Worker Voice in America:
A Current Assessment and Exploration of Options*

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Abstract

This article reports the results of the first phase of a multi-method study of the state of worker voice in America and options available to workers for closing the gap between the amount of say or influence they expect to have on their job and their actual level of influence. The authors draw on a nationally representative survey of workers that both updates the Freeman and Rogers 1995 survey and one conducted by the Department of Labor in 1977 and goes beyond the scope of these previous efforts to assess worker interest in a wider array of workplace issues including workplace/personal issues, personnel/collective bargaining issues, and higher level organizational values and related issues. The array of voice options examined is also expanded to capture internal firm provided options such as supervisors, coworkers, ombuds systems, grievance procedures, joint committees along with union representation and the newer examples of worker advocacy such as online petitions, occupational associations, and protests. Results indicated that workers believe they ought to have a voice on this full set of workplace issues, there are substantial gaps between their expected and actual voice, a higher percentage of non-union workers want to join a union than was observed in the two prior national surveys, and there are significant variations in the preferences, rates of use, and satisfaction with different voice options. The results suggest that there is a sizable voice gap in American workplaces today but there is no "one sized shoe" (voice option) that fits all workers or all issues.

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Introduction

One of the biggest intellectual puzzles in employment relations today is: Why don't more workers take action in the face of objective evidence that their employment conditions and outcomes have deteriorated steadily over time? Addressing this puzzle has implications for society as well as for individual workers. There is growing awareness that the decline in worker voice through the traditional channel of union representation has imposed costs on the economy and society. The economic costs are greater income inequality and the sizable gap between productivity and wage growth Western and Rosenfeld (2011); Kochan and Riordan (2016). The social costs are the frustration and anger that have arisen as workers feel their voices have not been heard at the workplace and/or in political affairs (Autor, Dorn, Hanson, and Majlesi, 2016). Yet there is no consensus how to restore worker voice and bargaining power.

This lack of consensus reflects uncertainty about workers' preferences and limited data on how U.S. workers are engaging with the variety of channels for expressing voice provided today by employers, unions, and other worker advocates. Indeed, the only two nationally representative workforce surveys that explored this issue, The Quality of Employment Survey (Quinn and Staines, 1979; Kochan, 1979) and the Worker Participation and Representation Survey Freeman and Rogers (1999) were conducted decades ago and were mostly focused on assessing how workers viewed unions and/or informal participation processes. Since then, however, the options for worker voice proposed and/or implemented in various settings have expanded considerably. Thus it is time for an assessment of the current state of worker voice in America and an examination of options for rebuilding it for those who believe they should have a greater say at work than they currently experience. That is the purpose of the larger project in which this paper is embedded. Here we report on just the initial phase of the project in which we use a national survey to take stock of these different options for worker voice, begin to adjudicate among a number

of potential explanations of why workers are not taking more actions to exercise their voice at work, and suggest directions for further research needed to identify viable paths for filling the void in worker voice for those who want and need it.

The Concept of Worker Voice: Historical and Contemporary Considerations

The term worker voice has been used in various ways historically and currently and therefore we need to be clear about how we use and conceptualize this term. Hirschman (1970) provides a generic definition of voice as an effort directed at a higher authority to change behavior. Employment relation scholars use this generic definition but adapt it depending on their frame of reference for understanding the interests at stake in employment relationships (Fox, 1966; Budd and Bhave, 2008). As Barry and Wilkinson (2016) note, those using a unitary frame of reference assume that workers and employers' interests are congruent, and therefore the task of worker voice is to elicit "positive" actions or "organizational citizenship" behaviors to improve individual, group, or organizational outcomes that will potentially also enhance commitment, engagement, trust, and job satisfaction (Organ, 1988; Marchington, Boxall, Purcell, and Wright, 2007; Morrison, 2011; Klaas, Olson-Buchanan, and Ward, 2012; Bashshur and Oc, 2015). Voice is used in the service of joint goals.

In contrast, those following a pluralist tradition of employment relations view conflicting and shared interests as inevitable between employers and workers. The concept of worker voice under this tradition is rooted in a democratic ethos articulated by the Webbs (1897). Pluralists argue that workers should have the right and ability to assert their interests individually or collectively to influence the conditions under which they work. Collective voice is most commonly exercised through collective bargaining, in which trade unions negotiate the terms of employment with

employers (Commons, 1913; Fox, 1975; Ackers, 2007; Kochan, 1980; Budd, 2004). Our use of the term "worker voice" is embedded in this pluralist tradition but recognizes that workers also want to identify with and contribute to organizations that share their values and interests. Voice may therefore mix individual and collective efforts to improve organizational processes and performance with efforts to assert worker interests that are in conflict with employers' or other parties' interests at work.

Alternative Explanations and Options

It is somewhat surprising, given the central role that voice plays in our field and the range of options that have been developed for exercising it, that to date there has been no well specified explanation for the relative absence of visible efforts by workers to address their workplace concerns. Though others have explored how voice may be exercised **instead** of exiting one's firm (Hirschman, 1970; Freeman and Medoff, 1984), we focus here on workers' experiences (or lack thereof) with exercising voice in their current jobs. We will explore several possible explanations below and examine them in the empirical analysis to follow.

One potential explanation for the limited exercise of worker voice is that many workers no longer believe they ought to have a voice on workplace issues, perhaps because they have adjusted their expectations to current realities. U.S. workers have faced significant changes in the employment relationship and in work conditions over the last thirty years. It is not clear whether those changes mean workers no longer expect to have a clear say in workplace decisions or whether those changes simply make it more difficult to pursue the voice that is still desired. Some researchers suggest most workers accept these changes as being driven by "the market," as a disembodied force, rather than being chosen by their employers. If current work conditions reflect broader forces that employers cannot change, then worker voice is less relevant. Workers who

have internalized the idea that they are "free agents," regardless of their current work status, may not expect to have a say in their workplaces but instead expect that they would need to move on to find more appealing work conditions if they are dissatisfied. These broad cultural changes – which reflect and reinforce structural changes – may mean that workers do not generally believe that they should appropriately have a say in determining work conditions. Furthermore, younger workers, who have only been exposed to the current ideologies, may be less likely to expect or demand more say. On the other hand, workers may believe they should and can contribute to workplace decisions in significant ways but they may be particularly concerned with weighing in in the face of limited job security or stagnant wages. For unionized workers, voice is part of the explicit social contract between workers and management. For non-unionized workers, expectations about how voice should be exercised are probably not as well developed and so their expectations regarding voice may be unarticulated or limited.

A number of studies have investigated the effects of structural changes in employment relationships on the expectations and norms workers bring to their workplace (Barley and Kunda, 2006; Wartzman, 2017). Some scholars argue that workers do not appear to be taking stronger actions to address the deteriorating working condition because they take the insecurity and instability as the new norms for work. For example, Newman's (1999) studies of unemployed managers suggest that middle class Americans attribute their downward mobility to their individual ability rather than blaming the system or the decisions of others. The internalized meritocratic individualism "exerts a pull towards individualistic analyses of failure" (Newman, 1999,p. 69) (Sharone, 2013; Heckscher, 1996; Meyer, 1995) and leads people to adapt their expectations to fit with current realities on their job Kalleberg (2013).

Smith (2002) further documents the organizational and institutional conditions that facilitate workers' internalized individualistic beliefs. She argues the meritocratic achievement ideology

is enhanced through organizational practices, such as identity work, training and networking. Both individualistic ideology and organizational sense-making conspire to created consent and discourage collective resistance by workers. Similarly, Pugh (2015) finds that workers expect little or nothing from their employers, but hold high expectations of themselves. This "one-way honor code" means workers demand hard work, dedication, and cheerful compliance of themselves but do not expect job security or voice in return, hoping only for a paycheck. These studies suggest that workers who are immersed in ideologies of internalized meritocratic individualism believe that the conditions that they are offered by their employers reflect what they deserve (in this system), rather than being open to negotiation through informal or formal voice channels.

A second potential explanation is that employers and workers may have reached a satisfactory set of arrangements; that is, with the development of new human resources policies and systems, there is no longer a gap between what workers believe is appropriate regarding their say at work and what they experience on their jobs (Foulkes, 1980; Guest, 1987; Fiorito, 2001; Machin and Wood, 2005). A variety of internal, firm-provided processes such as ombuds systems (Rowe, 1987), non-union grievance procedures (Lewin, 1987), and affinity or identity groups linking individuals of the same race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation (Creed and Scully, 2000; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993) may provide effective channels that satisfy workers' interest in voice and due process. In some workplaces, formalized participation processes and worker-employer committees Freeman and Rogers (1999) may help workers feel they can weigh in effectively. Supervisors may be chosen or trained to welcome and address worker concerns more than in the past (Detert and Burris, 2007; Detert and Treviño, 2008).

Because of changing expectations, new employer-based options, or for other reasons, today's workers may view unions, specifically, as less relevant channels for exercising voice. The decline in union membership may signal a lack of interest in, need for, or awareness of union represen-

tation. Alternatively, that decline may reflect workers' recognition that unionization is no longer a viable option in the face of employer opposition to unions (Bronfenbrenner, 1998), the high hurdles involved in navigating through the stages of union election processes (Ferguson, 2008), the constrained (or even "ossified") forms of representation allowed by labor law (Estlund, 2010; Kochan, 2011), and the low likelihood that workers will experience a union organizing drive at their place of work or in their occupational setting (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Union decline has led to the emergence of a variety of alternative worker advocacy initiatives that are attempting to provide voice options that are independent of employers yet not seeking to establish collective bargaining relationships. These new channels for worker advocacy include online petitions such as those offered by coworker.org (Heckscher and McCarthy, 2014), on-line ratings of employer practices such as Glassdoor or Turkopticon (Benson, Sojourner, and Umyarov, 2015), protests such as the fight for $15 (Rolf, 2016), and demographic-based associations such as immigrant worker centers (Fine, 2006; Milkman, 2011). To date, however, there is no systematic evidence of how aware workers are of these options or their views of them.

These three explanations are oriented to the broad question of why workers in the U.S. take so little action in the face of apparently deteriorating work conditions and declining union representation. We identify several empirical questions implied by this broad concern: To what extent do workers believe it is appropriate to have a say in their work and for what specific workplace issues are they most likely to believe they should be able to weigh in? What say do workers actually have (from their perspective) in specific workplace issues? Is there a "voice gap" in which workers expect more say than they have? And has this gap grown or declined in recent decades?

We are interested in describing the workforce as a whole but we are also interested in how expected say, actual say, and the voice gap vary by characteristics of the worker such as gender, race, age, education, family status, income, and union membership. We also ask a new question

prompted by changes in the employment relationship: Does employment status – whether one is working as a "regular" full-time employee, part-time employee, temporary employee, contract employee, or independent contractor – predict expected voice, actual say, or the voice gap? While workers who have greater distance from a standard employment relationship (such as temp workers or contractors) may not have as much say as "regular" workers in their work conditions, it is an open question whether they have similar views of what say they ought to have or whether they have accepted their lack of connection and influence with the employer and management. Because "non-standard" employment is growing (Katz and Krueger, 2016), understanding what these workers want with regard to voice at work (and how it compares to "regular" employees) is important for projecting what may happen in the future.

We then turn to questions regarding what voice channels workers have used previously and their assessments of the effectiveness of various options. We also ask about workers' use of and satisfaction with a variety of ways they might share their perspective and have a say at work.

A central question of interest is whether U.S. workers who are not currently union members would like to pursue this channel for voice and formal representation. What proportion of non-union workers report they would vote for a union and what worker or job characteristics predict union support? How has support for a union changed, if at all, in recent decades?

We believe the starting point for addressing these questions is to ask workers themselves about their lived experiences at work and with the different options employers, unions, and other worker advocates offer for addressing worker interests and concerns. To do so we report here the results of a survey of a nationally representative sample of the American workforce that addresses these questions.

Data and Measures

Data

We commissioned the National Opinion Research Corporation (NORC) to conduct a survey of a representative sample of the American workforce that contains questions regarding workers' expectations of having a voice at work with respect to different issues, the amount of voice experienced on their jobs with respect to those issues, and their experiences with a range of options for exercising voice. The questions in our Worker Voice Survey were generated by our study team and refined and pre-tested by NORC.

A general population sample of U.S. adults age 18 and older was selected from NORC's AmeriSpeak Panel for this study. AmeriSpeak is a national sample of household members who agree to be contacted by NORC for the various surveys it conducts. For this survey, respondents were screened to include those who were 18 years or older, currently working for pay, and were not upper-level managers, owners of businesses that employed others or family members of owners. Only one worker per household (randomly selected if more than one AmeriSpeak participant resided in the household) was selected for participation. Panelists were invited to participate between April 19 and May 29, 2017. The survey was available in English and Spanish and could be completed on the web or by phone. Participants earned AmeriSpeak credit valued between $3 to $5 for completing the survey. In total, NORC collected 3,915 completed interviews. This represented a 47 percent response rate of those invited to participate who passed the screening requirements for inclusion in the study. NORC calculated sampling weights to ensure the final sample accurately reflected the characteristics of the workforce as reported in the March 2016 Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS). Details on the sampling and weighting procedures are available on request. The weighted data are used in our analyses.

Tables 1 reports the individual demographic characteristics of our sample. Summary statistics use weights developed by NORC to adjust for nonresponding housing units and reflect the population totals from the Current Population Survey. Estimates for the remainder of this paper use these weights. We compared the Worker Voice Survey (WVS) respondents' characteristics with the 2016 American Community Survey (ACS), which is the core population survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, is provided in Appendix Table 1. The WVS sample overrepresents lower-income households. Our sample also underrepresents men and workers who do not have a high school diploma (but the weighted data adjusts for this, as seen in Appendix Table 1).

Tables 2 reports the work-related characteristics of individuals in our sample.[1] In additional analyses comparing our sample to other surveys, we found that union membership status differs– the Worker Voice Survey consists of 17.6 percent of union members[2] compared to 10.7 percent from the Current Population Survey (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Part of this difference may reflect the fact we asked whether or not respondents were represented by a union or professional association, not whether they were members (Hirsch and MacPherson, 2003).[3] Another point of interest is that 8 percent of our sample self-identified themselves as temporary employees, contract employees, or independent contractors, compared to 15.8 percent in "alternative worker arrangements" reported by Katz and Krueger (2016) in their 2015 RAND survey. Part of this difference may be because 4 percent of our sample identified themselves as standard full time or part-time employees and yet also indicated in the survey that they are self-employed. We retain these particular self-employed workers in the standard full or part-time categories in the analysis to follow to be conservative about our understanding of those in alternative work arrangements. [4]

[1]Occupational information can be found in Appendix Table 1.

[2]Note that this is based on a question that asks respondents if they are "represented by a union or professional association on your job."

[3]In CPS data, workers are considered as union members if they answer yes to the following question: *On the job, is __ a member of a labor union or of an employee association similar to a union?*

[4]Note if we placed the 4 percent of the sample that identified themselves as both standard employees and independent contractors in the independent contractor category 12 percent of the sample would consist of contingent

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of Worker Voice Survey sample

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative
Gender			
Male	2048	52.3	52.3
Female	1867	47.7	100
Age			
18–34	1438	36.7	36.7
35–49	1235	31.6	68.3
50–64	1059	27	95.3
65+	183	4.7	100
Race/ethnicity			
White	2481	63.4	63.4
Black	439	11.2	74.6
Other	189	4.8	79.4
Hispanic	675	17.2	96.6
Two or more races	132	3.4	100
Education			
Less than high school	284	7.3	7.3
High school	1087	27.8	35
Some college	1252	32	67
College degree or more	1292	33	100
Region			
Northeast	705	18	18
Midwest	868	22.2	40.2
South	1455	37.2	77.3
West	888	22.7	100
Marital status			
Married	1888	48.2	48.2
Not married	2027	51.8	100
Household income ($)			
<30,000	863	22	22
30,000–49,999	744	19	41
50,000-74,999	773	19.8	60.8
75,000-124,999	991	25.3	86.1
125,000+	544	13.9	100

Note: Summary statistics are based on the weighted estimates. Weights were developed by NORC to reflect the worker population of the Current Population Survey.

Measures

We built on two prior national surveys that addressed some aspects of worker voice of interest, the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey (Quinn and Staines, 1979; Kochan, 1979) and the 1995 Worker Representation and Participation Survey conducted under the direction of Richard Freeman and Joel Rogers (1999). Freeman and Rogers (1999) measured how much voice (operationalized as how much say or influence) workers indicated they "ought to have" on a variety of workplace issues (which we label "expected say" or "appropriate say" below) and how much say or influence respondents actually had on their jobs and from these two questions derived a "representation gap" estimate.

Expected Say. We follow a similar procedure to measure workers' views on how much say they "ought to have" as Freeman and Rogers. However, we expanded the set of issues (see discussion below) to better reflect contemporary employment relations. Respondents in our survey were asked how much say or influence they believe they ought to have over an array of issues affecting their work. This measure captures workers' sense of what is sensible in terms of their input at work; we see it as revealing workers' views of the appropriate social contract, specifically the balance between management and workers say, at work. We chose issues that span three levels of the employment relationship prior research indicated are important to worker voice and welfare (Kochan, Katz, and McKersie, 1986): (1) personal and workplace issues such as safety, respect, dealing with abuse or discrimination, control over how to do ones work, and scheduling of work hours; (2) personnel or collective bargaining issues such as compensation, benefits, job

workers and more closely approximate the 16 percent in the Katz and Krueger sample. Thus the results we report across these different employment relationships should be viewed with caution both because of the small numbers of respondents in these non-standard categories and the difficulties in sorting some of the respondents into a single category

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of Worker Voice Survey sample

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative
Type of employment			
Regular full time	2945	75.3	75.3
Regular part time	654	16.7	92.1
Temporary employee	109	2.8	94.8
Contract employee	105	2.7	97.5
Independent contractor	97	2.5	100
Hours worked per week (primary job)			
1–10	101	2.6	2.6
11–20	279	7.1	9.7
21–34	488	12.5	22.2
35–40	2026	51.8	74
41–50	759	19.4	93.4
51+	257	6.6	100
Establishment size			
1–10 employees	850	22.9	22.9
11–499 employees	2239	60.3	83.2
500–1,999 employees	338	9.1	92.3
2,000+ employees	287	7.7	100
Job tenure (years)			
0–2	1216	31.2	31.2
2–5	989	25.4	56.6
5–12	808	20.7	77.3
12+	886	22.7	100
Primary job earnings ($)			
<30,000	1474	41	41
30,000-50,000	921	25.6	66.6
50,000-75,000	640	17.8	84.4
75,000-110,000	358	10	94.3
>110,000	204	5.7	100
Union status			
Covered by union	682	17.6	17.6
Nonunion	3198	82.4	100

Note: Summary statistics are based on the weighted estimates. Weights were developed by NORC to reflect the worker population of the Current Population Survey. Employment-based questions (type of employment, establishment size, and primary job earnings are based on workers' primary/current job.

security, promotion, and training; (3) and higher level organizational issues or strategies involving technology, quality of products or services provided, and employer values.[5] For each issue, the respondents were given a score based on their expected level of voice at work (5=unlimited say; 4=a lot of say; 3=some say; 2=little say; 1=no say).

Actual Say. Respondents in our survey were also asked how much say or influence they believe they actually have over the same array of issues discussed above. For each issue, the respondents were given a score based on their actual level of voice at work (5=unlimited say; 4=a lot of say; 3=some say; 2=little say; 1=no say).

Voice Gap. Voice gap is measured as the difference between workers' Expected Voice and their Actual Voice at work on each issue mentioned above. Our "voice gap" is parallel to what Freeman and Rogers (1999) termed a "representation gap." While we view the voice gap as important information, it remains to be seen to what extent workers are willing to accept certain costs or investment required to increase or activate their voice.

Voice Options, including Union Support. Both prior surveys asked how workers would vote if a union representation election was held on their job. We replicated that question in the survey to provide comparative data on this issue.

Freeman and Rogers (1999) also asked about voice or representation options in addition to unions. They focused on employee participation committees in response to the public policy debates over this issue that were underway at that time (Commission on the Future of Worker-

[5]We created these groupings on conceptual grounds not on the basis of distinct clusters derived from a factor analysis. A factor analysis showed that all seventeen issues clustered on a single factor with an Eigen value of 7.69. No second distinct factor emerged. This suggests that workers tend to see these issues a components of a single interrelated system of workplace practices, employment conditions, and experiences.

Management Relations, 1994). We chose to expand the array of voice options again to better reflect those that are offered by some firms and some worker advocates today. We asked about a broad array of options that might be available within one's organization such as asking for assistance from supervisors, coworkers, or ombudsmen, filing a grievance or complaint, or participating in a joint worker-management committee. Note that the internal channels include both formalized procedures and informal interactions with supervisors or coworkers. We also asked about options that involve independent channels such as unions, occupational associations, protests, strikes, and several newer forms of worker voice that are emerging in some settings such as online forums, and petitions.

To gauge how effective all possible voice mechanisms were in handling various workplace issues, respondents were asked "If available, how effective would it be for you to [use voice mechanism] if you experienced a reduction in [issue]". Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of each voice mechanisms (with regard to two workplace issues which they previously rated as expecting a lot or unlimited say) using a 5-point scale (5=extremely effective; 4=very effective; 3=somewhat effective; 2=not very effective; 1=not effective at all).

Use and Satisfaction with Voice Options. We also asked about respondents' use of each of the 12 voice options. Use of voice options is a group of dummy variables that equals one if the respondent has used the specific voice option, zero otherwise.

Those who have used each type of voice options were asked to evaluate their satisfaction with the results. Workers' satisfaction with voice options is a group of categorical variables, ranging from 1 to 5 (5=extremely satisfied; 4=very satisfied; 3=somewhat satisfied; 2=not very satisfied; 1=not satisfied at all).

Results

Explanations 1 and 2: There is no need: Workers do not expect to have a voice at work or employers have provided adequate channels for their input.

To address the question of whether workers still expect to have voice at work and whether the human resource management policies that have emerged over the last two decades have closed the voice gap, **Table ??** presents the percentage distributions amount of say or influence workers expect and the amount of say or influence workers actually have. Two things stand out. First, a clear majority of contemporary workers expect to have a voice on how they work, their conditions of employment, the quality of the products or services they help produce or deliver, and the values their organization stands for. Across the full range of issues, only seven percent or less of respondents indicate they ought to have "no say" and 20 percent or less report that they should have "little" or "no say" on any of these matters. In addition, workers' views regarding how much of a voice they should have varies across issues. The distributions show that workers recognize the need to share influence with other parties, presumably their supervisors and managers, on compensation and benefits, promotions, hours and schedules and on strategic issues such as organizational values and use of technologies. However, they also believe they should have a greater say, perhaps even the dominant decision, on issues affecting their personal safety, freedom from abuse and discrimination, and respect on the job. The central message from these data is that the majority of today's workforce expect to have at least some influence on the full spectrum of issues affecting their work and careers yet they do not believe they should have complete control or the predominant voice determining the conditions under which they work. Thus, the limited expression of worker voice today is not due to a lack of interest in having a meaningful voice over their work experiences or some reduced expectations for the amount of say they ought to

have.

To address the question of whether there is a "voice gap," we first describe workers' actual say (as they report it) on a variety of issues and then compare expected and actual say. The results show that actual voice varies across different workplace problems. Indeed, the magnitude of the differences in actual say varies more across these issues than do differences in the magnitudes of expected say. Workers have the least say on their benefits, compensation, and promotion opportunities. For example, 62 percent indicate that they have no or little say on their benefits and 59 percent indicate that they have little or no influence on compensation. By comparison, only 18 percent of workers indicate they have no or little say on workplace safety issues.

Table 4 reports the mean appropriate and actual say, the mean voice gap, and the share of workers experiencing a voice gap (i.e. their stated appropriate say is less than their actual say experienced on a given issue). The largest voice gap is on benefits, compensation, promotion and job security. For example, 60 percent of these workers have less say on benefits and compensation than they believe is appropriate. The average distance between desired say and actual say regarding benefits is 1.07, meaning that the average different is a full response category (e.g., expect a lot of say but have some say or expect some say but have little say). In addition, about half the workers report a voice gap on personal treatment issues, such as harassment and protection from discrimination. The voice gap is the smallest regarding job control (choosing how the job is done) and schedule control (ability to organize schedule, say over the time to do the job) – but still over third of workers expect more say on these issues than they have.

We also investigated how the voice gap varies by gender, race and ethnicity, types of employment, and union status. We run OLS models to predict workers' voice gap on the three categories of issues described above. We find that women reported a consistently larger gap than men across

Table 3: Workers' appropriate and actual say, by workplace issue (percent)

	Appropriate say					Actual say				
Issue	No say	Little say	Some say	A lot of say	Unlimited say	No say	Little say	Some say	A lot of say	Unlimited say
Workplace/personal										
Harrassment protections	2.1	4.4	21.2	48.1	24.3	9.8	17.3	36.1	27.2	9.6
How to improve work	2.2	7.3	37.2	46	7.3	9.5	23.6	39.9	22.7	4.2
Ability to organize schedule	4.9	14.1	41.1	33.4	6.6	15.5	21.6	32.9	23.9	6.1
Time to do job	4.5	9.4	39.9	39.6	6.7	12.5	20	37.4	24.9	5.2
Choose how to do job	3.2	9.5	39	41.3	6.9	7.8	17.3	37.9	31.4	5.7
Ability to resolve problems	1.4	6.1	32.5	51.3	8.8	5.7	18.5	40.4	28.9	6.5
Respect towards employees	1.9	4.3	23.6	52.1	18.1	10.8	19.8	35.9	27.3	6.2
Discrimination protections	2	4.9	27	45.7	20.4	11	16.9	34.8	28.5	8.8
Personnel/bargaining										
Compensation	3.5	10.5	46.7	32.4	6.9	27.5	31.3	28.8	10	2.4
Benefits	5.3	10	45.9	32.2	6.6	33.9	28.2	26.3	9	2.6
Opportunities for promotion	4.5	9.8	47.4	32.8	5.5	25	29.8	30.8	11.6	2.7
Ability to perform job safely	2	3.8	19.9	50.8	23.5	5.4	12.7	32.8	37.6	11.5
Job security	4.1	7.7	35.1	42.2	10.9	17.4	25	35.3	17.7	4.6
Access to training	2.6	7.3	39.1	42.9	8	13.1	24.7	35.5	22.3	4.2
Organizational strategy										
Quality of products	4.7	10.9	35.7	40.6	8.1	16.8	20.7	34.7	22.2	5.5
How new technologies impact job	6.3	13.9	42.9	31.6	5.4	23.9	27.4	32.3	13.2	3.1
Employer values	4.2	12.3	40.2	35.4	7.9	18.9	24.5	33	19.2	4.5

Note: Based on Worker Voice Survey question 1, 'Thinking about your primary/current workplace, how much say do you feel you ought to have about [workplace issue]?'. We use a 5-point scale for this question (No say=1, Little say=2, Some say=3, A lot of say =4, and Unlimited say=5).

Table 4: Voice gap: Average appropriate say, average actual say, average voice gap, and share of workers experiencing a voice gap, by workplace issue

Workplace issue	Average appropriate say[a]	Average actual say[a]	Average voice gap[b]	Percent experiencing voice gap
Workplace/personal				
Harrassment protections	3.88	3.1	.79	51
How to improve work	3.49	2.88	.6	47
Ability to organize schedule	3.23	2.84	.39	38
Time to do job	3.34	2.9	.44	40
Choose how to do job	3.39	3.1	.3	35
Ability to resolve problems	3.6	3.12	.48	42
Respect towards employees	3.8	2.98	.83	53
Discrimination protections	3.78	3.07	.7	47
Personnel/bargaining				
Compensation	3.29	2.28	1.01	60
Benefits	3.25	2.18	1.07	60
Opportunities for promotion	3.25	2.37	.88	55
Ability to perform job safely	3.9	3.37	.53	43
Job security	3.48	2.67	.82	53
Access to training	3.46	2.8	.67	48
Organizational strategy				
Quality of products	3.37	2.79	.58	46
How new technologies impact job	3.16	2.44	.72	50
Employer values	3.3	2.66	.65	48

Note: Based on Worker Voice Survey questions 1, 'Thinking about your primary/current workplace, how much say do you feel you ought to have about [workplace issue]?' and 2, 'Thinking about your primary/current workplace, how much say do you feel you currently have about [workplace issue]?'. Each question uses a 5-point scale for this question (No say=1, Little say=2, Some say=3, A lot of say =4, and Unlimited say=5.

[a] Average appropriate and actual say can take the value range [1,5].

[b] Average voice gap can take the range of [-4,4].

all issues, as evidenced by the positive and statistically significant coefficients in **Table 5**. Additional analyses show that women believe they ought to have more say, as compared to men, but were no more likely to have that say, creating gender difference in the voice gap. Workers who attended or completed college reported higher level of voice gap on the broader organizational issues (such as use of technology and organizational values) as compared to workers with only a high school degree. Union members have a larger voice gap on personal issues, such as respect, safety, and protection from harassment and discrimination, compared to non-union workers. Further analysis of these data reveals that union members do not expect more say on personal issues than other workers – so the larger gap reflects union members' sense that they do not have as much say on these issues as others do. This finding might reflect management's desire to set policies that are not covered by collective bargaining, union members' perception that there is not a climate of respect in the organization, or perhaps union members' greater recognition of unresolved harassment and discrimination issues in their workplaces. Older workers and workers with longer tenure have a significantly larger voice gap. **Table 5** also reveals that moderate earners, making $30,000-$50,000, report more of a voice gap than their lower-income counterparts, probably because they are more likely to believe they ought to have a say in workplace issues than are the workers in the lowest income category. The voice gap on collective bargaining and personnel issues is significantly lower for independent contractors and regular part time workers, compared to regular full-time workers. Part-time workers also have smaller voice gap on personal issues compared to full-time workers. Taken together these results indicate American workers continue to experience a sizable voice gap. These data do not support the hypothesis that workers are satisfied with their voice at work.

Table 5: OLS regression: voice gap on workplace issues, by type of issues

	Workplace/ personal	Personnel/ bargaining	Organizational strategy
Respondent age	-0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Female	0.09*	0.10*	0.14**
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Education (ref: High school)			
No high school diploma	-0.02	0.06	-0.02
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.13)
Some college	0.06	0.05	0.14*
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.07)
BA or above	0.08	0.05	0.15*
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Race and ethnicity (ref: White)			
Black	-0.04	-0.04	0.01
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Hispanic	-0.02	-0.10	-0.04
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Other	0.00	-0.11	-0.02
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)
Two or more races	0.21	0.02	0.13
	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.15)
Represented by union	0.16***	0.05	0.05
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Type of employment (ref: Regular full-time)			
Regular part-time	-0.11*	-0.11	-0.07
	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.06)
Temporary employee	0.02	0.10	0.13
	(0.12)	(0.15)	(0.15)
Contract employee	0.13	0.08	0.01
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.11)
Independent contractor	-0.13	-0.28**	-0.17
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.12)
Tenure at current employer (years)	0.00*	0.01**	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Primary job earnings (ref: <$30,000)			
$30,000-$50,000	0.14*	0.18**	0.21**
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)
$50,000-$75,000	0.02	-0.01	0.04
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)
$75,000-$110,000	-0.08	-0.10	-0.01
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
>$110,000	-0.15*	-0.14	-0.10
	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.10)
Observations	3476	3475	3461

Note: All models include region of residency, occupation, sector, and establishment size controls.

[a] Personnel/bargaining issues include salary, benefits, training opportunities, promotion opportunities, job safety, and job security.

[b] Workplace/personal issues include scheduling, time to do work, how to do job, how to improve work, resolve problems affecting ability to do job, discrimination protections, harassment protections, and respect towards employees.

[c] Organizational strategy issues include how new technologies affect job, quality of employers' products or services, and the basic values the employer stands for.

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01. Standard errors in parentheses.

Explanation 3: Workers are no longer interested in joining unions

As noted earlier, unions have declined precipitously from their peak in representing approximately a third of the labor force in the mid-1950s. This raises the question of whether or not the workforce still has an interest in being represented by a union. The analysis presented above points to an interest in worker voice – but are workers still interested in unions, the traditional channel for having a say on key workplace decisions?

To address this question we replicated a question from both the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey and the 1995 Freeman and Rogers survey asking whether or not workers would join a union if a vote was held on their job. Note that the 1977 and 1995 surveys produced nearly identical results: About 1/3 of the non-union workforce said they would vote to unionize if given the opportunity to do so. In our 2017 survey, this increased such that almost half of the non-union workforce (46 percent) and exactly half of the non-managerial, non-union respondents said they would vote for a union. Moreover, a strong majority (83 percent) of currently unionized workers said they would vote for a union again. However, this number was slightly lower than the 90 percent of union members who reported they would do so in the 1995 Freeman and Rogers survey. (This question was not asked of unionized workers in the 1977 survey.) Stated support for a union seems to have increased in recent years, despite the decline in union representation and the political and policy hurdles for organizing today.

Table 6 reports results from a series of multivariate logistic equations that explore demographic and organizational predictors of workers' support of a union in their current workplace. This analysis is restricted to the non-union sample. Several results stand out. Among individual characteristics, one of the strongest predictors of the willingness to vote for a union is race; nonwhites are much more likely to vote for a union. The final model, for instance, implies that black, Hispanic, and other racial groups of workers are between 2.3 times and 2.6 times as likely

as their white counterparts to vote for a union. This finding is consistent with Kochan (1979) and Freeman and Rogers (1999), which suggests that there continues to be racial differences in interest in formal channels for worker voice, despite other changes in racial dynamics and politics in recent decades.

In contrast with the expectation that younger workers have accepted employer decisions as necessary reflections of broader "market" forces or have been exposed to cultural expectations that individual workers – not collectives – are responsible for their situation at work, age is not a significant predictor. Once other factors are controlled, younger workers are no more or less interested in union representation than their older counterparts. Surprisingly, once controlling for other characteristics, those with a four year college degree or higher are more interested in union representation than those with a high school or less degree. Since income and occupational variables are in this equation, this coefficient may be capturing the effects for those with a college degree in low wage occupations, i.e., the more underemployed segment of college graduates. Those earning more than $50,000 per year are significantly less interested in union representation than workers who earn less than $30,000 per year. The coefficient on contractor employees (not shown in Table 5 but is included in the model) is positive but not significant, though that may be due to the small sample size. Temporary employees are significantly less likely than regular full-time employees to vote for a union but is only statistically significant in the second model. These models also revealed significantly stronger interest in union representation from employees in service occupations–education, healthcare, art and media, food service, office and administrative services as well as in farming and fishing. Government employees (who are not currently union members) are more interested in union representation than their private sector counterparts. Taken together these results on demographic, occupation and sector variables indicate that lower income employees in low-wage and service occupations continue to be interested in unions today.

Table 6: Logit regression: nonunion workers who would vote for a union

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Respondent age	-0.00	-0.01***	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Female	0.07	-0.04	0.02
	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.14)
Education (ref: High school)			
No high school diploma	-0.16	-0.04	-0.13
	(0.36)	(0.36)	(0.38)
Some college	0.09	0.05	0.09
	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.18)
BA or above	0.37*	0.22	0.39*
	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.20)
Race and ethnicity (ref: White)			
Black	0.85***	1.14***	0.84***
	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.20)
Hispanic	0.85***	0.96***	0.90***
	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.20)
Other	1.08***	0.96***	0.96***
	(0.32)	(0.23)	(0.29)
Two or more races	0.56	0.45	0.44
	(0.36)	(0.36)	(0.40)
Primary job earnings (ref: <$30,000)			
$30,000-$50,000	-0.27	-0.21	-0.32*
	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.19)
$50,000-$75,000	-0.65***	-0.55***	-0.61***
	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.21)
$75,000-$110,000	-0.96***	-0.89***	-0.88***
	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.24)
>$110,000	-1.07***	-1.05***	-0.95***
	(0.28)	(0.26)	(0.29)
Average rating of union effectiveness	0.60***		0.68***
	(0.06)		(0.06)
Likelihood of losing job		0.33***	0.23***
		(0.08)	(0.09)
Difficulty of finding alternative job		0.19**	0.12
		(0.08)	(0.09)
Average voice gap			0.62***
			(0.09)
Observations	2531	2733	2518

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors in parentheses.

All models include region of residency, occupation, sector, type of employment, job tenure, and establishment size controls.

We also investigated how workers' sense of job security and alternatives for employment affected support for unions.[6] Workers may view unions as protecting job security or, alternatively, as making untenable demands that lead employers to close shops or move to other locations. However, we found that workers who indicated they are likely to lose their jobs soon are more interested in union representation than those who believe they are in secure jobs. Those who believe it would be hard to find an equivalent job in the external labor market are more interested in union representation than those with better external prospects. Those with larger voice gaps on all issues are significantly more interested in union representation those with lower voice gaps.[7] Finally, those who see unions as more effective voice mechanisms for addressing their top priority concerns are more likely to want union representation than those who see unions as less effective in addressing their priority concerns. Taken together these results are quite similar to the factors predicting interest in union representation included in the 1977 survey (Kochan, 1979) and the Freeman and Rogers (1999) study.

The implications from this analysis of interest in unions is that the desire to join a union has increased substantially in recent decades and the profile, income, and employment conditions of those most interested in supporting a union are generally consistent with the predictors identified in past research. The decline in the number of workers joining unions cannot be attributed to lack of interest in union representation. To put these findings in perspective, if all of the nonunion workers who have a desire to join a union had the opportunity do so, union membership could increase by approximately 55 million workers, essentially quadrupling the number currently rep-

[6] *Likelihood of losing job* is an ordinal variable that equals one if people believe that they are not at all likely to lose a job, two if not too like to lose a job, three if fairly likely to lose a job, and four if very likely to lose a job. *Difficulty of finding alternative jobs* is an ordinal variable that equals one if a person reports being very likely to find alternative job, two if a person is fairly likely to find alternative job, three if the person is not likely to find a job with comparable benefits and salary.

[7] There was little variation in how the three groups of issues individually affected union support.

resented by a union. Of course, that is not realistic given the demonstrated difficulty of organizing under the current law and the effectiveness of employer resistance in organizing efforts, a point we will return to in the final section of this paper.

Do different workers prefer different options for voice? And/or do different issues call for different options? Do workers have confidence in and access to these options?

What options do workers believe would be effective for providing a voice at work today? The factor analysis[8] reported in Appendix 1 shows the options included in the survey cluster into two groups with eigenvalues greater than one.[9] One group captures independent options such as unions, occupational associations, petitions, protests, and strikes. The other group clusters around internal options that are facilitated or at least implicitly supported by the firm, such as talking with a supervisor, conferring with people like themselves, and utilizing grievance and ombudsmen processes.

We first present descriptive statistics on the perceived effectiveness of each option for addressing interpersonal, personnel/bargaining, and managerial issues and then run a series of multivariate OLS regressions on indices of the perceived effectiveness of internal voice mechanisms and independent voice mechanisms.

Table 7 provides a comparison of effectiveness ratings of union represented and non-union

[8]Because the variables of interest are not continuous but ordinal-categorical, a polychoric function was employed as the factor analysis.

[9]The Kaiser Criterion is a reliable test for significance if the averaged extracted communalities (1-Uniqueness) is equal to or greater than 0.60 and the sample size is 250 observations or more (Yong and Pearce, 2013), both of which are met with our data.

Table 7: Effectiveness of various voice mechanisms by issue and union status

	Issue 1					
	Personnel/bargaining[a]		Workplace/personal[b]		Organizational strategy[c]	
	Not union member	Union member	Not union member	Union member	Not union member	Union member
Supervisor	2.94	2.77	3.00	2.83	2.95	2.95
	(1.07)	(1.03)	(1.04)	(1.09)	(1.09)	(1.27)
People like you	2.76	2.87	2.80	2.78	2.82	2.76
	(0.98)	(1.02)	(0.97)	(0.99)	(0.98)	(1.10)
Ombudsman	2.59	2.80	2.59	2.68	2.61	2.74
	(1.05)	(0.95)	(1.03)	(1.00)	(1.00)	(1.02)
Grievance	2.65	2.88	2.65	2.83	2.70	3.01
	(1.09)	(0.99)	(1.04)	(1.03)	(1.12)	(1.09)
Joint committee	2.68	2.84	2.66	2.71	2.77	3.08
	(1.03)	(0.94)	(1.02)	(1.01)	(1.04)	(0.98)
Union	2.40	3.37	2.26	3.20	2.35	3.27
	(1.19)	(1.11)	(1.14)	(1.15)	(1.16)	(1.05)
Petition	2.37	2.60	2.33	2.56	2.43	2.70
	(1.04)	(1.07)	(1.01)	(1.02)	(1.07)	(1.06)
Online rating	2.39	2.34	2.25	2.40	2.40	2.48
	(1.05)	(1.02)	(1.03)	(1.05)	(1.05)	(1.08)
Occupation association	2.43	2.87	2.34	2.68	2.42	2.90
	(1.04)	(1.09)	(1.00)	(1.07)	(1.05)	(1.09)
Demographic association	2.37	2.64	2.26	2.45	2.42	2.67
	(1.05)	(1.07)	(1.00)	(1.06)	(1.06)	(1.13)
Protest/rally	2.14	2.50	2.05	2.49	2.20	2.56
	(1.06)	(1.12)	(1.03)	(1.12)	(1.06)	(1.02)
Strike	2.12	2.69	2.02	2.61	2.13	2.78
	(1.12)	(1.24)	(1.10)	(1.26)	(1.10)	(1.23)
	Issue 2					
Supervisor	2.89	2.72	2.96	2.80	3.00	3.02
	(1.08)	(1.08)	(1.05)	(1.08)	(1.11)	(1.09)
People like you	2.66	2.74	2.66	2.70	2.75	2.77
	(1.00)	(1.00)	(0.97)	(0.97)	(1.02)	(1.07)
Ombudsman	2.51	2.63	2.46	2.64	2.49	2.83
	(1.03)	(0.99)	(1.03)	(1.04)	(1.06)	(1.05)
Grievance	2.56	2.86	2.55	2.83	2.63	2.94
	(1.03)	(1.08)	(1.03)	(1.07)	(1.11)	(1.11)
Joint committee	2.62	2.79	2.58	2.80	2.66	2.77
	(1.03)	(0.97)	(1.01)	(1.01)	(1.09)	(1.04)
Union	2.34	3.09	2.28	3.07	2.24	3.29
	(1.16)	(1.12)	(1.11)	(1.12)	(1.17)	(1.19)
Petition	2.31	2.57	2.23	2.51	2.34	2.65
	(1.04)	(1.01)	(1.00)	(1.04)	(1.10)	(1.02)
Online rating	2.24	2.35	2.21	2.42	2.25	2.42
	(1.05)	(1.09)	(1.00)	(1.07)	(1.09)	(1.09)
Occupation association	2.40	2.79	2.30	2.73	2.36	2.77
	(1.02)	(1.11)	(0.99)	(1.02)	(1.06)	(1.08)
Demographic association	2.31	2.56	2.22	2.47	2.28	2.50
	(1.02)	(1.06)	(1.00)	(1.06)	(1.06)	(1.09)
Protest/rally	2.10	2.49	2.06	2.50	2.14	2.59
	(1.05)	(1.16)	(1.02)	(1.12)	(1.14)	(1.09)
Strike	2.10	2.59	2.08	2.62	2.09	2.68
	(1.08)	(1.18)	(1.08)	(1.18)	(1.15)	(1.32)

[a] Personnel/bargaining issues include salary, benefits, training opportunities, promotion opportunities, job safety, and job security.

[b] Workplace/personal issues include scheduling, time to do work, how to do job, how to improve work, resolve problems affecting ability to do job, discrimination protections, harassment protections, and respect towards employees.

[c] Organizational strategy issues include how new technologies affect job, quality of employers' products or services, and the basic values the employer stands for.

workers grouped into the three issue categories introduced earlier: interpersonal, personnel/bargaining, and managerial issues. Each respondent had previously identified two issues where they expected to have at least "a lot of say" and then they were asked to describe the effectiveness of each possible voice channel. This is an admittedly hypothetical exercise, since respondents are describing expected effectiveness of different voice mechanisms, specifically for addressing the issues they'd identified as concerns, if those were available to them. The first finding to note is that none of these options receive high effectiveness ratings, with the highest value, just above 3, meaning respondents saw this option as being "somewhat effective" if they were to use it. Workers want more say than they have – but they are not convinced that the various voice mechanisms we described would be highly effective. Additionally, several points are noteworthy about the differences between union represented and non-represented workers. Unionized workers rate nearly all options other than supervisors and co-workers higher than unrepresented workers. This is particularly the case for options that fall within the "independent" as opposed to "internal" categories. While these data cannot explain why these differences are observed, it may be that a union helps, as Slichter, Healy, and Livernash (1960) argued many years ago, to discipline management in ways that make both internal and independent voice options more effective or that workers feel more confident in using these options in the presence of a union.

Table 8 reports the results of multivariate OLS equations that examine the relationships between perceived effectiveness of internal and independent options and individual worker characteristics, job and workplace characteristics, and the type of issue in question. The results demonstrate there is no simple sorting of effectiveness perceptions across these determinants. Unionized workers, black and Hispanic workers, for example, view both internal and independent approaches as more effective than their non-union, and white counterparts. Independent mechanisms were rated as more effective for addressing compensation, benefits, and job security issues.

Table 8: OLS regression: effectiveness of internal and independent mechanisms

	Internal mechanisms[a]		Independent mechanisms[b]	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Respondent age	-0.00	-0.00	-0.01***	-0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Female	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Education (ref: High school)				
No high school diploma	0.03	0.02	-0.02	-0.01
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Some college	-0.00	-0.00	-0.02	-0.03
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
BA or above	-0.03	-0.02	-0.07	-0.08
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Race and ethnicity (ref: White)				
Black	0.21***	0.21***	0.42***	0.42***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Hispanic	0.15***	0.15***	0.39***	0.40***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Other	-0.08	-0.08	0.15*	0.15*
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Two or more races	-0.00	-0.01	0.09	0.09
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Represented by union	0.11**	0.11**	0.36***	0.36***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Tenure at current employer (years)	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***	-0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Primary job earnings (ref: <$30,000)				
$30,000-$50,000	-0.08	-0.08*	-0.12**	-0.12**
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
$50,000-$75,000	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
$75,000-$110,000	-0.01	-0.00	-0.02	-0.02
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
>$110,000	0.08	0.09	-0.02	-0.02
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Issue 1 is either salary, benefits, or job security	-0.05		0.11**	
	(0.05)		(0.05)	
Issue 2 is either salary, benefits, or job security		-0.02		0.03
		(0.05)		(0.05)
Observations	3275	3275	3265	3265

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors in parentheses.
All models include region of residency, occupation, sector, type of employment, and establishment size controls.
[a] Internal mechanisms include: conversation with supervisor, advice from people like you,advice from Ombudsman, file a grievance, and join employee-manager committee.
[b] Independent mechanisms include: join a union, sign petition, rate employer on online community, join occupation association, join demographic association, join protest or rally, and go on strike with others.

This mix of results across demographic characteristics, issues, and occupations suggests that indeed there is no one size shoe or single option that works for all people or all issues.

Further exploration of options

In this section we take a deeper look at the use and satisfaction with the full array of internal and independent options included in the survey. When faced with workplace issues, the vast majority turn first to their supervisors and coworkers for assistance. These two channels are available to and used by 60 to 70 percent of the workforce. The use of the other channels then falls dramatically to under 20 percent. For example, only 6 percent of our sample has participated in strikes to address problems experienced at work.

Table 9 reports logit regression models predicting workers' use of internal and independent voice mechanisms. The results indicate that women workers are more likely to use internal voice mechanisms than are men. People who have attended colleges are more likely to use both internal and independent voice mechanisms. Black and Hispanic workers are significantly more likely than whites to use independent voice mechanisms, such as turning to unions, petitions, online ratings, similar demographic groups, protests, and strikes than their white counterparts. Union members are more likely to use independent voice mechanisms than are non-union workers, which is not a surprise given unions' part in organizing strikes and community protests today. In addition, compared to full-time regular workers, regular part-time workers are less likely to use both internal as well as independent voice mechanisms.

Comparing workers' use of voice mechanisms across occupations (not shown in the table), we find that compared to management occupations[10] (the reference group), non-supervisory work-

[10]Management occupations include directors and managers but front-line supervisors would be included in the

Table 9: Logit regression: use of internal and independent mechanisms

	Internal mechanisms[a]			Independent mechanisms[b]		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Respondent age	0.01	0.01	0.01*	0.00	0.00	0.01**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Female	0.38***	0.40***	0.46***	-0.04	0.00	0.02
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Education (ref: High school)						
No high school diploma	-0.12	-0.11	-0.20	0.24	0.22	0.26
	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.32)	(0.34)
Some college	0.48***	0.49***	0.44**	0.45***	0.48***	0.54***
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.18)
BA or above	0.34*	0.34*	0.34	0.43**	0.44**	0.50***
	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
Race and ethnicity (ref: White)						
Black	-0.02	-0.07	-0.03	0.76***	0.71***	0.54***
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.17)
Hispanic	-0.18	-0.19	-0.29	0.32*	0.31*	0.07
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.19)
Other	-0.15	-0.17	-0.37	0.32	0.21	-0.06
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)
Two or more races	0.04	0.03	-0.16	0.29	0.16	0.05
	(0.35)	(0.34)	(0.35)	(0.28)	(0.30)	(0.30)
Represented by union	0.04	0.08	0.12	2.46***	2.48***	2.42***
	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.17)
Tenure at current employer (years)	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.02**	0.02**	0.01*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Primary job earnings (ref: <$30,000)						
$30,000-$50,000	0.42**	0.44**	0.40*	-0.50***	-0.43***	-0.42**
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.17)
$50,000-$75,000	0.26	0.27	0.20	-0.09	-0.02	0.08
	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.19)
$75,000-$110,000	0.09	0.12	0.12	-0.29	-0.16	-0.04
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.26)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.22)
>$110,000	-0.00	-0.01	-0.07	0.01	0.15	0.34
	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.33)	(0.25)	(0.26)	(0.27)
Likelihood of losing job		0.10	0.18**		0.35***	0.40***
		(0.08)	(0.09)		(0.08)	(0.08)
Difficulty of finding alternative job		-0.27***	-0.24**		-0.06	-0.02
		(0.10)	(0.10)		(0.08)	(0.08)
Average effectiveness, by mechanism						
Internal mechanisms			0.38***			
			(0.10)			
Independent mechanisms						0.57***
						(0.07)
Observations	3480	3458	3256	3480	3458	3246

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors in parentheses.
All models include region of residency, occupation, sector, employment category, and establishment size controls.
[a] Internal mechanisms include: conversation with supervisor, advice from people like you, advice from Ombudsman, file a grievance, and join employee-manager committee.
[b] Independent mechanisms include: join a union, sign petition, rate employer on online community, join occupation association, join demographic association, join protest or rally, and go on strike with others.

ers in architecture and engineering, legal, and sales occupations are less likely to use both internal and independent voice mechanisms. Workers in education occupations are less likely to use internal voice mechanisms but more likely to use independent voice mechanisms. Workers in office and administrative support, construction, building and grounds cleaning and maintenance, and health care occupations are less likely to use internal voice mechanisms, without showing significant differences in their use of independent voice mechanisms. Finally, and not surprisingly, those who view internal options as more effective are more likely to use them and those who view independent mechanisms as more effective are more likely to use them.

We then examined satisfaction with use of the different channels among those respondents who reported using the relevant voice mechanism. Supervisors, unions, and coworkers get the highest satisfaction rankings and ratings (3.07 to 3.05 meaning just above "somewhat satisfied") followed by occupational associations and strikes. The lowest satisfaction rating was given to grievance processes. Again, differences existed between groups of workers in how they rated their satisfaction of various mechanisms. Notably, union members rated turning to the union as the option that was most satisfactory (mean rating of 3.17) compared to it being the 7th highest in satisfaction among workers who are currently not represented by a union (rating of 2.84). Once again, as with the effectiveness ratings, none of the voice options receive high satisfaction ratings, on average, even among the subsample that has used them.

Table 10 presents regressions predicting workers' satisfaction with their use of internal and independent voice mechanisms. The results suggest that compared to white workers, Hispanic workers and workers of other races are significantly less satisfied with their use of both internal and independent voice mechanisms. In Table 7, we had found that both black and Hispanic workers were more hopeful about the effectiveness of voice mechanisms for addressing their concerns, but here we see that their satisfaction is lower when we ask about options they have

other occupations.

actually used. Union workers are less satisfied with their use of internal voice mechanisms, but more satisfied with the use of independent voice mechanisms. Workers with higher incomes are more satisfied with internal voice mechanisms, but surprisingly, workers in larger firms are also less satisfied with internal voice channels. Compared to regular full-time employees, regular part-time workers are more satisfied with their use of internal voice mechanisms. Although the results suggest independent contractors are more satisfied with their use of internal and independent voice mechanisms, the results should be treated with caution given the absence of most types of internal voice mechanisms in most independent contractors' workplaces as well as the small sample size of independent workers in the survey.

Discussion

Today's workers expect to have a voice on the full spectrum of issues affecting how they work, how they are personally treated, their compensation and working conditions, and the values their organization stands for and the products or services they help produce or deliver. However, our study finds that there continues to be a gap between the amount of influence workers expect and what they experience across all of the issues examined, and the gap is largest on compensation (benefits and wages) as well as promotions and job security. Overall, workers see turning to their supervisors and coworkers as their most preferred or effective options for addressing problems experienced at work. When confronted with a problem at work over 60 percent of workers have turned to their supervisors or coworkers. None of the other options have been used more than 20 percent of the time. This suggests that these other options are not widely available or perceived to be useful to most workers today. However, there is considerable variety in preferences for options across different groups and across issues. For example, those currently represented by a union rate unions equal in effectiveness to supervisors and co-workers.

Table 10: OLS regression: satisfaction with internal and independent mechanisms

	Internal mechanisms[a]		Independent mechanisms[b]	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Respondent age	-0.00**	-0.00*	-0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Female	0.04	0.08*	0.15**	0.20***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Education (ref: High school)				
No high school diploma	-0.10	-0.10	-0.05	-0.21
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.19)	(0.20)
Some college	-0.03	-0.03	-0.19**	-0.20**
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.10)	(0.10)
BA or above	0.07	0.04	-0.14	-0.19
	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.12)
Race and ethnicity (ref: White)				
Black	-0.09	-0.11*	0.07	0.06
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.10)
Hispanic	-0.08	-0.13**	-0.11	-0.16*
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Other	-0.27**	-0.33***	-0.35***	-0.30**
	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Two or more races	-0.20	-0.25*	0.11	0.11
	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.22)	(0.21)
Represented by union	-0.14***	-0.09*	0.25***	0.37***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Type of employment (ref: Regular full-time)				
Regular part-time		0.27***		0.14
		(0.06)		(0.10)
Temporary employee		0.17		-0.05
		(0.14)		(0.20)
Contract employee		0.05		-0.02
		(0.12)		(0.18)
Independent contractor		0.34***		0.51***
		(0.11)		(0.19)
Tenure at current employer (years)		-0.01***		-0.01**
		(0.00)		(0.00)
Primary job earnings (ref: <$30,000)				
$30,000-$50,000		0.06		-0.12
		(0.06)		(0.09)
$50,000-$75,000		0.14**		0.06
		(0.07)		(0.10)
$75,000-$110,000		0.18**		0.09
		(0.08)		(0.13)
>$110,000		0.20**		-0.08
		(0.10)		(0.18)
Observations	3242	2925	1357	1217

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors in parentheses.
All models include region of residency, occupation, sector, and establishment size controls.
[a] Internal mechanisms include: conversation with supervisor, advice from people like you,advice from Ombudsman, file a grievance, and join employee-manager committee.
[b] Independent mechanisms include: join a union, sign petition, rate employer on online community, join occupation association, join demographic association, join protest or rally, and go on strike with others.

A majority of American workers today still see unions as a desirable channel to exercise voice. A substantially larger fraction of the non-union non-managerial workforce would join a union today (46 percent overall and 50 percent of the non-managerial workforce) than would have done so in the past (about one third in 1977 and in 1995). Over 80 percent of those currently represented by a union would vote to continue union representation. Moreover, the same general factors predict interest in joining a union as before; interest is greater among nonwhites, low-income workers, and those who have larger voice gaps on compensation and job security issues—those issues that tend to fall within the scope of traditional collective bargaining.

But unions alone, at least unions as we have known them and the system of labor law created to govern worker rights and collective bargaining, are not enough to close the voice gap. The obstacles to organizing under the procedures provided in current labor law may be too high to overcome.

Moreover, the data suggest that today no "one sized shoe fits all" workers or all issues in play in employment relationships. Some workers prefer to use internal options provided by employers; others prefer independent options provided by unions or worker advocates independent of employers. Many workers see internal options as effective for some issues and independent options as important for other issues. This is a particularly important point since it suggests the value of developing and making available multi-option systems of voice and/or representation in contrast to both labor law and prevailing practice. That is, labor law limits those internal forms of worker voice that violate bans on employer-supported or dominated labor organizations. Many employers strongly resist and suppress efforts of workers to form unions or engage in other independent options for exercising an independent voice. Many unions in turn see internal options as efforts to undermine or avoid union representation. These data suggest many workers do not share these distinctions in law or practice and would respond favorably to systems that provide access to systems of voice that mix these options together in an effective fashion.

Taken together, these data suggest there is considerable work yet to be done to close the voice gaps present for many at work today.

Future directions

We see these survey data as providing only a broad overview of the current state of worker voice and options for closing the voice gaps identified. More intensive analyses of different options offered inside firms and those being pursued by different worker advocacy organizations and/or unions are clearly needed. For example, given the increased interest in union representation, it would be useful to develop a better understanding of ways to make unions more accessible, what forms of union representation would be most attractive to prospective members, or what workplace or labor market services workers would most value (i.e., be willing to pay for) from unions. To turn the interest in unions into an increase in union membership and representation may require shifting from an organizing model that does not require obtaining support of a majority in a specific work or occupational setting (Morris, 2005) and one that does not lose members if or when they leave a union represented job or employer (Kochan, 2011; Budd, 2010)

Given the findings that suggest "one sized shoe" doesn't fit all groups or issues, another priority for further research should be to seek a better understanding of how different options can be provided as complements in a system of voice and representation that gains and sustains workforce trust (Rowe, 1987; Lipsky, 2015). Is there some complementary mix of internal and external options that would serve the workforce better than the current situation in which most employers favor internal options and seek to avoid independent options while unions see internal channels as employer dominated efforts to substitute for or competitive with union representation?

We hope the results reported here motivate others to address these and other questions they raise in search of ways to close the voice gaps American workers continue to experience today.

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Table A1: Demographic and financial characteristics of workers in American Community Survey (ACS) versus Worker Voice Survey (WVS) sample

	Unweighted			Weighted		
	ACS mean	WVS mean	ACS (household) mean	ACS mean	WVS mean	ACS (household) mean
Female	0.48	0.60	0.46	0.47	0.48	0.45
Married (1=yes)	0.57	0.49	0.56	0.52	0.48	0.54
Household has child	0.39	0.38	0.37	0.41	0.40	0.39
Number of children in household[a]	1.85	1.85	1.87	1.86	1.84	1.88
Home ownership	0.70	0.62	0.67	0.65	0.63	0.63
Self-employed	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.07
Age						
18–34	0.31	0.29	0.24	0.35	0.37	0.25
35–49	0.30	0.33	0.31	0.32	0.32	0.34
50–64	0.32	0.32	0.36	0.28	0.27	0.33
65+	0.07	0.06	0.09	0.05	0.05	0.08
Race						
White	0.69	0.64	0.70	0.63	0.63	0.66
Black	0.09	0.15	0.09	0.11	0.11	0.12
Other	0.07	0.05	0.06	0.07	0.05	0.06
Hispanic	0.13	0.13	0.12	0.16	0.17	0.14
Two or more races	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.02
Education						
No high school diploma	0.08	0.03	0.07	0.09	0.07	0.08
High school graduate or equivalent	0.24	0.13	0.23	0.25	0.28	0.23
Some college	0.32	0.37	0.32	0.32	0.32	0.32
College degree	0.22	0.28	0.23	0.22	0.20	0.23
Advanced degree	0.14	0.20	0.16	0.13	0.13	0.15
Region						
Northeast	0.18	0.16	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18
Midwest	0.22	0.27	0.22	0.22	0.22	0.22
West	0.23	0.22	0.23	0.24	0.23	0.23
South	0.36	0.35	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.37
Hours worked per week (all jobs)						
1–10	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02
11-20	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.05
21–34	0.11	0.11	0.10	0.11	0.12	0.09
35-40	0.51	0.48	0.50	0.52	0.48	0.52
41-50	0.19	0.22	0.21	0.18	0.21	0.20
51+	0.09	0.11	0.10	0.09	0.11	0.10
Household income (dollars)						
<30,000	0.10	0.20	0.14	0.11	0.22	0.15
30,000–49,999	0.14	0.19	0.17	0.15	0.19	0.18
50,000–74,999	0.19	0.21	0.20	0.19	0.20	0.20
75,000–124,999	0.29	0.26	0.26	0.29	0.25	0.25
125,000+	0.29	0.14	0.24	0.27	0.14	0.22
Primary job earnings[b] (dollars)						
<30,000	0.39	0.37	0.34	0.40	0.41	0.33
30,000–49,999	0.23	0.26	0.23	0.24	0.26	0.24
50,000–74,999	0.18	0.20	0.19	0.17	0.18	0.20
75,000–109,999	0.11	0.11	0.13	0.10	0.10	0.13
110,000+	0.09	0.06	0.11	0.08	0.06	0.11
Observations	1441224	3915	908478	1441224	3915	881598

Source: Analysis of Worker Voice Survey data (based on NORC AmeriSpeak sample) and the Center for Economic and Policy Research's extract of 2016 ACS data

[a] Conditional on household having any children

[b] For ACS, this reflects **any** wage or salary income and is not necessarily limited to one's primary job.

Note: Since the ACS sample could reflect multiple observations from the same household, a subset of unique households are presented (columns 3 and 6) and use the survey's household weight in addition to the individual person observations and person weight (columns 1 and 4).