 2001), while education and family policy, such as early childhood education and care, can be seen as benefiting younger people more. Because of ageing union membership, the latter types of policies should be less important to core union members.

It is important to note that what is looked at here in terms of union strategies is predominantly relative policy positions and relative strength of support, rather than support compared to

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<sup>4</sup>Of course, how universal social investment policies are depends on the actual implementation as well as on uptake. In the case of childcare, for example, middle class insiders may be more likely to take advantage of subsidized childcare or similar policies, leading to the policy having more actual benefits for them (Lancker and Ghysels 2012). To what extent a ‘Matthew effect’ – an increase of existing inequalities – may arise through social investment is unclear and appears to differ across policy fields, it is stronger in childcare policies than in ALMPs (Bonoli and Liechti 2018; Busemeyer, Porte, et al. 2018; Pavolini and Van Lancker 2018). As noted above, while a focus on new social policies including social investment does not necessarily imply a broad societal focus, for unions this does hold to some degree, because for them this constitutes a widening of focus beyond their traditional core membership.

opposition. Unions are unlikely to explicitly oppose the expansion of social policy, independent of its type, unless it stands in a clear trade-off relation with something else unions value more. This is all the more the case, since, although union members support social investment policies less than compensatory policies, they nevertheless tend to be supportive (Bledow and Busemeyer 2020). Prioritization is likely to be particularly important, however, in times of tight budgets, in which social investment policies are likely to compete with compensatory policy for funding and thus, more expenditure on one may come at the cost of the other (Busemeyer and Garritzmann 2017). In the following section I turn to putting together the considerations of social policy and union member interests, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the logics that influence union choice, and derive expectations for different unions and different country contexts. I also explain my methodological approach.

## 4.4 Expectations and methodological approach

### 4.4.1 Deriving expectations

In the realm of social policy, the logic of membership leads to the expectation that the higher the degree to which traditional types of members and relatively privileged labor market participants and older members constitute the membership of a union, the more it should focus on policy fields in which these members are likely to have a direct interest.<sup>5</sup> These are compensatory policy and policy fields catering to the elderly and securely employed full-time male workers. Further, this should be less the case in more encompassing unions. The reasoning behind this is that encompassing organizations, which represent a significant part of the population, should not cater to narrow interests, but rather support goals that benefit the wider population (Busemeyer 2020; Olson 1982). A further expectation related to the logic of membership, particular to some unions, is that those unions with members who work in the public sector, including social policy administration or education, should lead to a stronger focus on social policy overall.

However, as argued above, two other logics also influence union choices and strategies. The first of these is the logic of recruitment. This may be particularly relevant today, since socio-economic developments have led to changes in interests concerning social policy (Bonoli 2005, 2006; Häusermann 2012, 2018), as described in the previous section. Some of these new interests are likely to be more prevalent in the younger cohorts, since young people are, for example, more likely to be in atypical employment (Allmendinger, Hipp, and Stuth 2013; Standing 2011, p.56; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.59). It is important for unions to recruit young people, because they are currently underrepresented and because they have their entire employment history before them and hence have a long potential time horizon within the union (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.52ff.). Further, many unions with high membership levels are based in the industrial sector (Ebbinghaus 2006; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013, p.35ff.; Oesch 2006, p.160ff.; Streeck and Hassel 2003a). Given ongoing deindustrializa-

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<sup>5</sup>Note that I assume a rational choice logic: people are assumed to have an interest in and to prefer, *ceteris paribus*, those policies that they stand to benefit from. This does not exclude the possibility of other factors being at work.

tion, these unions may try to recruit outside their traditional membership base, which is likely to lead to increasing differences in the interests of the pool of potential recruits and existing members. With atypical employment becoming increasingly widespread, they may also try to expand recruitment. The proportion of women varies substantially across unions. Many unions, in particular those not primarily organizing public sector employees, are still predominantly male, but have tried to recruit more female members. Accordingly, the unions' need to recruit new members could constitute a reason for them to focus on the interests of people outside their traditional core membership and of younger people, leading to them supporting broader social policy and 'new' social policies. This leads to expecting that unions with more pressing membership issues and for which potential recruits differ sufficiently from current members, should support social investment and policies benefiting primarily younger people and other groups outside their traditional membership more.

For looking at expectations derived from influence considerations, the type of unionism, i.e., the shape and institutional structure of union movements, need to be taken into account. In considering the logic of influence it is helpful to look at the country level, since with regard to institutionalized, involvement (major) unions within a country can be expected to vary less than across countries. The same holds, partially, for interactions with parties and governments. However, the structure of the union movement in a country also affects positions in a way other than via influence considerations. In the following, expectations at the country level will be derived, including but not limited to expectations connected to the logic of influence. The characteristics of union movements tend to cluster together, meaning that different modes of unionism can be identified. Ebbinghaus (2010) identifies contentious, pluralist, neo-corporatist and social partnership union movements. While the former two modes exhibit less density and centralization, the latter are both quite centralized, with relatively encompassing unions, though in the social partnership case union density is substantially lower. These modes are also tied to different welfare regimes, namely southern, liberal, universalist and conservative. Density is seen as related to both more influence as well as support for more universal policies (Gordon 2015; Olson 1965). Applied to focus on different social policy types, this implies that in settings of more encompassing unionisms, unions should support policies targeted at general interests more, which, from the perspective of unions, should include new social policies.<sup>6</sup> Further, since density increases power resources, it can give unions a sense of security, which allows them to have broader policy ambitions (Gordon 2015). Vice versa, when density is declining, they should focus more on narrow interests. Centralization, including the level of collective bargaining (firm, sector or national), as well as the structure of unions and their confederations, is also seen as positively related to union strength as well as a focus on broader interests (Gordon 2015).<sup>7</sup> Thus in countries with more centralized union movements, unions are expected to be more supportive of newer social policy targeted at non-traditional groups, such as SI.

The traditional forms of institutionalized union influence, such as being involved in tripartite

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<sup>6</sup>As also alluded to when looking at the logic of membership.

<sup>7</sup>Though less centralized and concentrated unions may in some contexts also have a positive effect on union strength, as suggested by the results from Becher, Stegmüller, and Käppner (2018), who find less concentrated unions to be associated with more liberal legislative voting in the US case.

administration of social insurance systems, focus primarily on compensatory policies rather than social investment (Ebbinghaus 2006, 2010). Being involved in such structures is a source of union strength (Streeck and Hassel 2003b). Further, if unions are closely involved in a specific policy field, they can have a greater impact in this field while having to use less resources, thus it can be an efficient area of engagement for a union (Gordon 2015). This leads to the expectation that in contexts with stronger institutionalized involvement, especially in social insurance, unions should have a stronger focus on compensatory policies, because this is their traditional and efficient realm of influence and they are likely to have an interest in retaining this influence. A further argument related to the logic of influence is the following: given recent developments in the welfare state, in particular the emergence of the social investment paradigm (e.g., Garritzmann, Häusermann, et al. 2017; Hemerijck 2013, 2018), unions may need to strategically position themselves with regard to new policy types if they want to gain and retain influence in welfare policy. This should be particularly the case where unions acutely fear a loss of influence in social policy. In a context where social investment and social policy targeted at young people are more established policies and important in the policy discourse, I thus expect unions to seek to retain influence by according more importance to these topics and being more supportive of related policies.

To summarize the expectations: from the logic of membership, I derive the expectation that unions with a less encompassing and an older and traditional membership should focus more on ‘old’ social policies, compensatory policy, policies benefiting the elderly, and policies benefiting those in secure full-time employment. The logic of recruitment gives rise to the expectation that in contexts where recruitment is of particular importance and where potential recruits differ sufficiently from existing members, unions will support social investment and policies benefiting younger people. Across different types of unionism, I expect unions in those countries with higher density and a more encompassing and centralized union structure to be more supportive of social investment and policies focused on new labor market risks. Influence considerations lead me to expect that where unions are embedded in welfare state structures, particularly in social insurance, they will prioritize compensatory policy. Further, where social investment is particularly established and important in the policy discourse, unions should support it more.

#### **4.4.2 Methodology and research design**

Assessing positions, in particular general and fundamental positions towards social policy areas, is difficult, since statements made by unions may serve a variety of purposes, besides expressing the actual position. Nevertheless, to go beyond assuming positions and to gain an impression of what general positions unions actually have with regard to new and old social policy types, an attempt to gauge such positions is important, even if it is flawed. In order to get an idea of union positions and underlying strategies, firstly, I analyze semi-structured expert interviews conducted with union representatives (more on these below). In order to see whether what emerges from these interviews is also reflected in union statements more generally, I additionally examine press releases. The positions of individual unions and their relative focus on different types of social policy are the main dependent variables, accordingly, the unit of analysis is the union. I consider the following policy fields: pensions, unemployment benefits, care and health,

active labor market policies (ALMPs), and education. I also look at the two more general policy types discussed above, i.e., social investment and compensatory policy. As regards determinants, membership and recruitment pertain primarily to the union level, although there is also variation across unionisms in membership and recruitment patterns. Influence and the importance of social investment as a topic, on the other hand, apply more to the level of country contexts as a whole. Accordingly, countries are considered as a second level of analysis in which unions are embedded. Therefore, I investigate the positions of different unions in three countries: Denmark, Germany, and the UK. This implies that I select cases on two levels, on the country and on the union level.

With regard to the country level, the case selection strategy is the following: the country level is important because the type of unionism is likely to affect both unions' influence as well as their positions. With regard to variants of unionism, my selection of cases constitutes a set of diverse cases (Gerring 2011): Denmark is considered a neo-corporatist type, with high density, high levels of centralization, in conjunction with a universalist welfare regime; Germany is a case of social partnership, with high levels of centralization but lower density, coupled with a conservative welfare state; the UK represents a liberal welfare regime and a pluralist union structure, with relatively low levels of centralization and density (Crouch 1993; Ebbinghaus 2010; Ebbinghaus and Visser 1997; Gordon 2015). Thus, concerning both aspects of union movements as well as the type of welfare regime, which capture those country level factors likely to influence union positions, the cases selected are diverse.

Concerning the selection of unions, I attempt to investigate all major unions (by size of membership), thus capturing the entire population. Size is the criterion here, since it is one of the important drivers of unions' power resources and legitimacy, making them a potentially important voice in social policy (Buss and Bender 2018). A second reason is that these are the unions engaged in social policy debates – smaller unions (even if some of them are more powerful in other respects) tend to rely more on union confederations in social policy matters. Moreover, these are the unions mostly referred to in the debate about the breadth of interests addressed by unions; small unions, which in part are closer to professional associations, are more clearly devoted to the particular interests of their constituents. It follows that the arguments in this paper apply to major unions that aim to cover a relatively broad group of members, rather than to small unions. Union confederations are also active in social policy debates; as mentioned above, some unions rely on the confederation taking care of this realm. Further, there can be differences between those unions who take their own position concerning social policy and the confederation they are affiliated with, since the confederation has to take into account the positions of different unions it represents. Therefore, the main confederations in the three countries are included in the analysis as well.

The interviews were conducted with representatives of the major unions in Germany, Denmark and the UK in March, April, and May 2019, with an additional preliminary test interview being conducted in February. In Germany and Denmark all unions contacted responded positively and interviews were thus conducted with all of them; in the UK three unions did not agree to be interviewed: these were GMB, NASUWT, and USDAW.<sup>8</sup> Those unions that were interviewed

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<sup>8</sup>The full name of the USDAW is Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. The NASUWT and GMB

in the UK were Unite, Unison, NEU, and TUC.<sup>9</sup> In Germany interviews were conducted with representatives of IG Metall, Verdi, IG BCE, IG BAU, GEW, and DGB.<sup>10</sup> In Denmark the interview partners were from FOA, 3F, Dansk Metal, FH, and AC.<sup>11</sup>

In all three countries the unions differ considerably in terms of size and membership composition. Excluding the confederations, the size ranges from IG Metall with 2.262.571 members in Germany to Dansk Metal in Denmark with 142.000 members. Those unions predominantly representing education sectors or public sectors (FOA, Verdi, GEW, Unison, NEU) tend to be disproportionately female, while in most other unions male members make up a higher proportion. For details on the size and membership composition of the unions see the Appendix (Tables C.3-C.5). My interview partners were high-level representatives of the national union chapters, either representatives focusing on relevant policy fields or general high-level representatives within the union. In the case of Germany and Denmark the interviews were conducted in person, in the UK telephone interviews were conducted. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes. The interview guideline can be found in the Appendix (section C.4). My interview questions attempted to grasp the relative focus a union puts on old vs. new social policies and social investment compared to compensatory policies, the extent to which unions prioritize the interests of different groups, and to gauge the reasoning behind the relative focus. I also tried to get an idea of the union representatives' estimation of the current strength and influence of the union as a social policy actor and the development over time. I proceeded by first implicitly trying to probe these points, for example, by asking what areas of social policy are particularly important for a union. I then went on to ask more explicitly, in the example case asking them to rank predefined policy fields. Finally, I directly asked for their assessment of the relative importance of social investment and compensatory policy. All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Important caveats apply to the chosen methodological approach. Most importantly, the analysis is based predominantly on the perceptions of single interviewees. Yet, since the interviewees were representatives of social policy issues of the respective unions, their perceptions can to some degree be taken as representative for the union. Social desirability issues, in particular preserving the social legitimacy of unions, may still be at work. Nevertheless, gaining an understanding of how unions want to present themselves and be seen with regard to their social policy positions is in itself informative and is likely to give some evidence about actual strategies. In order to mitigate in particular the problem stemming from the interviews being done with single representatives, I also look at press releases, as mentioned above. Between 60 and 360 press releases and news items per union were examined. The sources of the press releases can be found in the Appendix, as well as an overview of the number by union and the time period when they were released (Table C.2).

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are known by these initials (historically the names stem from the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers and the General, Municipal, Boilermakers' and Allied Trade Union respectively

<sup>9</sup>In full: Unite the Union, Unison the public service union, and the National Education Union.

<sup>10</sup>The full names are: Industriegewerkschaft Metall, Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft, Industriegewerkschaft Bergbaue, Chemie, Enerige, Industriegewerkschaft Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt, Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft, and Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund.

<sup>11</sup>Forbundet af Offentligt Ansatte, Fagligt Fælles Forbund, Dansk Metalarbejderforbund, Fagbevægelsens Hovedorganisation, Akademikernes Centralorganisation.

In the following two sections I analyze the interview and press release material. The analysis is divided into two parts: first, I describe which policy types unions in the three countries focus on and, in the subsequent section, I examine the reasoning for and strategies behind this proclaimed focus.

## 4.5 Social policy focus across unions and countries

### 4.5.1 Germany

A first clear observation is that, with one exception, all German interview partners named pensions as the most important policy field (see interview Germany-1, Germany-2, Germany-4, Germany-5, Germany-6). For around half of the unions this is followed by long-term care and health care. Policies such as ALMPs and education are ranked below the classic compensatory policies. This focus is mirrored by the frequency of press releases: for most unions in Germany, pensions are a relatively frequent topic, especially compared to other social policies.

Concerning the relative importance of social investment and compensatory policy aspects of social policy, most representatives stated that both are equally important. However, they went on to explicitly specify that a sufficient degree of compensatory policy is a precondition for focusing on social investment (interview Germany-2, Germany-4, Germany-6). Two representatives, from the GEW and the IG BCE stated that social investment has the highest importance, yet both also added the qualification that having a social safety net is also of importance (interview Germany-3, Germany-5). These results are summarized in Table 4.1 below (as well as the results for Denmark and the UK).

A noticeable observation is that representatives from those unions whose membership is relatively securely employed and tends to have relatively high income (IG BCE and GEW) identify social investment as more important than compensatory policy (interview Germany-3, Germany-5). Similarly, for the two representatives of these unions, education is the first (in the case of the GEW) and the second (IG BCE) most important policy field. In the press releases of these two unions this focus is also apparent; especially the GEW focuses almost exclusively on education in terms of social policy topics. This is to be expected, since a large part of GEW is employed in the education sector, making education an important topic for GEW members not only as recipients, but as providers of education.<sup>12</sup> Besides general education, further education and VET are recurring topics – for IG BCE these are the dominant types of social investment policy mentioned in press releases. In contrast, interview partners from unions representing overall less privileged constituencies stressed that, while education and social investment are important, sufficient insurance etc. needs to be ensured first (interview Germany-2, Germany-4).

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<sup>12</sup>This is evidence of the logic of membership being at work – more on this below.

### 4.5.2 Denmark

The stated policy focus in Denmark is on education: three respondents named education as the field with top priority (interview Denmark-2, Denmark-3, Denmark-5), while only one clearly named pensions as the most important field (interview Denmark-1). ALMPs generally are ranked after education for most unions, followed by childcare and family policy (interview Denmark-1, Denmark-2, Denmark-4). When asked on the relative importance of the social investment and the compensatory policy role, three unions stated that social investment is somewhat more important (interview Denmark-2, Denmark-3, Denmark-5). Two respondents went on to clarify that compensatory policy, or a ‘safety net’, is important too, and is the precondition for social investment (interview Denmark-3, Denmark-5). Considering the topics of press releases, overall a focus on social investment rather than compensatory policy is apparent as well: for most unions, press releases concern social investment topics at an equal or higher rate than compensatory policies; for FH (one of the confederations), the rate at which social investment topics are discussed is markedly higher. It is also notable that in the press releases of Danish unions, investment as a term is regularly mentioned in the context of education, qualification, and similar topics – i.e., in a ‘social investment’ usage.

Comparing the focus across unions, a similar pattern to Germany emerges: those unions that represent better-off members in more secure employment, AC and Dansk Metal, tend to be those that clearly rank social investment above compensatory policy (Denmark-3, Denmark-5). These unions (or in the former case the confederation) also tend to be more homogeneous in their membership and were not founded through mergers of other unions, as is the case for the other Danish unions that were interviewed. The representatives from other unions also noted the importance of social investment, but, as in Germany, stressed that compensatory policy is the precondition (interview Denmark-1, Denmark-4). However, in the Danish case the representatives from other unions also ascribed education primary importance.

### 4.5.3 United Kingdom

Concerning the UK unions, a first interesting observation is that the term social policy was understood in a much broader sense. Most interview partners initially took it to mean a very wide range of government policy, also mentioning Brexit, industrial policy (such as regulation of union involvement), and referring to broad concepts such as equality and discrimination (interview UK-2, UK-3, UK-4). Given that the way the questions were phrased was very similar to the interviews conducted in Denmark and Germany, this may firstly indicate that the term ‘social policy’ is simply used differently in the UK; however, it could also be taken as reflecting the fact that unions have less of an established social policy role than in other countries, making it less immediately clear what the question refers to.

When narrowing down to the specific policy fields looked at in this paper, interview partners were unwilling to differentiate between the importance of pensions, education, and ALMPs, most saying that all fields are important, and that it depends on the particular circumstances which is focused on most (interview UK-1, UK-2, UK-3). An exception is NEU, the education union, the representative of which made clear that education is their priority, followed by

pensions (interview UK-4). As in the case of the GEW in Germany, one reason here is likely to be the interests of members as education suppliers. They further noted that unemployment and ALMP are not a big topic for the union, since its members tend not to be at a high risk of unemployment. Asking directly about the relative importance of compensatory policy and social investment, one interview partner clearly named compensatory policy, arguing that the safety net is of primary importance but also under threat, which makes prioritizing this particularly important (interview UK-2). Two other interviewees said that they find it difficult to rank, but went on to argue that compensatory policy is to some degree the precondition and needs to be protected (interview UK-1, UK-3).

Surveying the unions' press releases, it can be seen that social policy topics, both social investment and compensatory policy, are comparatively rarely mentioned by most unions.

## 4.6 Determinants of unions' social policy positions

### 4.6.1 The logics of membership and recruitment

In Germany and Denmark unions representing more privileged members, and likely consisting of a more homogeneous membership, assigned social investment higher priority, while representatives of other unions noted that sufficient compensatory policy is a condition that needs to be fulfilled first. It appears that it is easier for those unions whose members have some degree of security in terms of pensions and unemployment to focus on the 'luxury' of social investment. This is also made explicit by the representatives from Dansk Metal, AC and GEW, who state that they can put their primary focus on education, *because* their members are in relatively secure positions and therefore are not that interested in compensatory social policy types (interview Denmark-3, Denmark-5, Germany-3). Similarly, in the UK, the union representing teachers stated that they do not place a primary focus on policies targeted at the unemployed, because it is not as much an issue for their members (interview UK-4). From the other perspective, the interview partner from 3F clearly stated that they focus on compensatory policy types, because their members, but also people with lower income and lower skills in general, have a higher need for decent unemployment benefits and health care (interview Denmark-4). These statements indicate that membership considerations are at work, leading to a focus more on new social investment policy types among unions representing more privileged members and on compensatory policy for unions representing relatively less privileged members. As far as concerns social policy, the interests of the less privileged members are claimed to lie in the realm of traditional, compensatory social policies, while the ability to focus on social policies other than the traditional kinds appears to be a 'luxury'.

Inquiring further into the focus on pensions and health care among German and to some degree Danish unions, an additional interesting point emerged: several representatives stressed that a focus on pensions is demanded by their members, but primarily by the younger to middle aged members (see especially interview Germany-1, Germany-2, Denmark-4, Denmark-5). One interview partner noted that the union sometimes has to convince the older members, especially those already in pensions, of the importance of working towards better pensions in

**Table 4.1:** Main findings compared across countries

	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>UK</i>
<i>Policy priority</i>	Pensions (followed by care/healthcare)	Education (followed by ALMPs, then pensions)	Reluctance to prioritize
<i>SI vs. CP</i>	CP as a precondition for SI	SI > CP	Implicitly CP ≥ SI
<i>Logic of membership</i>	At work but differently than expected; need to convince members wrt. some topics	At work, but faces competing logics; need to convince members wrt. some topics	–
<i>Logic of recruitment</i>	Perceived as important and potential recruits as different. Logic at work partially	Perceived as important and potential recruits as different. Logic at work	Perceived as important and potential recruits as different Unclear to what extent logic is at work
<i>Logic of influence</i>	Focus on CP high in Germany (supporting evidence)	Less focus on CP than in Germany; logic at work but differently than expected	Perceived relatively low social policy influence, no corresponding stronger focus

the future (interview Germany-1). Considering that present lobbying efforts for pensions will, if successful, usually impact future pensions only, this appears plausible, and makes it somewhat questionable that exerting effort for good pensions is seen as a policy type benefiting primarily the elderly. The claim that a focus on pensions caters to the interests of young people can also be found in press releases, particularly in those of the DGB. To what extent the preferences of young members are indeed behind the focus on pensions is hard to assess – pointing to the apparent fears of young members may also be a strategy of legitimizing what is actually more preferred by those closer to pension age (or already in pensions). Yet, the fact that there is a focus on young people in recruitment, as will be discussed below, indicates that the preferences of young people – both members and potential recruits – are seen as interests that must be taken into account. What the statements accordingly show is that unions feel the need to justify the focus on pensions to young people, whether they are the ultimate driver of this focus or not. Consequently, the focus on pensions does appear to be driven to some degree by the logic of membership, but in a different way than expected.

With regard to focusing on other policy fields, such as education, other logics appear to matter as well and to partly conflict. One representative stated that it is very important for their organization to focus on education, life-long learning, and qualification, but that they have a hard time conveying this to their members (interview Germany-2). They recounted that their members perceive discussions about further qualification etc. as threatening, partly because they do not necessarily have good memories of their education. This point was also made

by several interview partners in Denmark, who mentioned that some older members are not very interested in education and do not view the prospect of further qualification or life-long-education positively (interview Denmark-1, Denmark-4, Denmark-5). Two unions explicitly stated that they are working hard at making elderly people, in particular, view further education as something positive (interview Denmark-4, Denmark-5). This points to differences in the assessment of policy importance between unions as organizations and their members, indicating that union policy focus does not simply mirror the views of their average members, but instead tries to shape them as well.

Concerning recruitment, most interview partners stated that their focus is particularly on younger people, because they have a longer potential membership horizon and have more to fight for (interview Germany-2, Germany-4, Germany-5, Denmark-1, Denmark-4, Denmark-5, UK-1, UK-2, UK-3). The statements have to be interpreted with some caution, since social desirability may be an issue here. However, several representatives also pointed out the specificities and challenges of focusing on younger people, lending the statements some plausibility. They noted that younger generations have different interests, such as time, and time sovereignty, and combining work and family, partly because they are more likely to work in temporary and precarious jobs (interview Germany-3, Germany-4, Germany-5). One interviewee elaborated that this presents a challenge for unions, since it is so different from the industrial world that the unions were built on (interview Denmark-1). A different representative explicitly stated that the increased focus on women and young people is changing the union's policy focus (interview Germany-5). Further, several representatives stated that they are trying to recruit previously underrepresented groups, for example white-collar workers and precariously employed people, ranging from temporary workers to freelancers (interview Germany-2, Germany-4, Denmark-1, Denmark-3, Denmark-5, UK-2). It seems that important groups of potential recruits are perceived as differing significantly from the core membership of unions.

This entails the question to what extent the interests of these potential recruits are indeed reflected in the policy focus of the unions. While several representatives state the importance of combining work and family for young recruits, only two German unions (Germany-1, Germany 3) and three Danish unions (Denmark.1, Denmark-2, Denmark-3) mention these topics when asked about policy priorities. In Germany these two are Verdi and GEW – the two that have above 50% female members (see Appendix A3 Table 3). In the actual focus on policies facilitating combining work and family obligations, existing members accordingly appear to play a more decisive role than the interests of potential recruits, even if they are perceived. A further indication of how this proclaimed focus on recruiting non-typical groups is borne out in policy focus, is how frequently these groups and policies of interest to them are mentioned in the press releases. Looking at the press releases of German unions, non-traditional groups such as part-time and temporary employed people, as well as women, are a frequent topic for Verdi and IG Metall (and to some extent the DGB), compared to the other unions. Quite often these groups are mentioned in conjunction with the topics of qualification and retraining. In the Danish case non-traditional groups are mentioned relatively frequently by those unions that also point to their importance in the interviews (FH, 3F, Dansk Metal), supporting the statements in the interviews. In the case of FH these groups are frequently mentioned in conjunction with

all types of social policy, while for 3F and Dansk Metal it is often in combination with topics of education and reskilling. For the UK, the TUC and Unison mention non-traditional groups relatively frequently in their press releases. It seems that unions perceive the pool of recruits as differing from the traditional membership and that this is influencing the social policy focus of some unions and union confederations. Others, however, perceive the difference in interests of potential recruits, but do not exhibit a corresponding policy focus. Accordingly, the logic of recruitment seems strong enough to influence social policy positions, but only partially.

Overall, the logic of membership appears to lead to a focus on compensatory policy, though somewhat differently than assumed in the literature. Those unions which represent somewhat less privileged members (compared to other unions) appear to focus most strongly on compensatory policy. For this reason, focusing on a topic other than traditional social policies, which I assume to be to some extent an indicator of broad interest representation, appears to be a ‘luxury’. The logic of recruitment is at work in the sense that the need to recruit people who have other social policy interests is perceived. Yet a corresponding policy focus was only partially apparent; this possibly indicates that where the logic of membership and the logic of recruitment conflict, the former dominates.

#### 4.6.2 Variants of unionism and influence considerations

Comparing the three countries, the results are in line with the general expectations: where there is higher union density and where the union movement is more centralized, support for social investment and other policies addressing non-traditional or newer risk groups is expected to be higher and it is indeed found to be highest in Denmark, where centralization is combined with a high level of density. It is less strongly supported in Germany, where density is lower, though support still exists. In the case of the UK no clear focus on either policy type can be distinguished.

As argued in section 4, when taking positions on social policy, considerations of unions’ interests as an organization are expected to also involve influence considerations. One expectation derived from this argument is that unions should have a stronger focus on compensatory policy in settings in which they have an institutionalized role in social policy (and particularly in social insurance). This expectation receives some support: Germany is a classic case of a conservative welfare state with union involvement and the focus on compensatory policy is clearest here. While Danish unions also have an established role in the welfare state, because social policy is more universalist, the expectation of a focus on compensatory policy applies less, and indeed unions assign a higher priority to social investment than in Germany.<sup>13</sup>

Besides looking at the institutionalized role in social policy, a further expectation from the logic of influence was that in settings in which social investment is particularly dominant in the policy discourse, unions should focus on it most. The perceptions of current dynamics in unions’ social policy role are also important, since they give an idea of the pressure unions face to gain or retain their voice in the social policy discourse and policy making. Comparing Denmark and Germany in terms of the extent to which union influence in social policy is

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<sup>13</sup>Since the UK case is quite different it will be discussed below.

under pressure, the following picture emerges: while in both countries the representatives feel that unions as social policy actors are still relatively strong despite the overall developments, in Germany several union representatives noted that the trend was towards getting stronger again (interview Germany-1, Germany-3, Germany-4). Many identified a problematic period following the Agenda 2010 reforms in the early 2000s, but several interviewees noted that since the Great Recession the role of unions has to some degree become stronger again (interview Germany-1, Germany-6). This contrasts to Denmark, where two representatives saw the role of unions in their country as stronger than in Germany (interview Denmark-2, Denmark-3), but overall, several interview partners argued that the persistently strong role of unions in Denmark is under threat (interview Denmark-1, Denmark-3, Denmark-4). They mentioned, for example, that their role as consultants in social policy is not seen as a given to the extent that it used to be. Bringing this together with the welfare state status quo in the two countries, in Denmark (where social investment policies are more established, see Garritzmann, Häusermann, et al. (2017)) several interviewees noted that education (one important part of social investment) is being increasingly cut back (interview Denmark-1, Denmark-3, Denmark-4), and another argued that overall social investment is under threat more than compensatory policy (interview Denmark-2). Comparing the extent to which union representatives see social investment as important in the two countries, the fact that this is more strongly the case in Denmark speaks for the logic of influence argument. Interestingly, however, it does not seem to be the context of a turn towards social investment, but instead perceiving existing social investment policy to be under attack, combined with a threatening loss of influence, that increases unions focus on social investment. Simply stating that social investment is a more important topic for Danish unions because it is more established in Denmark does not capture the whole story.

Adding the UK case, there is no clear focus on compensatory policy, but not on social investment either. This is in line with the expectation from institutionalized involvement in social policy: unions are not closely involved; thus neither type of social policy is an efficient area of engagement for them, leading to a lack of close engagement with or focus on either. Concerning union strength, here the general tenor is that unions perceive themselves as substantially weaker than those in both Germany and Denmark (which is clearly congruent with the established literature on union movements) (interview UK-1, UK-2, UK-3). Some stress that the current period is particularly hard (interview UK-1, UK-3), though others do not see a general trend of declining strength in the past few years (interview UK-2, UK-4). Concerning the status quo of social investment, the UK is a country of medium implementation (Garritzmann, Häusermann, et al. 2017), which, according to the expectations, should entail a moderate focus on social investment. However, what can be summarized from the results is that social investment does not seem to be seen as a distinct type of policy that one should focus on. Rather, it is one of many different types of policy that unions in the UK promote. When asked to point to the most important topics they generally point to more compensatory policy types, the reason given being that these are under threat.

## 4.7 Discussion of results

The core questions at the heart of the analyses above were what positions labor unions take with respect to social policy today, and what role the logic of membership, the logic of recruitment, and influence considerations play in influencing these positions. A first main finding is that the policy focus of unions exhibits clear differences across countries: while education is the highest priority in Denmark, in Germany it is pensions. Comparing the countries with regard to the types of unionism, the fact that the focus on social investment is highest in Denmark is congruent with its neo-corporatist type of unionism, in a setting with a history of comparatively universalist social policy. The fact that in Germany the focus is more on compensatory policy fits with union involvement in traditionally stratified, status-preserving social policy. Across all country cases, to the extent that social investment is seen as representing a type of policy addressing new risks and non-traditional groups of employees, unions cannot be seen as unambiguous supporters of old social policies only, nor as representatives of solely traditional interests. In Denmark social investment was actually seen as having a higher priority, and in the other two country cases social investment, and policies belonging to social investment, were seen as having considerable importance as well.

However, it emerged that the interviewees understood a focus on compensatory policy in part as a focus on the dangers of the less well-off, and a focus on social investment as a ‘luxury’ focus. Those unions that declared a clear focus on compensatory policies stated that this is because of the lack of privileges of their members. This corresponds to membership patterns: those unions whose membership is somewhat less privileged on average prioritize compensatory policy more. From the union perspective, less privileged employees, at least those that unions want to target, may be facing considerable old risks as well as new risks, and unions especially note the importance of the former.

The repeated statement that sufficient compensatory policy is a precondition for focusing on social investment has implications concerning for what type of reform packages union support may be won. Particularly in cases where compensatory policy is seen to be under threat, a sufficient guarantee ensuring the persistence of old social policies appears necessary for unions to embrace newer policy types. This provides new, though perhaps not unexpected, evidence for unions positioning themselves as supportive of both compensatory and social investment policy – but more strongly so in the former case. This also speaks to the academic debate on whether social investment should be seen as a substitute or a complement to traditional social policies: unions very clearly embrace the second perspective. This is not surprising, but still important to know.

Concerning underlying strategies, one main finding is that while the logic of membership does matter, as generally assumed in the literature, it matters in unexpected ways. According to the interview representatives, a primary focus on pensions, for example, addresses the demands of middle aged and younger members more than those of the elderly. This indicates, at the very least, that unions perceive the need to gain legitimacy among these groups of members. Moreover, the logic of membership is not the only logic at work. The logic of recruitment appears to play an important role as well. There is a focus on recruiting young and atypically

employed people, who are perceived as having different policy interests, thus providing a reason for unions to focus on new social policy types, and in part on policies benefiting the atypically employed. Corresponding patterns of actual focus on such policies, however, can only be observed for some unions. A further indication that union positions on social policy are not solely determined by their members' interests is that union representatives feel that they have to convince parts of their membership of supporting certain policies, such as life-long education and retraining.

These findings are largely similar in Germany and Denmark. The UK, on the other hand, stands out as a somewhat different case. The interview partners were more hesitant to compare the relative importance of different policy fields. The general understanding of social policy was much broader, manifesting itself in a focus on more general goals, rather than policy types, on the one hand, and on specific small reforms belonging to various different kinds of social policy, on the other hand. This may be due to unions not being institutionally involved in either type of social policy, leading to neither being an efficient arena to focus their resources on and gain influence. Further comparing Germany and Denmark, there is evidence in line with the expectations from the logic of influence: in Germany the focus CP is stronger, in line with union engagement in traditional policies. In Denmark unions focus more on SI, yet the reason given for this is less the importance of it in the policy discourse. Instead, it is the perceived threat to existing SI combined and a loss of influence that leads unions to stress the importance of SI.

## 4.8 Conclusion

Two general conclusions emerge: firstly, looking at the social policy realm, unions cannot be seen as mere transmission mechanisms of their members' interests. There is also a focus on recruiting people from groups that differ from typical members, such as the young and the atypically employed. One way in which unions claim to address this is by according importance to policies addressing the needs of these groups. Such a focus can be partially observed. Turning to the second general conclusion: social investment and 'new' social policy types appear to be somewhat more important for unions than expected by much of the literature. This, in turn, can be partly explained by the plurality of goals which unions and the union leadership consider simultaneously. While social investment is supported more by unions than often expected, it is less clearly supported than compensatory policy, which is seen as prior in its importance, with SI being somewhat of a 'luxury' focus. The clearest focus on social investment is in Denmark, but it is still seen as important by unions in Germany – potentially more so by union leaders than by members. In the UK no clear focus can be observed, but compensatory policy as a necessary condition is mentioned by some interviewees.

This paper has several important limitations: a first set of limitations is due to the methods employed, mainly related to the problem of gauging actual positions, described in the methodology section. Moreover, since this paper focuses squarely on the positions and goals, the specific policy context is only taken into account to some extent. Given these limitations, further work is needed, which combines insights from interview data with the involvement of

unions in specific reform processes and with policy outcomes. This will further allow for going beyond differentiating between union positioning and the power unions have to achieve desired outcomes, and systematically looking at their relation. Further, exploring how the different logics influence unions' positions and strategies in other realms, such as collective bargaining, and how this is related to their social policy focus would be highly interesting.

A further major limitation is geographical focus. I look only at Northern and Western European countries – in other regions of Europe, as well as in the US, unions' positions on social investment and compensatory policy, as well as the strategies behind these positions, may look very different. The same applies to other world regions: unionism has quite a different shape in East Asian or Latin American countries, for example. The developments in social policy are also likely to differ, though tendencies towards social investment can be found in these regions as well (Garritzmann, Häusermann, et al. 2017). A further avenue of future research is, accordingly, to investigate what positions unions take concerning new and old types of social policy in other country contexts.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion and outlook

## 5.1 Main findings and recap of the central contributions

This dissertation project addressed the question what unions want in today's welfare state and what strategies lie behind this. With regard to the former question I find, across all three papers, that unions want traditional CP – but also support SI to some degree. Paper I provides indirect evidence for this, by showing that union members do support SI more, compared to non-members, although we should consider them lukewarm supporters. Paper III finds that in the three countries it studies, Denmark, Germany, and the UK, both CP and SI are seen as important (though in the case of the UK only to some extent). Paper II zooms in on Germany and finds that in the four major unions, the most important topics discussed in membership newspapers are immediately labor market related. However, social policy does also play a role, and in recent years SI policy, in particular closely labor market related kinds, has increased in salience. This echoes a result from Paper I: when disaggregating SI policy preferences of union members, the results show that union members are especially supportive of SI policies that are closely related to the labor market.

Paper I and III further find that what unions want and what union members prefer varies across country contexts: the support of union members for CP is highest in continental corporatist welfare state regime countries. For SI the pattern is not as clear, overall the analyses by country confirm that the support of union members (compared to non-members) for SI is less clear cut than their relative support for CP. On the union level, the results of the analyses in Paper III also point to differences across countries: the analyses indicate that for unions in Germany the field of pensions, a paradigmatic type of CP, has the highest priority – while in the case of Denmark education, and thus a component of SI, is prioritized.

What unions want with regard to SI and CP not only varies across countries but also across different unions. Paper III finds that those unions whose membership tends to be somewhat more privileged focus more on SI, while the other unions more strongly emphasize the priority of CP. Paper II similarly finds that, in the German case, for unions whose membership is on average more privileged, SI is more salient. Comparing general welfare state orientation with narrow labor market orientation, these unions appear to focus more on the latter.

Concerning what strategies and logics lie behind the focus of unions in the welfare state, I find support for the assumption by much of the literature that the logic of membership plays an important role. This emerges from the results of Paper II, where I find that the union with the most members employed in the welfare state is the union for which this topic is the most salient. The finding mentioned above that for unions with more privileged membership the labor market in general and labor market SI specifically is more salient than CP also suggests the logic of membership being at work. However, my dissertation project adds the important insight that the logic of membership is not all that matters for unions as welfare state actors. The analysis in Paper III shows this by providing results indicating that unions not only represent their members with respect to social policy matters, but they also try to influence them, for example concerning acceptance of the importance of life-long learning. Paper III further provides evidence for the logic of recruitment playing a role: for one thing unions stress the priority of recruitment. Further, many also see the social policy interests of potential

recruitments as distinct from those of their established members.

The findings also provide some evidence as to whom unions tend to represent in social policy matters today, though this project can provide at most a very partial answer to this question. To the extent that a focus on CP is seen as signalling a focus on the narrow interests of traditional members, unions cannot be seen as exclusively representing these interests: they do also accord some importance to SI, although, on average, less than to CP. This fits with what union members support. Contrary to some assumptions found in the literature, they tend to be slightly more supportive of SI than non-members – though the difference is larger in the case of CP. Taken together, this suggests that unions hold positions similar to their members' preferences, but that this may in some contexts entail more support for SI than often thought.

However, what this says with regard to the degree that unions represent broad interests in the sense of representing precariously employed or generally disadvantaged people is uncertain. This depends on who is expected to benefit from SI and who turns out to benefit. Answering these questions, in particular the latter, is beyond the scope of this paper. What can be said with regard to the former question, as to who is expected to benefit, is that SI is framed as an answer to the increased prevalence of precarious employment – as well as technological change and other socio-economic changes. Consequently, one can infer that unions, given that they do also assign importance to SI, are considering the interests of these types of employees. This further receives some support from the interview evidence in Paper III: unions state that they are trying to recruit these types of workers and that they see their social policy interests as different from their core membership (however, this is only partly borne out by the focus of press release topics).

Considering different income groups, it is not so clear what can be inferred from unions' focus on different types of social policy. SI is often framed as being meant to be universal. To what degree it actually is and whether it can be redistributive is not clear and depends on the specific design and take up of policies. The finding in Paper III, that several unions claimed a need to focus on CP to ensure that the less well-off are protected, is interesting in this regard. As noted above this claim aligns with the finding that unions representing less privileged employees tend to prioritize CP more. Overall, the perspectives unions appear to take fits well with those scholars and policy analysts who emphasize that SI has to be seen as a complement, not a substitute for SI.

Accordingly, the following can be responded to the question whom unions are representing or attempting to represent in the social policy realm: while nothing definite can be said about whom they are actually representing, it appears that most unions considered in this project see the need to frame their focus as being on the disadvantaged as well and to make the impression of representing employees beyond a narrow traditional clientele. This need appears to shape policy standpoints, at least to some degree.

The research conducted in the context of this dissertation project and the insights gained contribute to the existing literature in three main ways. First, it adds an analysis of union member attitudes and union standpoints concerning CP and SI. Examining what attitudes union members actually have is important in gaining an understanding of the role of unions in the social

investment turn, since one of the factors determining union standpoints and behavior is the preferences of the members. The results show that while union members are more supportive of CP, they are also somewhat more supportive of SI than non-members – they are lukewarm supporters. Developing an understanding of unions in the contemporary welfare state further necessitates investigating what different unions want in the welfare state today. I find that the standpoints vary, both across countries and across unions. The second main contribution is an analysis of unions as strategic actors in the social policy realm, who face multiple conflicting logics. While the findings provide support for the (mostly implicit) assumption in much of the literature that the membership logic is central, they further demonstrate that other logics also play a role. This holds in particular with regard to the logic of recruitment, which I argue it is important to distinguish from the other logics. Third, this project also contributes to the literature by examining union positions and topic salience among unions directly, thus distinguishing between union goals and standpoints and the power they have to achieve these goals. Part of this contribution is the application of quantitative text analysis to union member newspaper articles – a novelty to the best of my knowledge. This also involved the construction of a large corpus of articles and of a dictionary tailored to unions as social policy actors, constituting concrete methodological contributions.

In summary, there are three main substantive takeaways of this dissertation project: first, union members and unions appear to be more supportive of new types of social policy such as SI than is often expected, though they remain somewhat hesitant supporters. Union members tend to support these new types more than non-members, and unions are also aware of the importance of these policies and talk about them quite a bit in their publications. Second, policy standpoints differ considerably across unions. This holds with regard to different types of social policy as well as concerning the degree of social policy vs. labor market focus. Standpoints also vary across country contexts. Third, unions' social policy standpoints are shaped by the logic of membership – but understanding unions as mere transmission mechanisms of their members' interests provides an incomplete picture: unions, to some degree, try to influence their members' preferences and other logics also play a role, in particular the logic of recruitment.

## 5.2 Outlook

While this dissertation project contributes to understanding the role which unions play in today's welfare state, the focus is limited in several important ways, and the insights gained remain partial. As discussed in the introductory sections of this dissertation, the role of unions in social policy is important, first, from the perspective of welfare state research – because unions were one important force shaping the welfare states in the past and because they remain a potentially important actor. Second, it is also important because unions can affect representation. Depending on whose interests they represent, they may decrease or increase biases existing in democratic representation, and one way they do this is via the social policy interests they try to further. For both of these reasons for why it is important to understand the role of unions in the welfare state, the actual impact unions have, i.e., their power to

influence outcomes, is central. Yet I expressly do not look at this. Instead, I focus on what unions (and union members) want in the social policy context, the standpoints they have, and the strategies likely to lie behind this. As discussed above, I do so for good reason: this has been neglected in previous research, which for the most part has not distinguished between social policy standpoints or goals and the power to achieve these goals. Since the former have been rarely looked at explicitly, this is what I do. Thus, what the research undertaken here lacks is gauging the role unions play in policy outcomes and other aspects that indicate unions' influence. Likewise, I focus on unions' general standpoints and strategies with respect to the welfare state, because this is lacking in the literature. This needs to be complemented by further research (adding to the existing work) on union involvement in concrete reforms.

Several aspects of what I examine in the dissertation project need to be explored in greater depth. For one thing, a more fine-grained analysis of different unions, their members, and, to the extent possible, the main types of employees they attempt to recruit, would help gain more definite insights on the underlying strategies influencing union standpoints. Concerning member preferences, exploring survey data that asks for welfare state preferences and can identify which union members belong to would be exceedingly fruitful. The problem here is that there are few large scale surveys that include an indicator for which union respondents are a member of. One way forward would be collaboration with unions, in the best case across multiple countries, since some of them regularly survey their members.

There are other issues that are closely related to what I do in the dissertation project and which merit attention, but which I do not examine. One such issue is the structure of representation and decision-making within unions. Such structures and the degree to which members are democratically involved may influence union positions and behavior concerning social policy. Further, this project concentrated on the social policy role of unions. However, as discussed at several points in this dissertation, this is entwined with their role as industrial relations actors and particularly with wage bargaining. Both of these roles, their relation, and their relative importance need to be reconsidered in the context of the challenges discussed above.<sup>1</sup> Focusing more explicitly on interactions of both roles, specifically as concerns social investment policy, is likely to be fruitful.

A further dimension with regard to which this dissertation project is clearly very limited is country focus: I focus exclusively on Western and Northern European countries, and two of the three papers focus on one or three cases only. Yet the welfare state is undergoing similar changes in many other country contexts, though the turn to social investment can be said to be most pronounced in the European countries (Hemerijck 2017). The union traditions across countries vary greatly. Considering unions' social policy focus in the context of different institutional traditions more than has been done in this project is crucial. Taking more country contexts into account also would make it possible to better study policy feedback effects on union members and unions. Beyond investigating other country contexts, examining the role of labor unions in social policy on a more international level, such as on the level of the European Union, may become increasingly important (cf. Streeck and Hassel 2003b). Keeping in mind these

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<sup>1</sup>One contribution addressing this relation and how it has changed in recent years is, for example, Ibsen, Toubøl, and D. S. Jensen (2017).

limitations, I do suspect that the core results to some extent also apply to other countries. The results that standpoints regarding SI and CP vary across unions and that other logics beside the logic of membership also play a role are likely to hold for at least those Western and Northern European countries that were not considered in Paper II or Paper III, I believe. It would further be interesting to learn whether the support for directly labor market related policies can be found in other country contexts as well. On the one hand, this seems likely, since the core focus of union is the labor market. On the other hand, this may depend on the specific design of directly labor market related social investment policies. If, for example, ALMP includes a lot of conditionality and tends more towards workfare this should change union support.

Considering the more general implications of this dissertation project, under some circumstances both unions and their members can be supportive of new types of social policy. It is not clear that they will act as reform blockers, and they may be won as coalition partners in coalitions working towards social investment. This has important implications for the policy making arena. Given the complex and indistinct cleavages in the politics of social investment (as discussed in Bonoli and Natali 2012) as well as the fact that the returns to investment accrue in the future (Hemerijck 2017; Jacobs 2011), the prospects of social investment being further established are unclear. As Busemeyer, Porte, et al. (2018) note, the recalibration of the welfare state can be understood as being at a critical juncture: the turn towards social investment has slowed (at least on the supranational level) and right-wing populist parties, which have gained support in the past years, could constitute important opponents; to the extent that they focus on social policy, they tend to support traditional policies (see also Busemeyer, Rathgeb, and Sahm 2021). The potential of unions as partners in furthering social investment may prove important. Yet, as emerges from this project, for unions the view of social investment as a complement to compensatory social policy is central. It appears important to keep this take on SI in mind if it is to achieve its goal of also protecting the disadvantaged: while social investment holds the promise of achieving higher employment and aiding the development of capabilities, it may be less able to address poverty and inequality (Busemeyer, Porte, et al. 2018; Taylor-Gooby, Gumy, and Otto 2015). The importance of finding a balance of compensatory policy and social investment is also supported by research into public opinion: while social investment is generally very popular, its popularity decreases when trade-offs with other social policies are mentioned (Busemeyer 2017). In terms of union support, an approach to social investment that ensures a balance with compensatory policy seems politically more feasible.

In the course of the work on this dissertation project, the economic and social structures (as well as the world and people's lives in general) faced a major disruption: the outbreak of a global pandemic. Welfare states in many parts of the world are currently facing acute and new challenges, the handling of which could shape the directions of development in the future. In the course of the still unfolding socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, public spending has been increased immensely, including by countries such as the US. The situation of many branches of the economy having to deal with prolonged closures and substantial numbers of employees in furlough may make the importance of considering social

investment and compensatory policy jointly more acute than ever. What the rethinking of social and economic policy in the wake of the pandemic implies for the role of unions remains open.

That the future of labor unions is uncertain (independently of the current situation) is a widespread consensus among scholars (see, for example, Bryson, Ebbinghaus, and Visser 2011; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013; Hyman 2015). In the past, phases of unions recovering strength have also involved “a realization that unions provided a much-needed counter-balance to the unbridled power of capital” (Bryson, Ebbinghaus, and Visser 2011, p.104). Recruiting non-traditional groups requires unions to convincingly convey that they can provide such a counter-balance. They further need to demonstrate that they represent people beyond their traditional constituencies, including the disadvantaged. If unions succeed in doing so, Hyman (2015) sees, as a third scenario (1.3.2), a regaining of union strength from below as one possible future: “This is an immense challenge, and there is no certainty that actually existing trade unions will succeed; but if they cannot, it is unclear what other collective actors could do so – though certainly, there are many social initiatives and movements with the vision, hope and enthusiasm which many unions have lost. Acting together, they might even turn the third scenario into reality” (p.12f.). What can be inferred from this dissertation project concerning the future of unions is that, as concerns the social policy realm, unions are, at the very least, aware of the necessity of changing their orientation and focusing on new types of interests. Whether unions can solve possible conflicts between the logic of membership and the logic of recruitment has a bearing on to what extent they prioritize these new types of interests. Bridging diverse interests by according sufficient importance to SI policies (understood as complementary to traditional social policy) may be beneficial for unions, since not only does SI receive quite widespread support among the general population, but also among union members, as this dissertation project finds.



## Author's contribution

Paper I: *Lukewarm or enthusiastic supporters? Exploring unions member attitudes towards social investment and compensatory policy*

The article is joint work with Marius Busemeyer, we share authorship. My independent contribution consists in developing the basic idea, conducting the empirical analysis, and writing the first draft of the paper. We worked jointly on the interpretation of the results. In further developing the theoretical framing, writing the introduction and conclusion, and revising the paper for publication we closely collaborated. The article is published in the Journal of European Social Policy (Bledow and Busemeyer 2020).

Paper II: *Exploring topic salience among labor unions using textual data: social investment, compensatory policy, and the labor market*

The article is single-authored.

Paper III: *Whose interests do unions represent in today's welfare state? Investigating social policy positions of labor unions*

The article is single-authored.

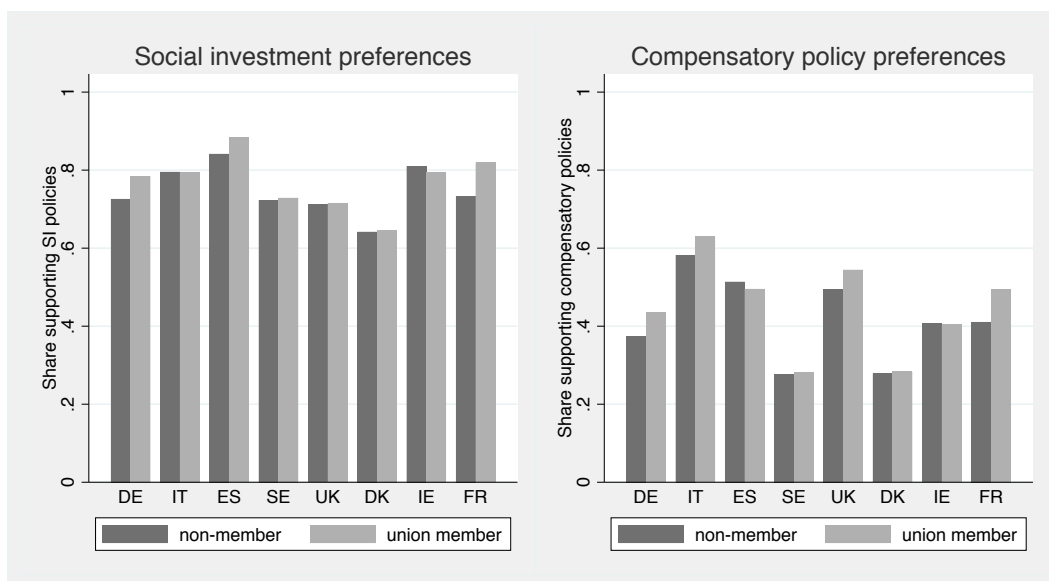


## A Appendix Paper I

**Table A.1:** Rotated factor loadings and Eigenvalues after principal-component factor analysis

Item	Factor 1: SI	Factor 2: CP	Factor 3: WF
unemp. opportunities	<b>0.4742</b>	0.1661	-0.5684
access to ECEC	<b>0.7918</b>	0.0870	0.0763
investing in universities	<b>0.7896</b>	0.0205	-0.0383
increase pensions	0.0764	<b>0.8003</b>	0.1036
lower ret. age	0.0439	<b>0.7709</b>	-0.1437
forcing unemp.	0.0750	0.0249	<b>0.8999</b>
Eigenvalues	1.4887	1.2708	1.1715

Note: Bold numbers indicate high factor loadings

**Figure A.1:** Differences in support for SI and CP between union members and non-members

Note: the Figure displays the average share of support for those policy reforms, which constitute the respective factor

**Table A.2:** Models disaggregated across SI and CP policy fields (reduced models)

	unemp. opportunities (1)	access to ECEC (2)	investing in universities (3)	increase pensions (4)	lower ret. age (5)	forcing unemp. (6)
union member	0.239*** (0.063)	0.176** (0.076)	0.100 (0.073)	-0.055 (0.065)	0.469*** (0.064)	-0.138** (0.061)
age	0.012*** (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.009*** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.002)	-0.012*** (0.002)	0.014*** (0.002)
income	-0.095*** (0.021)	-0.038 (0.024)	0.030 (0.025)	-0.205*** (0.022)	-0.168*** (0.021)	0.078*** (0.020)
public sector	-0.089 (0.065)	0.034 (0.080)	-0.193** (0.077)	0.129* (0.069)	0.275*** (0.066)	-0.071 (0.064)
unemployed	0.354*** (0.119)	0.081 (0.156)	0.245 (0.165)	-0.037 (0.112)	0.326*** (0.120)	-0.497*** (0.107)
education level	0.017 (0.018)	0.012 (0.021)	0.108*** (0.021)	-0.141*** (0.018)	-0.169*** (0.018)	-0.147*** (0.017)
child in hh	-0.079 (0.056)	-0.222*** (0.069)	-0.016 (0.070)	-0.032 (0.060)	-0.012 (0.057)	0.033 (0.056)
female	-0.152*** (0.049)	-0.040 (0.060)	-0.142** (0.060)	0.064 (0.138)	0.286*** (0.138)	0.016 (0.132)
Observations	7750	7758	7772	7685	7737	7796
Pseudo $R^2$	0.020	0.033	0.072	0.057	0.090	0.036

Standard errors in parentheses

Country dummies included (coefficients not shown)

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.3:** Interaction union member and public sector, SI, CP, WF as DV

	(1)	(2)	(3)
union member	0.047 (0.031)	0.168*** (0.038)	-0.147*** (0.040)
public sector	-0.074** (0.038)	0.180*** (0.045)	-0.028 (0.047)
union member × public sector	0.054 (0.056)	-0.079 (0.067)	0.036 (0.069)
education level	0.055*** (0.008)	-0.107*** (0.009)	-0.068*** (0.010)
income	0.019** (0.009)	-0.138*** (0.011)	0.061*** (0.011)
age	0.003*** (0.001)	-0.003*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)
unemployed	0.031 (0.044)	0.079 (0.060)	-0.358*** (0.064)
child in hh	-0.063*** (0.024)	-0.031 (0.030)	0.004 (0.031)
female	-0.040* (0.021)	0.166*** (0.026)	0.039 (0.027)
Observations	7367	7367	7367
Adjusted $R^2$	0.063	0.128	0.027

Standard errors in parentheses

Country dummies included (coefficients not shown)

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.4:** Logit models with SI spending preferences as DV

	educ. spending		LMP spending		family spending	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
union member	0.156** (0.077)	0.244*** (0.071)	0.218*** (0.068)	0.285*** (0.063)	0.039 (0.070)	0.159** (0.065)
age	-0.000 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	-0.006*** (0.002)	-0.006*** (0.002)
income	0.005 (0.026)	-0.026 (0.023)	-0.096*** (0.023)	-0.123*** (0.021)	-0.098*** (0.023)	-0.158*** (0.021)
public sector	-0.154* (0.082)	-0.089 (0.076)	0.098 (0.070)	0.132** (0.066)	-0.006 (0.074)	-0.007 (0.069)
unemployed	0.097 (0.162)	0.155 (0.149)	0.311** (0.124)	0.388*** (0.115)	0.199 (0.133)	0.294** (0.128)
social spending	0.790*** (0.069)		0.565*** (0.058)		0.913*** (0.058)	
GAL-TAN	-0.163*** (0.030)		-0.100*** (0.026)		0.027 (0.027)	
economic left/right	-0.118*** (0.028)		-0.164*** (0.024)		-0.153*** (0.025)	
education level	0.045** (0.022)	0.056*** (0.020)	-0.038* (0.020)	-0.022 (0.018)	-0.084*** (0.020)	-0.084*** (0.018)
child in hh	0.176** (0.072)	0.144** (0.066)	-0.066 (0.062)	-0.076 (0.058)	0.173*** (0.064)	0.185*** (0.059)
female	-0.101 (0.062)	-0.020 (0.056)	0.030 (0.053)	0.079 (0.049)	-0.179*** (0.055)	-0.057 (0.051)
Observations	6926	7804	6800	7590	6848	7667
Pseudo $R^2$	0.102	0.069	0.094	0.074	0.154	0.118

Standard errors in parentheses

Country dummies included (coefficients not shown)

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.5:** Logit models with CP spending preferences as DV

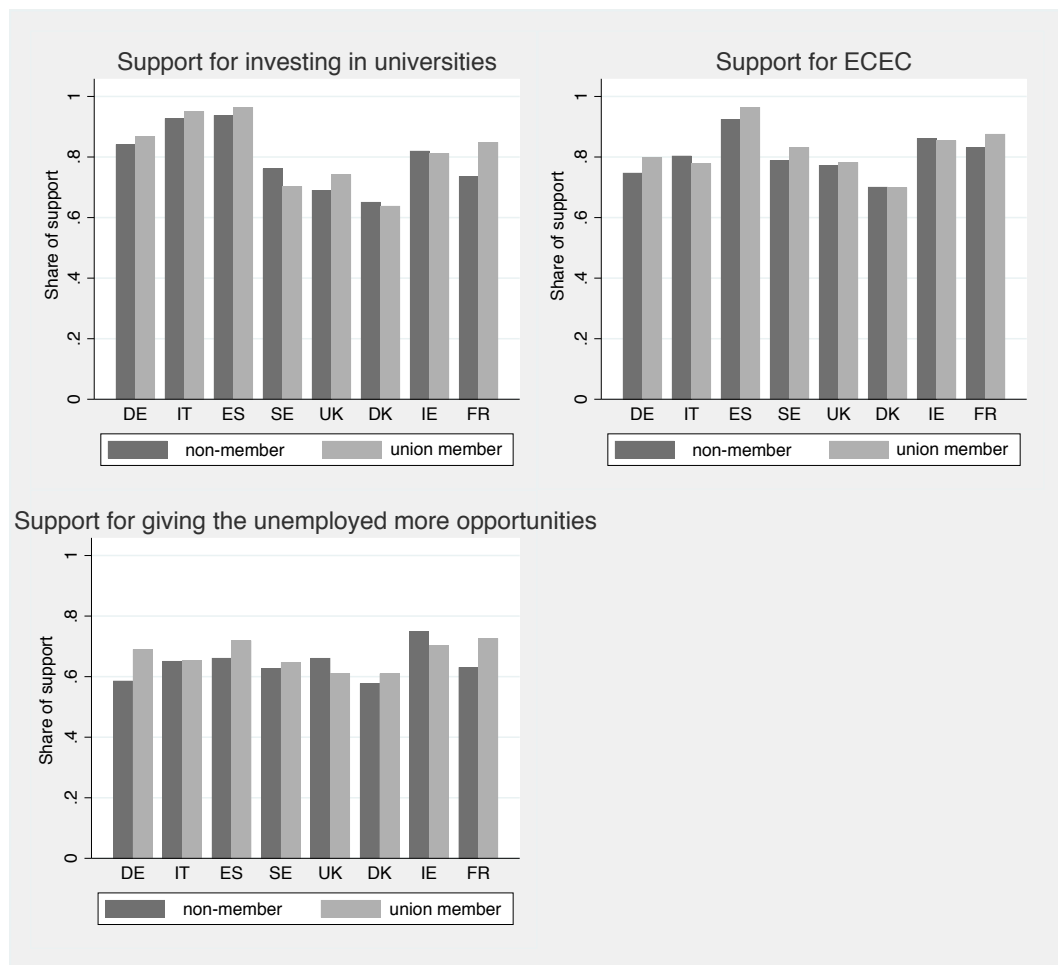
	unemp. spending		retirement spending	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
union member	0.146*	0.279***	0.158**	0.249***
	(0.075)	(0.068)	(0.068)	(0.063)
age	0.009***	0.007***	0.006***	0.005***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
income	-0.214***	-0.249***	-0.208***	-0.275***
	(0.027)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.021)
public sector	-0.012	0.058	0.103	0.098
	(0.083)	(0.075)	(0.071)	(0.066)
unemployed	0.602***	0.680***	-0.097	-0.048
	(0.138)	(0.123)	(0.131)	(0.120)
social spending	1.308***		0.932***	
	(0.067)		(0.059)	
GAL-TAN	-0.156***		0.200***	
	(0.030)		(0.026)	
economic left/right	-0.214***		-0.148***	
	(0.028)		(0.024)	
education level	-0.089***	-0.048**	-0.110***	-0.130***
	(0.022)	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.017)
child in hh	-0.030	-0.046	-0.026	-0.028
	(0.071)	(0.064)	(0.062)	(0.057)
female	-0.005	0.062	0.175***	0.240***
	(0.061)	(0.055)	(0.054)	(0.049)
Observations	6843	7664	6860	7720
Pseudo $R^2$	0.178	0.105	0.125	0.084

Standard errors in parentheses

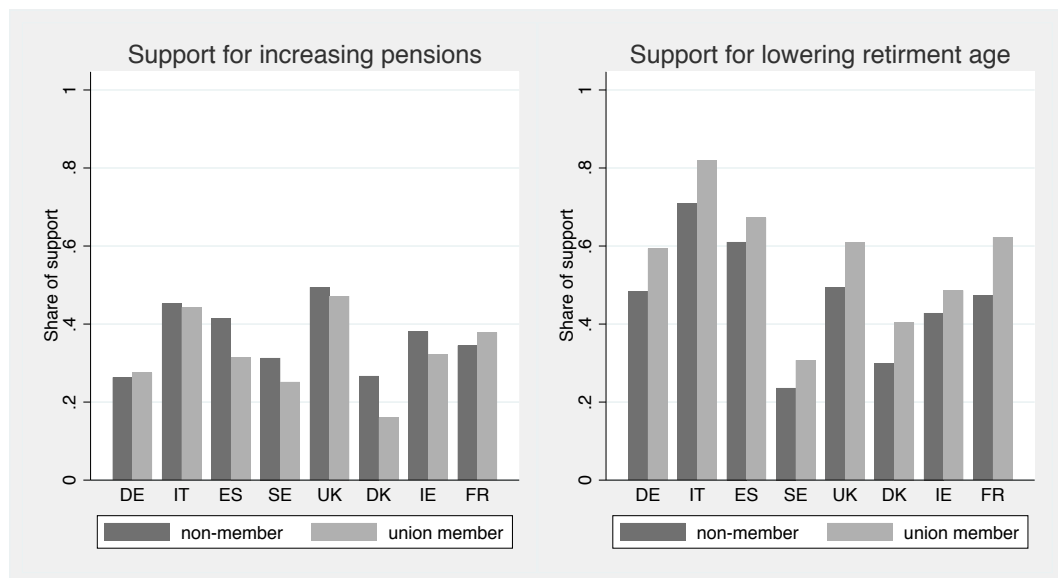
Country dummies included (coefficients not shown)

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

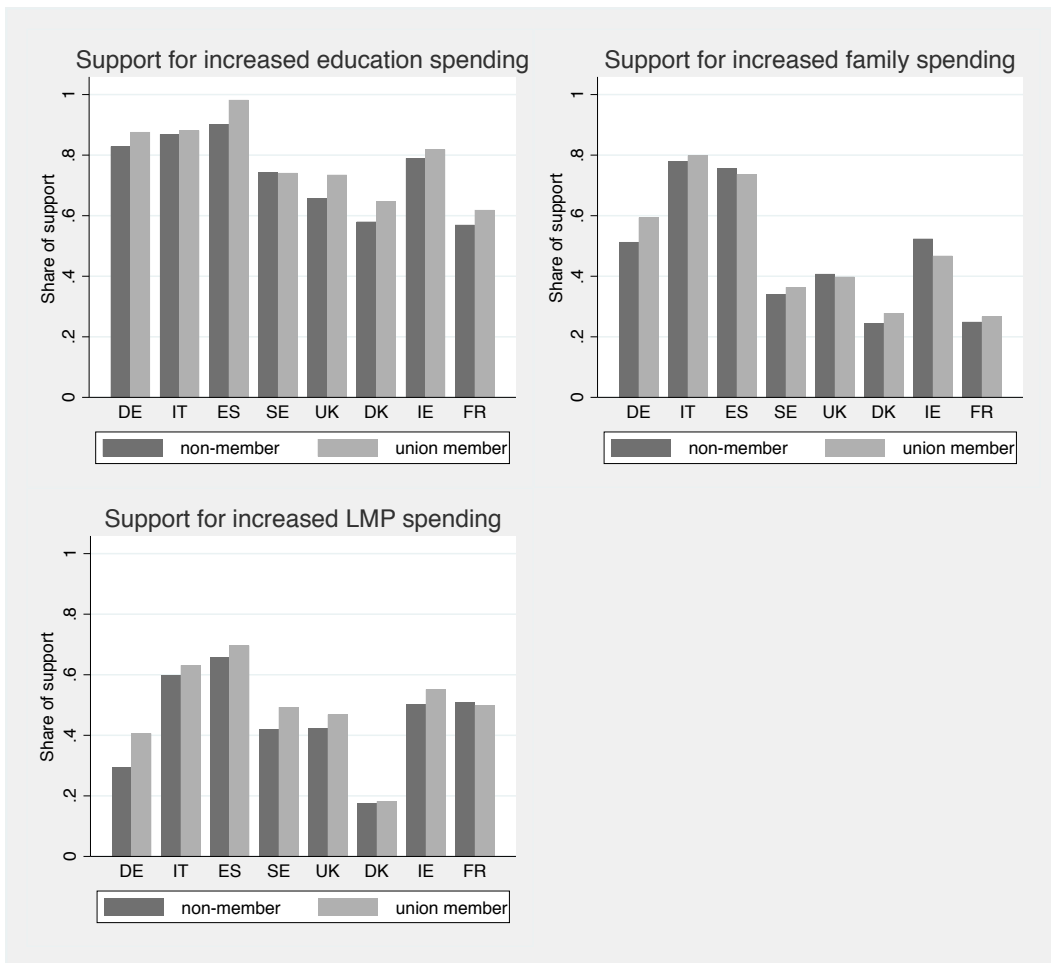
**Figure A.2:** Differences in several SI policies between union members and non-members



**Figure A.3:** Differences in several compensatory policies between union members and non-members



**Figure A.4:** Differences in spending on SI preferences between union members and non-members



**Figure A.5:** Differences in spending on compensatory policy preferences between union members and non-members

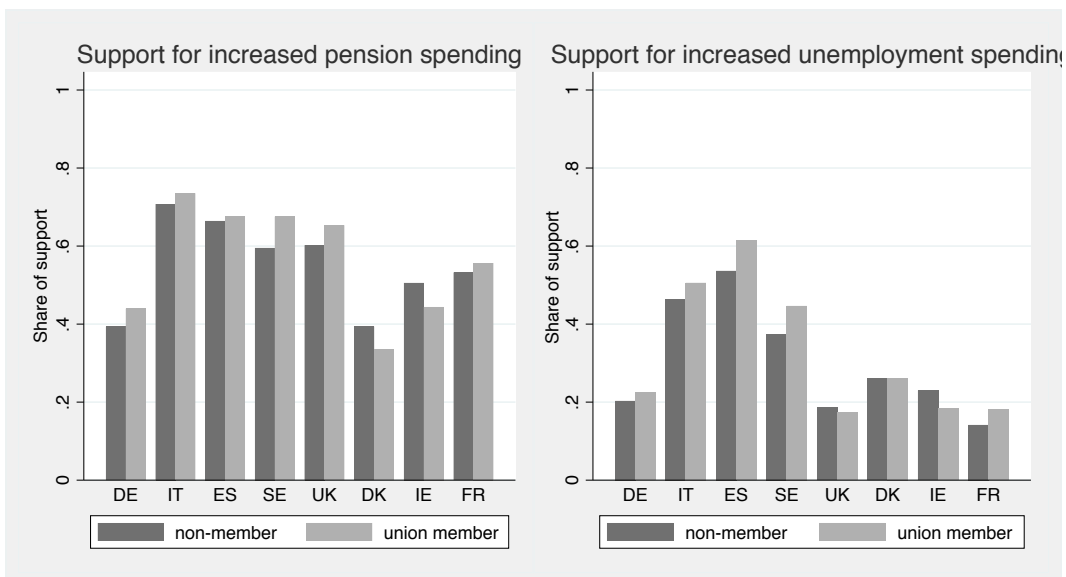


Table A.6: SI preferences by country

	DE	FR	IT	ES	SE	DK	UK	IE
union member	0.109* (0.062)	0.231** (0.093)	0.026 (0.070)	0.080 (0.091)	-0.012 (0.069)	-0.031 (0.073)	0.072 (0.089)	0.089 (0.087)
age	0.005*** (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)	0.006** (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
income	0.018 (0.021)	0.006 (0.025)	0.052* (0.028)	0.071*** (0.025)	0.025 (0.027)	-0.017 (0.028)	0.007 (0.026)	0.016 (0.028)
public sector	0.028 (0.068)	-0.070 (0.086)	-0.046 (0.085)	-0.071 (0.074)	-0.176** (0.082)	0.024 (0.086)	-0.065 (0.080)	-0.050 (0.108)
unemployed	0.111 (0.158)	-0.115 (0.133)	0.140 (0.121)	-0.039 (0.075)	-0.291 (0.183)	0.604*** (0.181)	0.238 (0.169)	0.176 (0.114)
education level	0.042** (0.017)	0.048** (0.023)	0.046** (0.023)	0.035* (0.019)	0.032 (0.024)	0.098*** (0.026)	0.107*** (0.028)	0.031 (0.022)
child in hh	-0.133** (0.060)	-0.104 (0.069)	-0.153** (0.066)	-0.067 (0.060)	-0.042 (0.076)	0.105 (0.078)	0.070 (0.074)	-0.048 (0.070)
female	-0.073 (0.048)	0.043 (0.063)	-0.059 (0.061)	0.031 (0.053)	-0.048 (0.067)	0.000 (0.067)	-0.135** (0.064)	-0.016 (0.061)
Observations	1296	905	811	916	888	764	950	837
Adjusted $R^2$	0.021	0.007	0.025	0.023	0.010	0.027	0.023	-0.002

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A.7: CP preferences by country

	DE	FR	IT	ES	SE	DK	UK	IE
union member	0.293*** (0.085)	0.337*** (0.121)	0.105 (0.080)	-0.112 (0.114)	0.063 (0.079)	0.186** (0.083)	0.274*** (0.098)	0.097 (0.115)
age	-0.006*** (0.002)	-0.009*** (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)	0.000 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.010*** (0.003)
income	-0.213*** (0.027)	-0.160*** (0.033)	-0.171*** (0.034)	-0.036 (0.035)	-0.078** (0.031)	-0.126*** (0.033)	-0.116*** (0.027)	-0.165*** (0.034)
public sector	0.134 (0.088)	0.144 (0.104)	0.300*** (0.094)	0.139 (0.101)	0.095 (0.093)	0.152 (0.096)	0.046 (0.091)	0.155 (0.128)
unemployed	-0.147 (0.156)	0.316* (0.178)	0.241 (0.155)	0.089 (0.099)	0.465** (0.185)	-0.498** (0.202)	-0.208 (0.277)	0.298 (0.201)
education level	-0.114*** (0.022)	-0.172*** (0.029)	-0.090*** (0.026)	-0.075*** (0.026)	-0.121*** (0.027)	-0.109*** (0.029)	-0.092*** (0.029)	-0.114*** (0.027)
child in hh	-0.030 (0.077)	0.178** (0.090)	0.059 (0.079)	-0.160** (0.075)	0.045 (0.088)	-0.091 (0.094)	-0.020 (0.082)	-0.221** (0.088)
female	0.375*** (0.063)	0.140* (0.078)	0.281*** (0.074)	0.077 (0.070)	0.070 (0.075)	0.261*** (0.078)	0.099 (0.071)	-0.026 (0.079)
Observations	1296	905	811	916	888	764	950	837
Adjusted $R^2$	0.140	0.115	0.097	0.020	0.038	0.080	0.043	0.085

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table A.8: Workfare preferences by country

	DE	FR	IT	ES	SE	DK	UK	IE
union member	-0.184** (0.079)	-0.221* (0.129)	0.032 (0.079)	-0.374*** (0.120)	-0.220** (0.088)	-0.134 (0.093)	-0.136 (0.111)	-0.143 (0.124)
age	0.000 (0.002)	0.001 (0.003)	0.007** (0.003)	0.010*** (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	0.005 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.003)
income	0.027 (0.027)	0.067** (0.034)	-0.004 (0.031)	0.077** (0.035)	0.049 (0.033)	0.090** (0.035)	0.071** (0.031)	0.115*** (0.037)
public sector	-0.056 (0.082)	-0.098 (0.112)	-0.052 (0.099)	-0.024 (0.094)	-0.084 (0.100)	-0.147 (0.104)	0.201* (0.104)	0.051 (0.138)
unemployed	-1.266*** (0.168)	-0.430** (0.197)	-0.054 (0.156)	-0.091 (0.102)	-0.576* (0.314)	-1.021*** (0.236)	-0.725*** (0.256)	-0.276 (0.189)
education level	-0.044** (0.021)	-0.125*** (0.030)	-0.095*** (0.026)	-0.087*** (0.025)	-0.037 (0.029)	0.005 (0.031)	-0.102*** (0.033)	-0.045 (0.029)
child in hh	-0.087 (0.074)	0.038 (0.094)	-0.076 (0.079)	0.075 (0.080)	-0.001 (0.097)	0.144 (0.100)	-0.049 (0.099)	-0.049 (0.097)
female	0.126** (0.061)	0.030 (0.081)	-0.015 (0.068)	0.039 (0.073)	0.115 (0.081)	-0.100 (0.085)	-0.039 (0.079)	0.103 (0.082)
Observations	1296	905	811	916	888	764	950	837
Adjusted $R^2$	0.038	0.026	0.036	0.039	0.016	0.040	0.022	0.010

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.9:** Spending preferences for Germany

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
union member	0.373** (0.158)	0.201 (0.180)	0.300 (0.218)	0.383** (0.155)	0.532*** (0.153)
age	-0.017*** (0.004)	0.000 (0.005)	-0.010* (0.005)	-0.016*** (0.004)	0.000 (0.004)
income	-0.305*** (0.053)	-0.229*** (0.065)	0.061 (0.068)	-0.028 (0.049)	-0.144*** (0.053)
public sector	-0.113 (0.162)	-0.162 (0.205)	-0.082 (0.222)	-0.349** (0.156)	-0.008 (0.167)
unemployed	0.229 (0.384)	1.728*** (0.413)	0.354 (0.572)	0.032 (0.376)	0.660* (0.377)
education level	-0.115*** (0.041)	0.033 (0.049)	0.165*** (0.051)	-0.011 (0.040)	0.036 (0.043)
child in hh	0.041 (0.148)	-0.023 (0.182)	-0.030 (0.200)	0.168 (0.139)	-0.201 (0.154)
female	0.380*** (0.119)	-0.040 (0.142)	0.105 (0.154)	0.040 (0.114)	0.141 (0.123)
Observations	1337	1336	1365	1350	1341
Pseudo $R^2$	0.058	0.035	0.017	0.017	0.018

Models have the following DVs: (1) retirement spending, (2) unemployment spending  
(3) education spending, (4) family spending, (5) LMP spending

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.10:** Spending preferences for France

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
union member	0.215 (0.228)	0.652** (0.287)	0.307 (0.226)	0.202 (0.260)	0.088 (0.218)
age	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.007)	-0.013*** (0.005)	-0.014** (0.006)	-0.001 (0.005)
income	-0.268*** (0.060)	-0.277*** (0.091)	-0.058 (0.057)	-0.270*** (0.073)	-0.039 (0.057)
public sector	-0.031 (0.177)	0.217 (0.262)	-0.042 (0.180)	-0.052 (0.210)	0.221 (0.177)
unemployed	0.360 (0.324)	0.799** (0.345)	0.252 (0.323)	0.436 (0.310)	0.558* (0.317)
education level	-0.234*** (0.053)	-0.102 (0.073)	-0.010 (0.050)	-0.206*** (0.058)	0.016 (0.050)
child in hh	0.475*** (0.160)	0.180 (0.222)	-0.013 (0.157)	0.376** (0.180)	-0.127 (0.154)
female	0.454*** (0.142)	0.240 (0.208)	0.142 (0.139)	-0.069 (0.162)	0.204 (0.137)
Observations	916	918	926	913	916
Pseudo $R^2$	0.068	0.044	0.012	0.054	0.008

Models have the following DVs: (1) retirement spending, (2) unemployment spending  
(3) education spending, (4) family spending, (5) LMP spending

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.11:** Spending preferences for Italy

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
union member	0.015 (0.183)	0.052 (0.160)	0.109 (0.238)	0.044 (0.196)	0.000 (0.167)
age	0.028*** (0.006)	0.013** (0.006)	0.004 (0.008)	0.009 (0.006)	0.005 (0.006)
income	-0.265*** (0.071)	-0.143** (0.066)	0.178* (0.105)	-0.077 (0.079)	-0.221*** (0.065)
public sector	0.142 (0.212)	0.067 (0.198)	-0.138 (0.297)	0.012 (0.237)	0.333* (0.201)
unemployed	-0.438 (0.287)	0.722** (0.285)	-0.200 (0.368)	0.417 (0.379)	0.690** (0.331)
education level	-0.128** (0.056)	-0.020 (0.052)	0.152* (0.082)	0.011 (0.062)	0.000 (0.052)
child in hh	0.218 (0.169)	0.065 (0.156)	0.254 (0.224)	0.574*** (0.176)	0.244 (0.161)
female	0.478*** (0.162)	-0.007 (0.144)	-0.056 (0.210)	-0.105 (0.173)	0.208 (0.147)
Observations	839	822	860	849	820
Pseudo $R^2$	0.068	0.019	0.020	0.014	0.026

Models have the following DVs: (1) retirement spending, (2) unemployment spending  
(3) education spending, (4) family spending, (5) LMP spending

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.12:** Spending preferences for Spain

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
union member	0.029 (0.232)	0.490** (0.232)	1.688** (0.738)	0.042 (0.254)	0.252 (0.241)
age	0.013** (0.005)	0.011** (0.005)	0.012 (0.008)	0.002 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.005)
income	-0.078 (0.065)	-0.233*** (0.066)	-0.168 (0.120)	-0.171** (0.073)	-0.108 (0.067)
public sector	0.310 (0.205)	-0.010 (0.197)	0.155 (0.367)	-0.092 (0.219)	0.183 (0.206)
unemployed	0.223 (0.207)	0.233 (0.193)	0.297 (0.374)	0.011 (0.225)	0.410* (0.215)
education level	-0.081 (0.050)	-0.067 (0.048)	0.050 (0.088)	-0.082 (0.056)	-0.116** (0.051)
child in hh	-0.525*** (0.151)	-0.113 (0.147)	0.150 (0.255)	-0.124 (0.166)	-0.233 (0.155)
female	0.239* (0.144)	0.136 (0.137)	0.167 (0.245)	0.103 (0.157)	0.292** (0.144)
Observations	931	935	939	933	928
Pseudo $R^2$	0.033	0.037	0.029	0.018	0.027

Models have the following DVs: (1) retirement spending, (2) unemployment spending  
(3) education spending, (4) family spending, (5) LMP spending

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.13:** Spending preferences for Sweden

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
union member	0.611*** (0.155)	0.385** (0.150)	0.006 (0.165)	0.123 (0.149)	0.340** (0.144)
age	0.018*** (0.004)	0.007* (0.004)	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)
income	-0.267*** (0.057)	-0.172*** (0.056)	0.122* (0.063)	-0.154*** (0.058)	-0.129** (0.055)
public sector	0.133 (0.178)	0.141 (0.171)	-0.160 (0.192)	0.250 (0.174)	0.238 (0.169)
unemployed	0.071 (0.607)	0.296 (0.504)	0.568 (0.640)	-0.430 (0.530)	-0.620 (0.514)
education level	-0.190*** (0.051)	-0.132*** (0.048)	0.052 (0.052)	-0.075 (0.049)	-0.072 (0.047)
child in hh	-0.041 (0.170)	0.066 (0.166)	-0.136 (0.188)	0.086 (0.172)	-0.214 (0.163)
female	0.286** (0.144)	-0.053 (0.138)	-0.286* (0.155)	-0.160 (0.142)	-0.023 (0.136)
Observations	952	950	955	951	945
Pseudo $R^2$	0.066	0.024	0.012	0.013	0.017

Models have the following DVs: (1) retirement spending, (2) unemployment spending  
(3) education spending, (4) family spending, (5) LMP spending

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.14:** Spending preferences for Denmark

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
union member	0.325* (0.173)	0.498** (0.199)	0.449*** (0.164)	0.614*** (0.203)	0.325 (0.231)
age	0.013** (0.005)	0.016*** (0.006)	0.015*** (0.005)	0.008 (0.006)	-0.006 (0.007)
income	-0.297*** (0.066)	-0.364*** (0.075)	-0.005 (0.062)	-0.203*** (0.074)	-0.117 (0.086)
public sector	0.232 (0.212)	0.171 (0.225)	-0.304 (0.197)	0.383* (0.223)	0.379 (0.241)
unemployed	-0.531 (0.537)	1.210** (0.486)	0.245 (0.509)	0.570 (0.455)	-0.977 (0.783)
education level	-0.115** (0.056)	0.016 (0.061)	-0.027 (0.053)	-0.211*** (0.064)	-0.122* (0.072)
child in hh	-0.364* (0.204)	0.222 (0.223)	0.336* (0.186)	0.136 (0.216)	-0.259 (0.256)
female	0.211 (0.159)	0.215 (0.172)	-0.339** (0.152)	0.011 (0.176)	0.173 (0.198)
Observations	853	835	860	816	817
Pseudo $R^2$	0.072	0.062	0.019	0.039	0.020

Models have the following DVs: (1) retirement spending, (2) unemployment spending  
(3) education spending, (4) family spending, (5) LMP spending

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.15:** Spending preferences for UK

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
union member	0.434** (0.188)	0.403* (0.227)	0.407** (0.201)	0.143 (0.183)	0.449** (0.180)
age	0.002 (0.005)	0.010 (0.007)	-0.003 (0.005)	-0.014*** (0.005)	0.003 (0.005)
income	-0.362*** (0.052)	-0.256*** (0.075)	-0.075 (0.052)	-0.185*** (0.052)	-0.131*** (0.050)
public sector	0.060 (0.174)	-0.167 (0.238)	-0.095 (0.182)	-0.161 (0.173)	-0.092 (0.169)
unemployed	-0.410 (0.441)	1.069** (0.477)	-0.652* (0.388)	0.448 (0.403)	0.284 (0.405)
education level	-0.146*** (0.055)	-0.011 (0.070)	0.072 (0.057)	-0.098* (0.056)	0.007 (0.055)
child in hh	0.033 (0.162)	-0.469** (0.237)	0.359** (0.169)	0.365** (0.158)	0.143 (0.160)
female	-0.072 (0.137)	0.166 (0.178)	0.143 (0.137)	-0.188 (0.136)	-0.122 (0.133)
Observations	1018	999	1020	990	973
Pseudo $R^2$	0.062	0.051	0.016	0.032	0.011

Models have the following DVs: (1) retirement spending, (2) unemployment spending  
(3) education spending, (4) family spending, (5) LMP spending

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.16:** Spending preferences for Ireland

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
union member	0.072 (0.207)	-0.108 (0.287)	0.363 (0.271)	-0.016 (0.202)	0.274 (0.203)
age	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.009 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.007)	-0.006 (0.005)	0.008 (0.005)
income	-0.321*** (0.066)	-0.524*** (0.094)	-0.151** (0.075)	-0.250*** (0.064)	-0.087 (0.062)
public sector	-0.032 (0.235)	0.350 (0.307)	-0.049 (0.301)	0.083 (0.229)	0.085 (0.230)
unemployed	0.509 (0.396)	0.928** (0.398)	1.329* (0.724)	1.542*** (0.503)	0.421 (0.368)
education level	-0.102** (0.049)	-0.145** (0.058)	0.037 (0.058)	-0.120** (0.049)	0.014 (0.049)
child in hh	-0.122 (0.170)	-0.274 (0.212)	0.332 (0.207)	-0.015 (0.170)	-0.105 (0.165)
female	0.151 (0.144)	0.053 (0.177)	0.183 (0.174)	0.054 (0.145)	-0.138 (0.143)
Observations	874	869	879	865	850
Pseudo $R^2$	0.045	0.086	0.019	0.044	0.009

Models have the following DVs: (1) retirement spending, (2) unemployment spending  
(3) education spending, (4) family spending, (5) LMP spending

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$



## **B Appendix Paper II**

**B1: Characteristics of the four unions****Table B.1:** Union characteristics

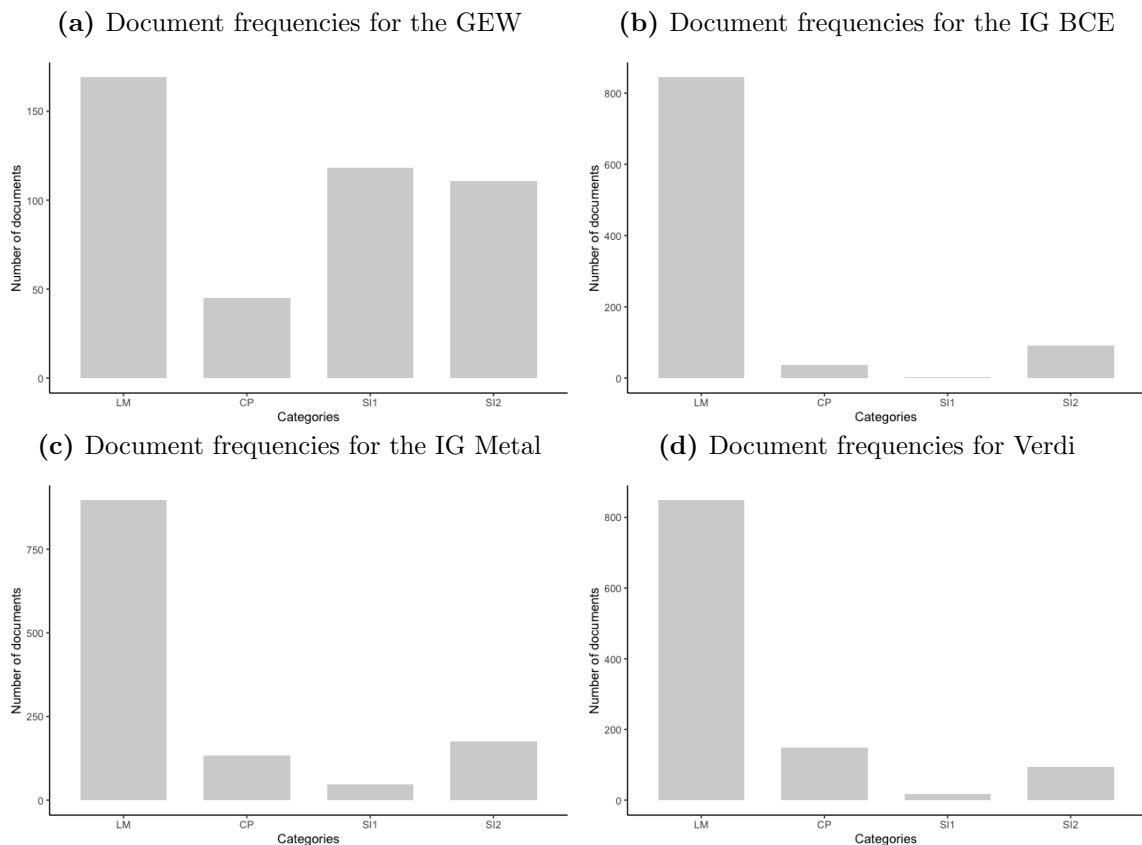
<i>Union</i>	<i>Membership base</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Gender composition</i>	<i>Part-time employees</i>	<i>General education level</i>	<i>Income (in deciles)</i>
Verdi	broad variety of service sector workers, private and public (education, public administration, financial services, retail, media, logistics, social insurance, IT services)	1,955,080 (2019)	52% female, 48% male	14.20% (of all union members)	low 39.68%, medium 34.83%, high 24.11%	mean: 5.17, median: 5
IG Metall	metal, electronic, and transport/automotive industry, but also wood, textile (overall manufacturing)	2,262,571 (2019)	18% female, 82% male	7.79%	low 48.30%, medium 32.67%, high 18.04%	mean: 5.08, median: 5
GEW	teachers, university employees/researchers, kindergarten teachers, social workers	280,343 (2019)	72% female, 18% male	9.38%	low 11.94%, medium 13.43%, high 74.63%	mean: 6.3, median: 6
IG BCE	mining, oil, chemical companies, pharmaceutical companies, material (plastic, glass, leather, paper etc), and energy	618,321 (2019)	22% female, 78% male	4.92%	low 42.31%, medium 31.54%, high 24.62%	mean: 5.77, median: 6

Source for occupation, size, and gender composition: Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (<https://www.dgb.de/uber-uns/dgb-heute/mitgliederzahlen/2000-2009>), source for part-time share, education level and income: Inequality Barometer Survey (see Busemeyer, Garritzmann, et al. 2018)

Note that in the survey data used in the Table above, current and former union members are considered. For some unions there are relatively few respondents. Since the goal of this survey was not looking at unions union members were not oversampled, as would have been necessary to get a larger sample. The information on composition is thus not fully reliable and has to be treated with caution.

The following figures show the document frequencies of the four main categories by union.

**Figure B.1:** Document frequencies for the four categories by union



## B2: Comparison to other topics

In the main analysis I compare the relative frequency of the four topics with one another. However, as noted above, the corpus as a whole also includes the category ‘other’. This category comprises texts about internal organizational matters, such as meetings or union elections, accounts of events and celebrations, international news stories, individual work place features, and other topics of interest. Compared to the four topics of main interest in the paper, the category ‘other’ is substantially more frequent. It makes up about 60% of all documents. In order to get a more detailed picture of how this varies across unions, I estimate a regression model with a dummy for belonging to one of the four categories of main importance compared to belonging to the category other. The results displayed in Table ?? show that all unions are significantly more likely than the GEW to talk about the four categories in their union membership newspapers. This is particularly the case for the IG Metall. The chances of belonging to one of the substantive categories increases over time, but there is no difference in

this trend across unions.

**Table B.2:** Overall chance of being categorized in the substantive categories

	With permissive criterion	
	Model I	Model II
IG BCE	0.568*** (0.066)	-6.366 (89.303)
IG Metall	0.903*** (0.063)	-40.370 (67.018)
Verdi	0.567*** (0.062)	29.586 (65.108)
year	0.041*** (0.012)	0.039 (0.026)
IG BCE*year		0.003 (0.044)
IG Metall*year		0.020 (0.033)
Verdi*year		-0.014 (0.032)
Constant	-83.777*** (23.939)	-80.630 (51.593)
N	10,908	10,908
AIC	14,077.500	14,082.040
<i>Note:</i>	***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1	

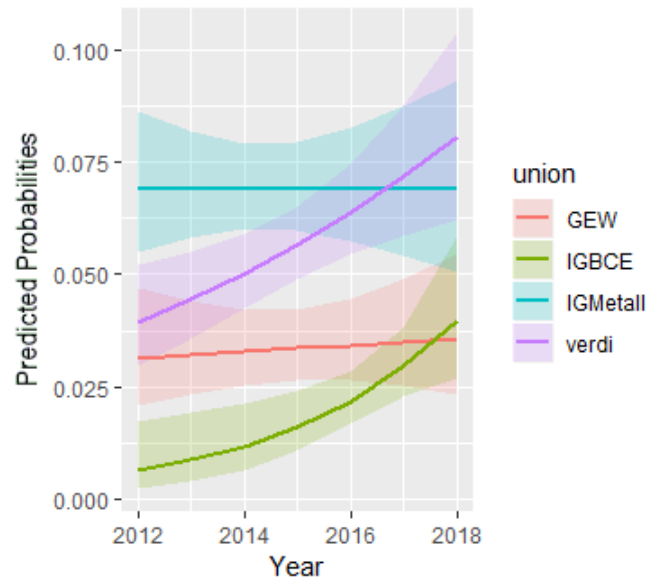
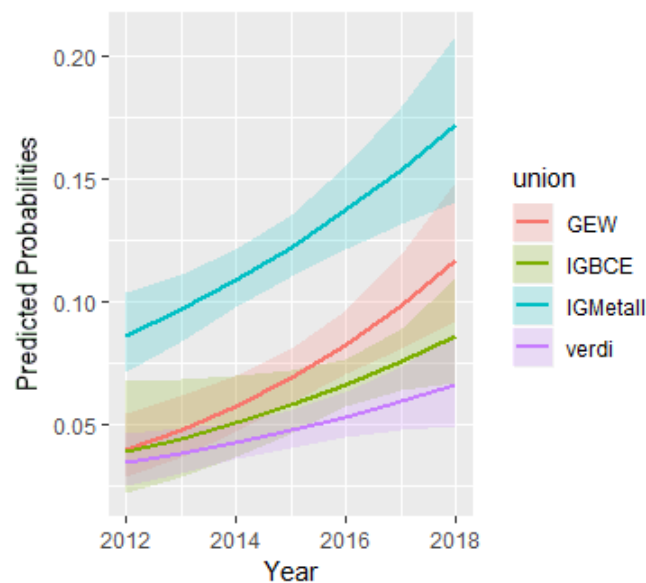
I also estimate models similar to the ones estimated in the main analysis, but with the reference group encompassing the other three substantive categories plus all other documents for each category. In terms of direction and strength the results are largely similar to the main analysis, as is to be expected. Examining the predicted probabilities across the years shows that in terms of absolute salience (meaning salience of a substantive topic compared to all categories), the increase of the importance of SI2 is particularly strong for the IG Metall. For CP absolute salience increases especially for the IG BCE (though from a very low level) and for Verdi.

**Table B.3:** Regression results for all documents including the category ‘other’

	LM Model I	CP Model II	SI 1 Model III	SI 2 Model IV
IG BCE	1.497*** (0.086)	-0.417** (0.177)	-3.446*** (0.390)	-0.207* (0.117)
IG Metall	1.431*** (0.084)	0.794*** (0.142)	-0.949*** (0.137)	0.621*** (0.104)
Verdi	1.296*** (0.083)	0.546*** (0.143)	-2.234*** (0.207)	-0.414*** (0.119)
year	0.003 (0.013)	0.069*** (0.026)	0.017 (0.032)	0.145*** (0.021)
Constant	-8.707 (26.905)	-143.350*** (51.488)	-37.558 (65.429)	-294.402*** (43.019)
N	10,908	10,908	10,908	10,908
AIC	12,119.360	4,079.288	2,352.189	5,673.561
<i>Note:</i>	***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1			

**Table B.4:** Interaction models for all documents including the category ‘other’

	LM Model I	CP Model II	SI 1 Model III	SI 2 Model IV
IG BCE	-129.769 (107.045)	-579.227** (253.456)	1,260.153 (913.379)	107.645 (163.259)
IG Metall	-221.236** (88.532)	48.256 (148.953)	133.159 (150.635)	128.321 (110.280)
Verdi	-110.930 (86.895)	-208.082 (148.711)	-273.835 (223.861)	160.787 (126.729)
year	-0.065* (0.038)	0.023 (0.061)	0.027 (0.042)	0.196*** (0.044)
IG BCE*year	0.065 (0.053)	0.287** (0.126)	-0.627 (0.453)	-0.054 (0.081)
IG Metall*year	0.111** (0.044)	-0.024 (0.074)	-0.067 (0.075)	-0.063 (0.055)
Verdi*year	0.056 (0.043)	0.104 (0.074)	0.135 (0.111)	-0.080 (0.063)
Constant	129.717* (75.786)	-50.139 (123.213)	-56.725 (83.923)	-397.298*** (88.932)
N	10,908	10,908	10,908	10,908
AIC	12,118.220	4,075.156	2,352.930	5,677.646
<i>Note:</i>	***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1			

**Figure B.2:** Predicted probabilities including category ‘other’ by year and unions for CP**Figure B.3:** Predicted probabilities including category ‘other’ by year and unions for SI2

### B3: Results using the strict categorization criterion

The strict criterion sorts texts as belonging to one of the categories if they either display a minimum of 10 term occurrences of the respective dictionary terms or a minimum share of 0.02 of all tokens in a document. As discussed above, for the main analysis I use the more permissive criterion since it has a better overall performance and particularly is better in terms of recall. The main gist of the results does not differ when applying the strict criterion, however.

**Table B.5:** Relative category salience using the strict criterion

	LM	CP	SI 1	SI 2
	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
IGBCE	2.486*** (0.195)	-1.027*** (0.279)	-4.097*** (0.740)	-1.331*** (0.191)
IGMetall	1.231*** (0.169)	0.065 (0.236)	-1.397*** (0.246)	-0.422** (0.170)
verdi	1.532*** (0.181)	0.274 (0.244)	-2.932*** (0.453)	-1.263*** (0.194)
year	-0.103*** (0.029)	0.063* (0.038)	-0.089 (0.065)	0.123*** (0.031)
Constant	207.485*** (58.649)	-128.840* (77.091)	177.286 (130.008)	-248.494*** (63.400)
N	2,235	2,235	2,235	2,235
AIC	2,519.782	1,626.392	629.984	2,298.059
<i>Note:</i>	***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1			

**Table B.6:** Relative category salience with interactions using the strict criterion

	LM	CP	SI 1	SI 2
	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
IGBCE	-235.556 (264.921)	-663.439* (377.715)	27,900.430 (1,110,682.000)	567.810** (260.989)
IGMetall	-442.281** (192.928)	122.717 (255.977)	-56.614 (274.989)	464.436** (194.839)
verdi	-335.142 (205.487)	-160.945 (264.388)	-32.150 (502.996)	420.486* (221.830)
year	-0.272*** (0.086)	0.042 (0.114)	-0.096 (0.103)	0.322*** (0.087)
IGBCE*year	0.118 (0.131)	0.329* (0.187)	-13.848 (551.207)	-0.282** (0.129)
IGMetall*year	0.220** (0.096)	-0.061 (0.127)	0.027 (0.137)	-0.231** (0.097)
verdi*year	0.167 (0.102)	0.080 (0.131)	0.015 (0.250)	-0.209* (0.110)
Constant	548.387*** (174.227)	-86.028 (229.567)	191.465 (208.321)	-648.414*** (174.309)
N	2,235	2,235	2,235	2,235
AIC	2,519.980	1,625.121	632.539	2,297.146
<i>Note:</i>	***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1			

#### **B4: Single word count**

The main analysis of this paper looks at the frequency of documents on a certain topic. I choose this as the main level of analysis, since articles are generally the level at which one topic is discussed (though sometimes multiple topics are addressed within one article, which is why the categories are not exclusive). Looking at the relative frequency of documents on different topics thus lends itself well to measuring salience. However, as discussed in the methodology section this necessitates fixing a threshold of absolute or relative dictionary term occurrences that serves as a criterion for categorizing a document. A different way in which salience could express itself, which would be not picked up by the document based measure, is a repeated mention of specific topics throughout different articles, without devoting any full article to the topic. In order to also capture this possibility I look at the single term count, which pools dictionary terms across articles.

Pooled across unions, the ordering of the topics is the same as in the analysis of documents: the most frequently occurring topic is LM (58%), followed by SI2 (17%), CP (16%), and, finally, SI1 (5%). Differentiating between unions the relative salience measured by the single word count also is the same as the document based analysis. For IG Metall and Verdi the share of terms belonging to LM accounts for more than half, 64 and 61% respectively, but the dominance is quite a bit less pronounced than measured by document frequencies. Looking at the developments of single term frequencies across time, the share of LM features (compared to the other categories) remains relatively stable, fluctuating between 52 and 63%. For CP and SI2 there is a slight increase over the years, while there is a slight decrease of SI1.

#### **B4: Topic salience by issue**

To some extent, topics within issues are correlated. Union newspapers tend to have one topic that is prominently displayed on the title page and which several of the articles in the issue are devoted to. Most articles in the newspapers are independent of the issue-topic, which is why the main type of analysis chosen is at the document level. Nevertheless, given this correlation, it could be the case that a union newspaper that does one issue on a topic with a range of articles within it focusing on this topic scores high on salience measured as document frequency, even though their treatment of this topic is confined to one issue. It is therefore informative to also look at salience measured as topics by issues.

I measure topic salience by issue in two ways. First, I look at those issues that have above median occurrences of terms belonging to the four substantive topics. Since topics will be distributed more evenly across issues than across articles (which for the most part focus on one issue) this summary measure is fitting: it indicates whether an issue puts more emphasis on one particular topic than is usual. The second strategy is to look at letter from the editor. The letters from the editor serve as a proxy for issue topic, because the editor generally writes a brief note related to the title topic. Since the corpus does not include a letter from the editor for all newspapers, the analysis is only partial. The letters from the editor are a subset of the documents included in the main analysis. Similar categorization criteria are applied.

The results of the letter from the editor measure lend some support to the findings from the main analysis and put it into sharper relief. Roughly a third of all letters from the editor fall under one of the four substantive categories, making up a total of 56. The by far most frequent category is LM (36), followed by SI2 (12), CP (5) and SI1 (2). Most of the letters from the editor categorized as LM are from the IG Metall (followed by the IG BCE). In the case of CP on the other hand two documents each are from the GEW and the IG BCE and only one is from the IG Metall. For SI1 all letters from the editor are from the GEW. For SI2 most are from the GEW (8), followed by the IG Metall (3). These results are mostly in line with the union placement in Figure 3.5 in the main analysis, in particular the focus of the GEW on SI emerges here. Similarly, for the IG Metall and IG BCE LM is salient. However, these results need to be interpreted with some caution, since the sample is relatively small, and thus much depends on whether single documents are correctly categorized.

The other strategy of measuring topic salience by issue yields results that are again for the most part in line with the results from the main analysis. The clearest focus on LM is found for the IG BCE, followed by Verdi and IG Metall. CP, in turn, is most salient for Verdi, according to this measure (followed by the IG Metall and IG BCE). A clear focus of the GEW on SI1 emerges, yet here the demarcation of this focus compared to the other unions is less clear: they also fulfil the criterion for several issues. Concerning SI2, this measure interestingly indicates that the salience is relatively similar across unions. All four have several issues which meet the saliency criterion applied.

To summarize, the measures looking at salience at the issue level do not yield very different results from the document level analysis. Consequently, it does not appear to be the case that the results from the main analysis are distorted by many salient documents clustering in a handful of issues.



## C Appendix Paper III

## C1: Country level union characteristics

**Table C.1:** Union density and fragmentation

<i>Country</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Density</i>	<i>Indicator of fragmentation</i>
Denmark	2014	69.26	5.13
Germany	2017	16.73	6.11
UK	2016	23.72	10.98

Source: Visser (2019)

Note: Data are from the most recent years available. Density is net union membership as a proportion of wage and salary earners in employment. The indicator for union fragmentation is the effective number of unions, which is calculated by multiplying the inverse Herfindahl index (a measure of concentration) applied to union confederations and affiliate unions respectively. Higher values signal more fragmentation. For details see Visser (2019).

## C2: Press releases

For all unions and union confederations recent press releases and news items<sup>2</sup> were examined, with the following questions in mind: What policy and policy type is how salient? Are priorities of policy types mentioned? Is the logic of membership or the logic of recruitment either mentioned or implied? Is there a focus on non-traditional members? Are logic of influence considerations implied? Press releases and news items were taken from the union websites. Depending on availability and the frequency of press releases, all items from 2019 were looked at. 2019 was chosen since this is the year the interviews were conducted. In some cases, only the last few months of 2019 were available, or the frequency of press releases was so high that the year was not covered in its entirety, so as to not diverge too much in item number from those with lower frequency. For others press releases going back until September 2018 were included. All items published as press releases or news items on the respective union websites were examined. Since unions differ greatly in the frequency of publishing press releases and news items, the number of items per union differ substantially. The items were first cursorily read and coded as either including statements concerning any type of social policy, or regarding any of the questions mentioned above, or belonging to the category 'other topics'. In a second step those categorized as being on a relevant topic were examined in detail, firstly, with respect to the above questions and secondly, searching for any other relevant information.

<sup>2</sup>Where the publications were not called press releases by the union I refer to them with the term news items.

**Table C.2:** Press releases

<i>Country</i>	<i>Union</i>	<i>Number of press releases/news items</i>	<i>Time period</i>
Denmark	FH	250 news items	03/2019 - 12/2019
Denmark	FOA	90 press releases	01/2019 - 12/2019
Denmark	AC	70 news items	01/2019 - 12/2019
Denmark	3F	250 press releases	10/2019 - 12/2019
Denmark	Dansk Metal	200 news items	undated
Germany	Verdi	360 press releases	09/2018 - 12/2019
Germany	IG Metall	90 press releases	10/2018 - 12/2019
Germany	GEW	100 press releases	09/2018 - 12/2019
Germany	IG BAU	100 press releases	10/2018 - 12/2019
Germany	IG BCE	80 press releases	11/2018 - 12/2019
Germany	DGB	110 press releases	09/2018 - 12/2019
UK	TUC	70 press releases	03/2018 - 12/2019
UK	unison	180 press releases	01/2019 - 12/2019
UK	unite	360 press releases	06/2019 - 12/2019
UK	NEU	60 press releases	03/2019 - 12/2019

Sources:

<https://fho.dk/aktuelt-seneste-nyheder-debatindlaeg-og-analyser/>

<https://www.foa.dk/forbund/presse/seneste-pressemeddelelser>

<https://www.akademikerne.dk/presse/>

<https://www.3f.dk/aktuelt/nyheder>

<https://www.danskmatal.dk/Nyheder/pressemeddelelser/Sider/default.aspx>

<https://www.verdi.de/presse/pressemitteilungen>,

<https://www.igmetall.de/presse/pressemitteilungen>,

<https://www.gew.de/presse/>,

<https://igbau.de/Presse-Archiv.html>,

<https://igbce.de/igbce/presse/medieninformationen>,

<https://www.dgb.de/presse>

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/news>

<https://www.unison.org.uk/news/>

<https://unitetheunion.org/news-events/>

<https://neu.org.uk/latest>

**C3: List of interview partners****Table C.3:** Denmark

<i>Union</i>	<i>Interview code</i>	<i>Membership base</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Gender composition</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Year founded</i>
FH	Denmark-1	–	1,400,000 (in 79 separate unions, 2019)	–	confederation	2019 (through merger of LO and FTF)
FOA	Denmark-2	predominantly public sector service employees, social and health care, cleaning/janitorial services, technology, education	153,985 (2018)	82% female, 18% male	union	1992 (through mergers)
AC	Denmark-3	represents unions primarily organizing employees with a higher education (lawyers, librarians, psychologists, doctors, teachers)	313,000 (2019)	–	confederation	1972
3F	Denmark-4	wide variety of members in industry, construction, transport and the service sector	269,763 (2020)	26% female, 74% male	union	2004 (through mergers)
Dansk Metal	Denmark-5	primarily people working in the metal, electronic and IT sectors	142,000 (2018)	–	union	1888

Table C.4: Germany

<i>Union</i>	<i>Interview code</i>	<i>Membership base</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Gender composition</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Year founded</i>
Verdi	Germany-1	broad variety of service sector workers, private and public (education, public administration, financial services, retail, media, logistics, social insurance, IT services)	1,955,080 (2019)	52% female, 48% male	union	2001 (through mergers)
IG Metall	Germany-2	metal, electronic, and transport/automotive industry, but also wood, textile (overall manufacturing)	2,262,571 (2019)	18% female, 82% male	union	1949
GEW	Germany-3	teachers, university employees/researchers, kindergarten teachers, social workers	280,343 (2019)	72% female, 18% male	union	1948
IG BAU	Germany-4	construction, agriculture and forestry, cleaning/janitorial services	240,146 (2019)	27% female, 73% male	union	1996 (through mergers)
IG BCE	Germany-5	mining, oil, chemical companies, pharmaceutical companies, material (plastic, glass, leather, paper etc), and energy	618,321 (2019)	22% female, 78% male	union	1997 (through mergers)
DGB	Germany-6	–	5,934,971 (in 8 separate unions, 2019)	34% female, 66% male	confederation	1949

Table C.5: UK

<i>Union</i>	<i>Interview code</i>	<i>Membership base</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Gender composition</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Year founded</i>
TUC	UK-1	–	5,500,000 (in 48 separate unions, 2020)	–	confederation	1868
unison	UK-2	primarily workers in public sector services and utilities, but also some private sector workers. (Education and childcare, social work, civil service, health, waste management etc.)	1,377,006 (2018)	> 70% female	union	1993 (through mergers)
unite	UK-3	diverse range of members, employed in industrial as well as service sector jobs.	ca. 1,400,000 (2020)	ca. 75% male	union	2007 through mergers
NEU	UK-4	teachers, nurseries and childcare, and other employees in the education sector	510000 (2018)	75% female, 25% male	union	2004 (through mergers)

Sources: union and union confederation websites ( Statistics Denmark)

<https://www.statbank.dk/LONMED3>

<https://fho.dk/om-fagbevaegelsens-hovedorganisation/medlemstal/>

<https://www.foa.dk/forbund/om-foa>

<https://www.akademikerne.dk/medlemstal/>

<https://www.3f.dk/om-3f/3f-kort-fortaltfordeling-paa-koen>

<https://www.danskmetal.dk/Om/Sider/Fakta-om-Dansk-Metal.aspx>

<https://www.dgb.de/uber-uns/dgb-heute/mitgliederzahlen>

<https://www.gew.de/ueber-uns/>

<https://igbau.de/Ueber-uns.html>

<https://igbce.de/igbce/ueber-uns>

<https://www.igmetall.de/ueber-uns>

<https://www.verdi.de/ueber-uns>

<https://neu.org.uk/about-neu>

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/national/about-tuc>

<https://www.unison.org.uk/about/>

<https://www.unitetheunion.org/who-we-are/>

## **C4: Interview guidelines (English)**

### **Introduction**

- Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed
- Introduction (me/my institutional context)
- The project is about...
- Interview specificities (How much time? Detailed answers welcome, elaborate, subjective impressions ok)
- Ask for consent to being recorded

### **Introductory question**

- To get started [personalized part]. How often in a typical week do you deal in any way with social policy? In what way? Can you describe what your typical week looks like, which core tasks your work consist of typically?

### **Unions and social policy**

- In the literature unions are often said to have (at least) two main roles: firstly, as bargaining partners in industrial relations and as employee representation in immediately workplace related issues/policies; secondly, as advocating/representing member interests in the realm of social policy, as welfare state actors (e.g., fighting for pensions, education etc.). Do you think the description of unions as having these two main roles is accurate?
  - Which of the two roles is more important for UNION?
  - Do you think this has changed over the past years/decades?
  - How is this reflected in your work/publications/union convention resolutions etc.?
- How does UNION influence social policy?
  - Has the way in which unions/UNION try to influence social policy changed?
  - Influence through committees? Parties? Collective bargaining?
- If you consider unions/UNION as a social actor, how strong would you say unions/UNION are currently?
  - Has the strength changed over time?

### **Role in/positions with respect to different fields of social policy**

- If you think about the general policy fields that are part of social policy, which socio-political area is most important/the topic discussed most frequently within UNION?
  - With regard to which topic is it particularly important that UNION position itself?

- Which social policy debates are discussed in UNION?
- If you think about debates within UNION, but also about campaigns, projects; which social policy area is mentioned most frequently?
- If you think about the following three policy fields: pensions, active labor market policy, education policy (vocational education, general education, childcare); how important are these policy fields each for UNION?
  - How important is it that UNION takes a position/is active with regard to each policy field?
  - Can you sort the three fields according to their priority?
- Imagine that (due to scarcity of resources/time but simultaneously reform discussions in all fields) UNION has to give priority to one of these fields for the next months, which should it be?
  - Why?
  - Can you attach weights to these policy fields? In percentages, how much of the resources/attention should be given to which field?
- The welfare state is sometimes understood more as an insurance tool/compensation, sometimes more as an investment (e.g. in skills) (terms are meant neutrally). Which conceptualization/role do you think is more important?
  - Some are identifying a new development in social policy, towards a “investment welfare state” (a welfare state that e.g. tries to educate people thus preparing them for risks they may face). What would you say is UNION’s position with regard to this?
  - Is this a topic within UNION?

### Union members

- You said you would prioritize. . . . Why?
  - Which interests with respect to social policy would you say stand out among/distinguishes union members/members of UNION?
  - How diverse are the interests of UNION?
  - Would you say that overall members of UNION have a stronger interest in union action in the industrial relations area/workplace matters or in union influence in social policy?
  - Suppose you prioritize. . . How do you sell this to your members?
- Self-conception of the union: does UNION (do labor unions in general) represent specific groups, classes, generations? Which ones? Does it represent only members/internal groups or also specific external groups?

- Would you say the interests of specific groups dominate within UNION?
- For example of younger or older members?
- Do you as an organization have to convince (specific groups of) members of certain things?

### **Recruitment**

- Many unions have faced membership decline, recruitment is therefore an important topic. How is this issue addressed in UNION?
  - If you think of current/recent campaigns: which groups does UNION attempt to recruit in particular?
  - Are there topics/strategies on which UNION would like to focus for recruitment purposes but is unsure how well existing members would like that?
- Considering younger and older workers, is one group more difficult to recruit than the other?
  - Which of these groups does your union focus on more in terms of recruitment efforts?
  - If younger/older people are harder to recruit, does this imply anything for the social policy focus?
- Through socio-economic developments there are quite many precariously employed people, at the moment, part time, fixed-term contracts, etc. Many say that these people are difficult to recruit for unions. Do you agree?
  - How does UNION try to recruit these people despite the difficulties?
  - Does UNION consciously use different strategies in order to recruit these precarious vs. traditional employees?

### **Relation with the government/politics**

- How would you say the relation between UNION (and unions in general) and the government/parties is currently with respect to social policy, is there any collaboration? How strong is UNION?
  - How has this changed over time?
  - Why, do you think, this has changed (in this way)?
- How would you evaluate the current relations between employers/employer associations and the unions/UNION? Especially with regard to social policy concerns?
  - How exactly does social policy play a role in this relation?
  - Can the union gain influence by working together with employers in the social policy realm?
  - How has this changed over time?

- Why?
- In the past decades some commentators have seen unions as defenders of the welfare state status quo. Would you agree with this statement?
  - Why/why not?
  - What are current concrete social policy (reform) ideas that UNION/unions in general support/has formulated?

### **Other unions/other country-contexts**

- In Germany one role of the union federations is (ostensibly) to represent the unions social policy interests vis-à-vis the government. Is this similar in COUNTRY? What is the role of the federations as a social policy actor compared to the unions?
  - How do the positions of UNION differ from those of the federation?
- According to your assessment, how strongly do the positions with regard to pensions, education, ALMP, differ between UNION and other unions in COUNTRY?
  - Why do you think there are these differences/why not?
  - Are there conflicts between the separate unions because of different social policy ideas/emphasis?
- Can you give me a rough idea of your assessment of unions' situations in other countries: of course the union and welfare systems differ greatly. But if you think of the unions' role in social policy, the strength and the focus on specific social policy areas, how does the role of unions in and the positions on social policy differ in COUNTRY 1 and COUNTRY 2, in comparison with COUNTRY?

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