

Activism and Willingness to Help in Union Organizing

ABSTRACT

Research on union renewal often cites a critical role for lay activism. This study examines determinants of activism and activism intentions among a broadly representative sample of U.S. union members. Hypotheses are developed from theory and previous research on union commitment and participation. Results for current activism are generally consistent with prior work. Extending the model to future intentions to help with organizing, an interesting contrast is that pro-union attitude influences appear much more important than do union instrumentality perceptions. This suggests that “covenant” rather than “exchange” concerns are more salient for this form of activism. Findings for ideological orientation support this interpretation.

INTRODUCTION

Activism at an individual level is often viewed as a critical variable for union vitality, both before and after union certification elections (Clark 2000, Gordon et al. 1980, Tetrick, Shore, Newton McClurg, and Vandenberg 2007). Volunteers are required during representation or recognition campaigns to help persuade voters to choose the union (e.g., Dickens, Wholey, and Robinson 1987), and afterwards in order to keep the union operating successfully (e.g., Kuruvilla and Fiorito 1994). Much of the work behind a successful certification campaign (e.g., arranging meetings, creating and distributing information, etc.) requires volunteer efforts. Also, the ordinary functioning of unions outside of organizing campaigns also requires activists to hold union offices, staff committees, monitor contract compliance, and perform numerous other duties (e.g., Clark 2000, Gordon et al. 1980, Kelloway and Barling 1993, Kuruvilla and Fiorito 1994, McShane 1986).

Activism is also important at the macro-level, beyond the individual union. The substantial decline of union density in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere begs for the investigation of important factors associated with potential renewal (e.g., Fairbrother 2000). Activism has been linked to union renewal (e.g., Clark 2000, Fairbrother 2000, Fiorito 2004, Heery 2003). For example, Fiorito (2004) argued that member activism is required to effectively influence others (in workplaces, governments, and societies), and to grow membership.

The role of activism in union renewal or effectiveness can be overstated. In the most comprehensive assessment of activism's influence to date, Hickey, Kuruvilla, and Lakhani (2010) reviewed more than 30 published case studies of union renewal efforts in an organizing context, such as efforts to gain employer recognition of a union. In 18 studies, Hickey et al. reported a "primary" role for activism, but in eight others activism appeared to have been

important but insufficient by itself, and in six cases activism played no significant role (2010: 76). Rigorous empirical studies of activism's (or democracy's) impact are difficult to construct, and hence understandably rare or nonexistent (depending on one's definitions). For example, one could cite a positive effect for a measure of "democratic structure" on a composite scale representing union effectiveness in the context of a multivariate regression analysis modeling national union effectiveness indicators (Fiorito, Jarley, and Delaney 1995), but that was one result in a set of mixed findings, and national union constitution provisions such as frequent conventions that comprise democratic structure are by no means clear indicators of activism. In a thoughtful analysis, Strauss described his central argument thus: "Union democracy is desirable not because democracy is good in itself (as it is), but because *on balance* democracy increases union effectiveness in representing members' interests and in mobilizing these members to support its collective bargaining objectives" (1991: 201, emphasis in original). Yet Strauss cited no evidence in support of this argument and instead proceeded to focus on conditions that enhance union democracy. Further, union renewal has many possible meanings in addition to organizing and bargaining success (Heery 2003; Hickey et al. 2010) and the degree to which lay activism contributes to each likely varies, and varies as well with environmental factors such as labor market conditions and organizational factors such as the quality of top leadership.

Although it may be overstatement to argue that lay activism is *the* key factor in union effectiveness and renewal, it is nonetheless if not inherently desirable, theoretically important for many renewal conceptions (Strauss 1991) and demonstrably important in at least one central renewal conception (organizing) where its influence has been examined in some detail (Hickey et al. 2010).

Paradoxically, while activism is widely regarded as important for union well-being, it is also an elusive concept and not well understood. An important aspect of activism is that it is truly discretionary. There are usually no immediate or explicit monetary rewards associated with union activism, but there are personal and political rewards, and possibly self-actualization. There are typically no explicit punishments for withholding efforts (e.g., see Olson 1971), but there is social shunning (being “sent to Coventry”) or demotion, etc. for not being on the “right” side. A meta-analysis conducted by Bamberger, Kluger, and Suchard (1999) showed that there are important psychological inducements for union commitment, a critical antecedent of activism, including pro-union attitudes and perceived union instrumentality. To induce volunteerism, unions must first understand the nature of the activism construct, and its most important influences.

In this paper, we investigate some important antecedents to 1) general activism; and, 2) a more specific measure of activism intent, i.e., willingness to help unions organize. In fact, we offer what we believe to be the first direct empirical investigations of “willingness to help organize,” which may be considered a specific manifestation of a broader “willingness to work” construct (Gordon et al., 1980; Kuruvilla & Fiorito, 1994), that is, the willingness to perform unpaid “work” on behalf of the union¹. There may also be differences as willingness to organize is more likely to be in a conflict-bound situation and be harder where recognition does not exist. Consistent with prior research, we expect that beliefs and attitudes about unions and employers will predict activism and activism intentions – specifically willingness to help organize. In addition, we hypothesize a role for ideological factors and attitudes toward organizing. We show that attitudes toward unions and organizing are more important predictors of willingness to

¹ Our data do not permit a rigorous construct validation study whereby we might demonstrate that “willingness to help organize” is a distinct facet of “willingness to work.”

help organize than are union instrumentality beliefs. This result suggests that the nature of inducements for activism go well beyond pragmatic concerns. Findings come from a broad sample of US union members. Hence, we present results with high generality for a crucial set of union-related variables.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Behavioral intentions and actual behaviors are intimately linked in theory (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) and in empirical research on union-related behavior (Premack and Hunter 1988). One dependent variable in our study is a general class of behaviors (i.e., activism), while the other is a more specific behavioral intention (i.e., willingness to help the union organize). Helping unions organize is a specific behavior that falls within the overall activism domain, so we suggest that our two dependent variables will share antecedents (e.g., pro-union attitudes).

Helping unions organize is part of overall activism; however, there is an obvious divergence in the level of specificity. Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) showed that in order to have stronger attitude-behavior correlations, they must be compatible in their specificity along four dimensions: target, activity, context, and time. Therefore, we acknowledge that there may be differences in the degree to which the common antecedents relate to our dependent variables.

Important Antecedents From Union Commitment Literature

Activism is largely synonymous with participation although the former tends to connote more active forms of participation as the term implies. Union participation includes activities such as holding union offices, serving on committees, participating in meetings, talking to union leaders, voting on union matters, and reading union literature (Kelloway & Barling, 1993). Activism is usually about policy development and consequent implementation as well as recruitment, retention, achieving broader participation among lay members, and mobilization.

While the literature has long-used the term “passive participation” to reference more passive activities such as reading newsletters and attending meetings, the term “passive activism” would be oxymoronic and accordingly, is not used.

Activism and participation questions ask members about their union activities, and often, but not always, distinguish between truly active forms, e.g., McShane’s (1986) “administrative” participation, and more passive forms. Both constructs assess helping behaviors on behalf of the union. Another partially overlapping term is “union citizenship behaviors” (UCBs; see Snape & Redman 2004). Participation, UCBs, and activism will likely share common antecedents. Our purpose is not to belabor or put too fine a point on distinctions among these overlapping constructs. Rather, we emphasize that we deliberately focus on more active forms of participation and UCBs based on the premise that genuine activism is the most critical and scarce resource for unions (see Kuruvilla & Fiorito 1994).

Union commitment and participation are distinct constructs that are strongly and directly related (e.g., see Bamberger, Kluger, & Suchard, 1999). Union commitment (e.g., Gordon, Philpot, Burt, Thompson, & Spiller, 1980) is fundamentally attitudinal in nature, but includes a “willingness to work for the union” dimension that reflects a behavioral intention of volunteer effort, and as such provides something of a bridge between attitudes and behaviors. Premack and Hunter (1988) provide an instructive illustration of this bridge in a related context by concluding that for their meta-analysis of non-union workers’ union voting intentions, voting intention and actual vote are nearly synonymous. We contend that “willingness to help organize” is part of the union commitment construct domain, particularly the “willingness to work for the union” dimension. Consequently, “willingness to help organize” should share

common antecedents with the union commitment construct, and particularly its “willingness to work” facet.

Pro-union Attitudes and Union Instrumentality Perceptions

Bamberger et al. (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of selected antecedents of union commitment. They found that pro-union attitudes and union instrumentality perceptions were the most important, especially pro-union attitudes. In fact, they noted that pro-union attitudes were stronger predictors of union commitment than instrumentality perceptions. Professed theoretical explanations of the results were complex as the best-fitting model represented an integration of the dominant perspectives.

The first perspective is that union commitment is predominantly ideology-based (Tetrick 1995). The second is that union commitment is predominantly instrumentality-based (Kochan 1980, and Kochan, Katz, and McKersie 1986). Another view is that commitment is both ideology- and instrumentality-based, but established upon instrumentality beliefs (Newton and Shore 1992). Bamberger et al.’s (1999) conclusions seemed to most support the view of Newton and Shore. That is, instrumentality beliefs’ effects may operate both directly on commitment and indirectly via their influence on pro-union attitudes.

Based upon the theoretical perspectives just described and empirical results from previous studies, e.g., Bamberger et al.’s (1999) meta-analysis, and assuming that “willingness to help organize” is part of the union commitment domain, we hypothesize that pro-union attitudes and perceptions of union instrumentality will predict activism and “willingness to help organize” as follows:

H1a: Pro-union Attitudes is positively related to Activism

H1b: Pro-union Attitudes is positively related to Willingness to Help Organize

H2a: Union Instrumentality is positively related to Activism

H2b: Union Instrumentality is positively related to Willingness to Help Organize

Again, the activism hypotheses are not entirely new, as participation is already known to correlate with these antecedents. However, “willingness to help organize” is new, a specific form of “willingness to work” for the union, which has been previously analyzed (e.g., Kuruvilla & Fiorito 1994). We included activism in our analyses for intrinsic interest in terms of fairly contemporary data from a broad-based sample, but also in order to explore potential contrasts with the “willingness to help organize” results.

Pro-employer Attitudes

Impacts of pro-employer attitudes on constructs such as union commitment and participation have been somewhat ambivalent (e.g., Bamberger et al., 1999). Bamberger and colleagues reported that correlations between pro-employer attitudes and union commitment range from moderately negative to strongly positive. Although there have been increased calls for cooperative employer-union relations in the US at times, these relations remain largely adversarial. Thus in a broadly representative sample we would expect that workers who express more positive attitudes toward employers are less likely to be union activists or indicate a willingness to help unions organize, and hence we hypothesize:

H3a: Pro-employer Attitude is negatively related to Activism

H3b: Pro-employer Attitude is negatively related to Willingness to Help Organize

Ideology, Collectivism, and Organizing Attitude as Antecedents

Activism and especially “willingness to help organize” are likely associated with perceptions of challenging the status quo. Wright, Taylor, and Moghaddam (1990) reasoned that the degree of social change varies on two dimensions: individual vs. collective and normative vs. non-normative. Collective and non-normative actions, such as organizing a union to change the social structure, are perceived to be the most socially disruptive and difficult. The easiest actions are individual and normative, such as meeting with a supervisor one-on-one.

According to system justification theory, political ideology is a significant predictor of social change resistance, where, conservatives are typically more resistant to social change than liberals (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway, 2003). Union voting literature also supports the assertion that conservatives would be less likely to advocate social change (e.g., Hemmasi and Graf, 1993). Godard reported that studies in Britain, Canada, and the U.S. have found associations, albeit weak, between political beliefs and union voting intentions (2008: 382). Conservative and liberal orientations are proxied by affiliation with the Republican and Democratic parties, respectively.

As noted earlier, specificity and generality of constructs in relation to one another influences the strength of relations between attitudes and behavior (or behavioral intent; Ajzen and Fishbein 1977). Accordingly, attitudes toward union organizing should help explain union members’ willingness to help organize, although perhaps be less influential for more general union activism.

For these reasons, we can state the following formal hypotheses:

H4a: Collectivism Beliefs are positively related to Activism

H4b: Collectivism Beliefs are positively related to Willingness to Help Organize

H5a: Democratic Party affiliation (i.e., liberalism) is positively related to Activism

H5b: Democratic Party affiliation (i.e., liberalism) is positively related to Willingness to Help Organize

H6a: Attitude to Organizing is positively related to Activism

H6b: Attitude to Organizing is positively related to Willingness to Help Organize

Control Variables

While the preceding summarizes the key theoretical issues addressed here, it must be acknowledged that prior research has revealed several additional possible influences on activism and activism intentions. In many studies demographic variables have been used. In some instances these may proxy shared experiences such as discrimination that lead to a common outlook among particular groups, e.g., racial minorities. Many studies have found relatively pro-union attitudes among US black workers (Fiorito, Gallagher, and Greer 1986). Others may reflect persisting social norms on gender-specific roles, e.g., child care responsibilities may constrain women's activism (Snape, Redman, & Chan 2000). To better distil the effects for hypothesized influences and to rule out alternative explanations, we include measures for race, gender, and other demographic indicators as control variables in our multivariate specifications. These controls are detailed in a later section.

Summary of Hypotheses

To summarize, we argue that general activism and willingness to help organize likely share antecedents. Union commitment literature suggests that pro-union attitudes and union instrumentality perceptions will increase activism and willingness to help organize. This research also suggests, although less strongly, that pro-employer attitudes will decrease activism

and activist intentions. Further, liberal ideological orientation, collectivism beliefs, and organizing attitudes should also predict the dependent variables.

METHOD

Data

Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. conducted a telephone poll in 2003 on behalf of the AFL-CIO. The AFL-CIO generously made the data available to the authors, who were not involved in any aspect of the data collection. Self-reported data was collected from a stratified random sample of 1,602 adults (i.e., age 18 and over) across the United States. Respondents were selected using random-digit dialing of households, but with deliberate over-sampling of union members, the focus of this study. Thus the subjects used in this study represent a diverse and representative sample of U.S. union members, in contrast to many studies on related phenomena, which often rely on single-site samples reflecting relatively narrow groups in terms of occupation, industry, or union². Sponsorship of the telephone poll was not revealed to respondents. Case-wise deletion was used for missing data and “not sure” type responses, leaving a sample of 269 union members for our analysis.

Measures

Our study includes two dependent variables, six focal antecedents (or independent variables), and several control variables. All variables were either ordinal variables or dichotomous (0/1) dummy variables. The ordinal variables are used as interval-level measures because they possessed equal-appearing interval scales (see Schwab, 2005: 99-100).

Activism. Union activism was assessed with one item: “How active and involved would you say you are in your union—very active, fairly active, not that active, or not active at all?”

² For examples, Fullagar, Gallagher, Clark, and Carroll (2004) use letter carriers from the U.S. Postal Service, Goeddeke and Kammeyer-Mueller (2010) use faculty from a single university, and Tetrick et al. (2007) use members of a single Midwestern local who work for either of two telecommunications companies.

Response options were recoded such that 1=not active at all, 2=not that active, 3=fairly active, and 4=very active.

Willingness to Help in Union Organizing. This variable was operationalized with one item: “How interested would you personally be in working through your union to help nonunion workers to organize and gain union representation—very interested, fairly interested, just somewhat interested, or not interested?” Response options were recoded such that 1=not interested, 2=just somewhat interested, 3=fairly interested, and 4=very interested.

Pro-union Attitudes. Two alternative measures of pro-union attitudes were examined. The first, which we will call *Pro-union Feeling*, was measured with one item: “Rate your feelings toward [labor unions] as either very negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, or very positive.” Response options were recoded such that 1=very negative, 2=somewhat negative, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat positive, and 5=very positive.

The second, which we will call *General Union Attitude*, was a composite scale formed by summing several items involving beliefs about different aspects of unions. Each item involved a forced choice between phrases reflecting polar views on a specific aspect of unions. The introduction to the pairs of phrases stated: “I am going to read you several pairs of phrases, and I’d like you to tell me in each case which one of the phrases better applies to labor unions.” A pair of phrases was then read to the respondent, followed by “Which better applies to labor unions today?” One typical pair included: “Have leaders who are out of touch with their members” and “Have leaders who are responsive to their members.” Respondents were thus encouraged to pick one phrase from the pair, but were allowed to volunteer a response such as “mixed,” “both,” or “not sure.” Pairs of phrases covered leadership as in the preceding pair, as well as dues levels relative to value received, innovativeness, strike-proneness, member

involvement in decisions, honesty, helpfulness to individuals, contemporary relevance, and concern for workers generally (versus members only). The exact wording of all phrases is shown in Table 1. The response to each pair was coded as a “3” if the respondent chose the positive statement, “1” if the respondent chose the negative statement, and “2” if the respondent volunteered a “mixed” or “both” response. Responses across all pairs were then summed, with the sum then divided by the number of pairs. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was .78.

Table 1 about here

The two alternative measures reflect different approaches to the same general construct, as well as different measurement properties. *Pro-union Feeling* presumably reflects the respondent’s cumulative assessment based on numerous beliefs about unions such as those detailed by the paired statements used in the second measure, *General Union Attitude*. At a conceptual level, *Pro-union Feeling*’s global nature relative to the construct domain is advantageous. As a measurement issue, its simplicity is appealing and potentially efficient as a practical matter. *General Union Attitude* offers potential advantages in reliability and thus validity, less susceptibility to common method variance, as well as the potential for follow-up analysis to investigate whether particular union image facets are especially important for activism. Further, the facets may relate closely to union policy options, or at least image management issues.

Perceived Union Instrumentality. Union instrumentality was captured via a two-item scale. One item was: “Overall, how effective do you think labor unions are these days in improving wages, benefits, and working conditions for their members — not very effective, just somewhat effective, fairly effective, or very effective?” These responses were recoded such that 1=not very effective, 2=just somewhat effective, 3=fairly effective, and 4=very effective. The

second item was: “Thinking about the union you belong to, how would you rate the overall performance of your union in representing members like you – would you say the union is doing an excellent job, a good job, not so good a job, or a poor job?” Response values were re-ordered such that 1=poor job, 2=not so good a job, 3=a good job, and 4=an excellent job. These two items focus on the general and specific dimensions of union instrumentality, respectively, but share a common root in their focus on instrumentality. The two items were summed and divided by two. The Cronbach alpha for the scale was .62 ($r=.45$, $p<.01$).

Pro-employer Attitudes. Attitudes toward employers were operationalized with one item: “Rate your feelings toward [your employer] as either very negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, or very positive.” Responses were recoded such that 1=very negative, 2=somewhat negative, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat positive, and 5=very positive.

Collectivism Beliefs. The item used to assess collectivism beliefs was: “Do you think that employees are more successful in getting problems resolved at work when they bring these problems up as a group or when they bring them up as individuals? The response options were recoded such that 1=more successful as individuals, 2=makes no difference or not sure, and 3=more successful as a group.

Democratic Party affiliation (Ideological Orientation). This item was captured by asking respondents to indicate their political party affiliation: “How would you describe your overall point of view in terms of the political parties? Would you say that you are mostly Democratic, leaning Democratic, completely independent, leaning Republican, or mostly Republican?” The response options were recoded such that 1=mostly Republican, 2=leaning

Republican, 3=completely independent, 4=leaning Democratic, and 5=mostly Democratic. Hence, higher scores corresponded with higher degrees of a liberal ideological orientation.³

Attitude to Organizing. Union members' attitudes toward organizing were measured with a single item stating, "Some union leaders have proposed that unions' top priority for the next few years, ahead of all other activities, should be increasing membership by helping more workers who do not have a union to gain union representation. These leaders say that increasing membership will make unions stronger, which will mean better wages and benefits for current members. Would you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose having your own union make this a top priority?" Responses were recoded such that higher values on this four-point scale correspond to more favorable attitudes toward organizing.

Control Variables. As noted earlier, several control variables are included to reduce confounding and to help rule out alternative explanations. Most of these are of a demographic nature and measured as dummy variables to distinguish groups. These include *Female* gender, *Hispanic* and *Black* ethnic/racial identifications, *Married*, *Professional or Managerial*, *Other White Collar*, *Public Sector*, and *Full-time* status. For the *Hispanic* and *Black* measures, white or other ethnic/racial identification is the omitted reference group. For the *Professional or Managerial* and *Other White Collar* occupational dummy variables, blue collar and other occupations are the omitted reference group. In each instance, the preceding variables are coded "1" for the characteristic named and "0" otherwise. Two additional control variables, *Ageclass* and *Schooling*, are measured on conventional scales that order age and years-of-schooling groups into several roughly equal intervals. Details on all measures are available from the authors.

³ Terms such as "liberal" and "conservative" are imprecise, and the connection between ideologies and party leanings is loose and varies with more precise facets of ideology (e.g., in distinctions between "social" and "fiscal" conservatives. CIO President John L. Lewis was one of the more famous examples of a Republican who strongly believed in unions. In the early 21st Century, however, a presumptive link between liberalism and Democrat party leanings, and between union activism and liberalism is not unreasonable.

Analyses Techniques

Correlation analyses, ordinary least squares (OLS) multiple regressions, and ordered logistic multiple regressions were used to test the hypotheses. In order to provide a clearer discussion of results, we only reported results from the correlation and OLS multiple regression analyses. The ordered logistic multiple regressions were employed to ensure that violating OLS' assumption of interval-level measurement for the dependent variables did not materially affect results. The results did not differ substantially (all results are available from the authors upon request). There was adequate statistical power to examine all hypotheses. Our sample size (N=269) provided over 80% statistical power (1-beta error) for multiple regression models with sixteen predictors at the .05 alpha level, and medium effect sizes (e.g., see Cohen, 1992).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Results

Relative frequencies for the Activism and Willingness to Help Organize dependent variables are provided in Figures 1-2. Figure 1 shows, for example, that 15% of the union members in the final sample (N=269) said that they were “very active” and 12% said they were “not active at all.” Similarly on helping with organizing, Figure 2 shows that 20% said they were “very interested” and 23% said they were “not interested.”⁴

Figures 1 and 2 about here

⁴ The percentages of union members reporting high activism levels in our data are large relative to levels of activism reported from some other sources (e.g., Kuruvilla and Fiorito 1994 or Nissen 1998). Recall, however, that our measure is a self-report and that relatively passive activism forms such as reading newsletters, attending meetings, and casting ballots may be viewed as high activism by respondents. Similarly, an expression of interest in helping with organizing is not a commitment to undertake one-on-one recruiting efforts.

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for the dependent and independent variables are provided in Table 2⁵. The descriptive statistics are generally straightforward. For the dependent and hypothesized influences' measures detailed earlier, one can see the average response and variability. Thus the average value for *Activism* (M = 2.61) corresponds to a response roughly midway between “not all that active” and “fairly active,” and the average value for *Willingness to Help Organize* (M = 2.42) falls about midway between “just somewhat interested” and “fairly interested.” For control variables, mean values reveal that 33% of the subjects were female, 6% were Hispanic, 9% were Black, and 71% were married. The mean for the *Ageclass* variable (M = 5.97) indicates that the average age group was near the top of the 45-49 year-old group, and the mean for *Schooling* (M = 4.10) shows that the average schooling completed was in the vicinity of some college or vocational training but no baccalaureate.

Insert Table 2 about here

The estimated correlation between the two dependent variables, *Activism* and *Willingness to Help Organize* of .47 ($p < .01$) is notable in reinforcing the distinction between these measures. Although past activism and future activism intentions in a particular area (organizing) could be expected to correlate, even this moderately strong correlation underscores that past activism is different from future intentions to help unions organize. If, for illustrative purposes, we think in terms of past activism as a cause of future activism intentions, past activism can explain only about 22 percent ($.47^2 = .22$) of willingness to help with organizing.

The correlation results offered preliminary support for most hypotheses. Both alternative measures of pro-union attitudes, union instrumentality perceptions, liberal ideological

⁵ Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for all variables are available in an expanded version of Table 2 available from the authors on request. Frequencies for all measures are also available on request.

orientation, and favorable attitude toward organizing correlated positively with both dependent variables, with the organizing attitude measure apparently more strongly related to *Willingness to Help Organize* than to the more general *Activism* measure. Notable exceptions to expectations arose for *Collectivism Beliefs*, which evidenced a non-significant correlation with both dependent variables, and for *Pro-employer Attitude*, which showed a non-significant relation with *Willingness to Help Organize* and an unexpected (but modest) positive relation to *Activism*.

In addition, the bivariate correlations among predictors do not suggest any major collinearity problems, although some of the intercorrelations are large enough to raise such concerns (e.g., correlations between *Union Instrumentality* and either the *General Union Attitude* or *Pro-union Feeling* measures are on the order of $r = .60$ [$p < .01$]). To assure that collinearity was not a serious problem for our multivariate analysis, we examined variance inflation factors and tolerances from the regression models examined below, and in no instance did these diagnostics suggest serious concerns (details available on request).

Multiple Regression Analyses

Multiple regression models provided more formal bases for evaluating our hypotheses. Table 3 provides the results of the OLS multiple regression analyses with control variables included.

Insert Table 3 about here

The model explained roughly 25% of the variance in *Activism*, slightly less (23%) with the *General Union Attitude* scale and slightly more with the *Pro-union Feeling* item (26%). For the *Willingness to Help Organize* criterion, the model explained roughly 35% of the variance, and again slightly less with the *General Union Attitude* scale (34%) and slightly more with the *Pro-union Feeling* item (38%).

Turning to the hypothesized effects for specific predictors, Table 3's standardized beta coefficients reveal consistent support for the effect of pro-union attitudes on both *Activism* and *Willingness to Help Organize* with either alternate measure of union attitudes ($.21 \leq \beta \leq .36$, $p < .01$), supporting H1a and H1b with moderate effect sizes. Hypotheses for union instrumentality's effects received partial support, with a significant modest effect on *Activism* ($.16 \leq \beta \leq .18$, $p < .05$) per H2a, but no apparent effect on *Willingness to Organize* and thus no support for H2b. Attitudes toward employers and collectivism beliefs did not appear to influence either dependent variable in Table 3's results, meaning no multivariate-based support for H3a, H3b, H4a, and H4b. There was partial support for H5b, specifically evidence that liberal ideological leanings (*Democratic Party* affiliation) were associated with greater willingness to help unions organize ($p < .05$) with the *General Union Attitude*, but no apparent effect with the alternative *Pro-Union Feeling* measure. *Democratic Party* affiliation had no apparent effect on overall activism with either pro-union attitude measure, and hence there was no support for H5a. Finally among the predicted effects, attitude toward organizing was positively linked to both *Activism* ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$) and *Willingness to Help Organize* ($\beta = .26$, $p < .01$), supporting H6a and H6b. Considering the relative effect sizes, and unsurprisingly, it appears that organizing attitudes may more strongly affect willingness to help organize than general activism.

There are some potentially notable patterns among the control variables in the multivariate results of Table 3. Specifically, female gender showed no association with reported activism or willingness to assist with organizing. In contrast, Hispanics evidenced no greater reported activism than the omitted reference group (white and other excluding Blacks), but expressed a greater willingness to help organize. Blacks reported greater activism, but no greater willingness to assist with organizing. White-collar workers other than professionals and

managers reported no greater level of activism, but there is a mild suggestion in one equation that they might be more willing than blue collar workers (the omitted reference group) to assist in organizing. Finally, age was associated with lower activism, but this does not carry over to willingness to help organize.

DISCUSSION

In this paper, we investigated two potentially valuable constructs for unions and union renewal: union member activism and willingness to help unions organize. We deduced hypotheses concerning potential antecedents to these variables using the union commitment literature, system justification theory, and related research. Specifically, we hypothesized that pro-union attitudes, perceived union instrumentality, collectivism beliefs, liberal ideological orientations, and a favorable attitude toward organizing would lead to activism and willingness to help unions organize, while pro-employer attitudes would reduce union activism and willingness to help organize.

The results showed that the pro-union attitudes factor was critical in showing a consistent positive and moderately strong influence on reported activism and expressed willingness to help unions organize. This aligns with prior research (e.g., Bamberger et al. 1999) stressing an important role for pro-union attitudes in union commitment and participation among members. Union instrumentality perceptions showed a consistent modest, positive effect on activism, but no evident effect on willingness to assist with organizing when other factors are controlled. Formal statistical tests for differences in the effects of the pro-union attitude measures and the union instrumentality measure yielded mixed results. In both equations for *Activism*, the null hypothesis of “no difference” could not be rejected (see Table 3, bottom). In the *Willingness to*

Help Organize equations, the results differed, depending on the pro-union attitude measure used. Using the *Pro-union Feeling* measure, the null was easily rejected ($F = 8.05, p < .01$), but using the *General Union Attitude* measure, the null could not be rejected at conventional significance levels ($F = 2.16, .14 < p < .15$). Thus the evidence suggests that pro-union attitudes matter more than do instrumentality perceptions for *Willingness to Help Organize*, but with equivocation. It further shows that pro-union attitudes and union instrumentality are both important in general activism (*Activism*). A related result was that liberal ideological leanings evidenced no effect on activism, but perhaps a positive effect on willingness to help organize. These last two predictors' results are partially consistent with prior findings (e.g., Bamberger et al. 1999), but suggest that distinctions may be useful among different forms of union commitment and activism. Specifically, exchange considerations as well as covenant considerations (see Snape & Redman 2004) may be important in overall activism. It is not difficult to think of self-interest issues from bargaining and grievances arising in overall union activities such as reading newsletters, attending meetings, votes on contract ratification, and some committee roles. With regard to willingness to help organize, however, covenant issues, which are more closely associated with pro-union attitudes and liberal ideological leanings, may be more salient since the connection between the potential activism and self-interest is more tenuous. In other words, a general conclusion from our study may be that the activism and activist intentions reflect both ideology-based and instrumentality-based perspectives, or exchange and covenant perspectives (i.e., consistent with Newton & Shore 1992, Bamberger et al. 1999, and Snape & Redman 2004), but perhaps more so the ideology-based or covenant perspective, particularly when the activism form or intention involves activity for which the activist's "payoff" may be highly uncertain.

Implications

Researchers frequently conclude that member activism plays a critical role in union renewal (e.g., Fairbrother 2000, Heery 2003, Fiorito 2004). The current study implies that pro-union attitudes, union instrumentality perceptions, ideological leanings, and attitudes toward organizing play an important role, as they are strong predictors of member activism, willingness to help unions organize, or both. Interestingly, collectivism beliefs and attitudes toward employers played little or no direct role in shaping either activism measure. Consistent with Azjen and Fishbein's (1977) point about comparable specificity, for the most part the results reinforce the point that union activism and activist intentions are "about unions" rather than employers or broader philosophical concerns.⁶

However, there were some differential effects on the activism and willingness-to-help-organize measures, suggesting more subtle implications. Notably, while union instrumentality per se predicted activism, it had no apparent effect on willingness to help organize. Also, ideological leanings showed no effect on activism, but evidenced some influence on willingness to help organize. These two points together suggest that relative to overall activism, willingness to help organize involves a stronger ideological commitment to unionism and perhaps to liberalism. Finally among differential effects, attitude toward organizing affected both dependent variables, but appeared to have a stronger influence on willingness to help organize. This further reinforces Azjen and Fishbein's (1977) "specificity" point.

These findings appear to underscore the importance of covenant considerations in union commitment and activism. While pragmatic or exchange considerations are important for overall activism, as evidenced by the role of union instrumentality perceptions, more general attitudes toward unions, ideological leanings, and attitude toward organizing appear relatively

⁶ It is possible that some individuals are activists in many organizations, and in that sense, their activism is more of an individual characteristic than about the organizations in which they are active. We have no way of addressing this possibility with our data.

more salient in the important union policy area of eliciting lay members' volunteer efforts to assist in organizing. At risk of slight overstatement, the findings imply that such volunteer efforts are more of a "cause" with ideological overtones. Accordingly, efforts to enroll volunteer organizers from among union members may find more success by stressing union philosophy, solidarity among all workers, and social change rather than self-interest.

Limitations

The most significant threats to internal validity included the cross-sectional design for data collection. This provides a minimum basis for causal inference, particularly with regard to reported overall activism where there may be some "justification effects" whereby respondents adjust responses to attitudinal questions to maintain consistency with their already-reported behaviors – the overall activism question appeared before some attitudinal questions. This is less a concern for the willingness-to-help-organize measure, which was asked near the end of the interview, after all other attitudinal questions, and referenced a future intention. A further limitation lies in the fact that all variables were self-reported at a single point in time. This made the study vulnerable to measurement context effects (e.g., see Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) for a review of common method biases). Self-reports may have produced some artificial covariance due to common rater effects (e.g., biases from moods, social desirability, leniency tendencies, etc.). Slightly alleviating this concern was that the beliefs-based scale for general union attitude performed roughly the same as the affect-oriented pro-union feeling item, as the former would seem less prone to such influences as mood states. A further limitation resulting from this particular dataset is that most measures consisted of single-items. Single-item measures made it impossible to assess reliabilities directly, and are generally believed to offer limited reliability and validity for attitudinal measures.

A further limitation for internal validity and associated inferences arises from this study's focus solely on direct effects on activism and willingness-to-help-organize intentions. Previous research offers theoretical explanations and some evidence for certain mediating effects. Bamberger et al. (1999), for example, summarize and consider some such models. Perhaps most notable for our purposes among these is the Newton and Shore (1992) model that posits only an indirect role for union instrumentality on union commitment and participation. Supporting theory for such models exists, mostly from the political science and social psychology literatures. For example, Converse (1964) argued that political ideologies signify clusters of related values and attitudes, and hence are higher-level constructs relative to attitudes. And, Maio and Olson (1995) concluded that values and ideologies influence attitudes directly and indirectly. Recognizing that such possibilities exist does not invalidate our results, but it does point out that a fuller understanding may require consideration and testing of more complete causal networks.

Finally, as with any archival data source we are limited to the measures available in our data. At least three possible omitted variables have been suggested to us by others reacting to earlier versions of this paper. First, there may be individual differences in activism propensities associated with individual traits not available in our data. Personality factors may be one such influence, with extraverted or gregarious types more likely to be active in nearly any context, for example. Second, casual empiricism suggests that activism is partly a function of union policies, structures, and cultures. Some unions strive to improve member activism, and some do not. This most likely varies across locals within unions as well. Third, although our results suggest that attitude toward employers is not a major influence, this does not speak directly to the role of union members' perceptions of their employers' attitudes toward the union. If members sense that their employer is hostile to the union, they may be less committed to the union (Fuller and

Hester 1998) and are probably going to be less active in it for fear that such activism may be seen as disloyal or an indication that the employee is “not serious” about his or her career advancement. Goeddeke and Kammeyer-Mueller (2010) found that perception of a hostile employer attitude toward the union reduced union participation.

The possible consequences of these and other possible omissions is difficult to assess. Although we find some encouragement in that our results were relatively robust to inclusion or exclusion of various controls (details available from the authors on more parsimonious models), this is no assurance that omitted variables do not correlate with measured variables. To the extent they do, this is a potential source of bias and inconsistency in estimated effects.

Strengths

This study also possessed considerable strengths. The data represented a diverse, recent, and representative sample of union members across the United States and provided adequate statistical power by conventional standards (e.g., Cohen 1992). These features are particularly valuable because most studies concerning union commitment and participation have relied upon single-union or single-employer analyses, and often with limited statistical power. Also, several control variables were included to help avoid confounded interpretations, alternate explanations, and omitted variables bias. Hence, we offer results that are comparatively more powerful and general. Also, we brought into focus a new and potentially valuable construct to unions and union researchers: willingness to help unions organize. While the importance of the “willingness to work for the union” (WTW) concept has long been recognized (Gordon et al. 1980, Kuruvilla & Fiorito 1994), the willingness-to-help-organize variable taps into a much more specific aspect of the union commitment WTW domain, and more directly relates to contemporary union renewal efforts.

Future Research

Immediate opportunities for research lie in the development of better measures for willingness to help with union organizing and other constructs that demonstrate satisfactory psychometric properties. For example, a worthwhile project might be the development of a scale that assesses the member's willingness to help unions organize, and also possesses adequate validity and reliability. Distinctions may also be useful between recruiting non-members within already-organized units versus the organizing of non-represented workers.

A potentially fruitful area for future research is to look at possible activism consequences, in addition to other antecedents. How strong is the link between the intention to help organize and specific organizing behaviors? Premack and Hunter (1988) found a strong intent-behavior link for union voting, but union voting is a private act. The link may be less strong when the intended behavior requires interaction with others, and possible resistance from those others. And, do these behaviors meaningfully affect unions and union renewal? Hickey, Kuruvilla, and Lakhani (2010) contend that member activism may be overstated in union renewal efforts, whereas Gall and Fiorito (2009) maintain that activism is vital for virtually all union renewal projects.

Researchers could also determine if different solicitation strategies affect a member's willingness to help organize (or their overall activism level). In other words, do different types of invitations to participate matter? For example, should union leaders directly or indirectly (e.g., through active co-workers) ask their inactive members to participate? If so, how should they ask (e.g., considering parameters such as frequency, accountability, etc.)? Are tangible incentives such as recruiting "bounties" useful, or are these irrelevant or even contrary to the

ideological or covenant foundations that appear to play a key role in volunteer organizer motivations?

Finally, we suggest that future research continue to explore potentially important antecedents to pro-union attitudes. Pro-union attitudes are a crucial factor. They predict an employee's likelihood of voting for a union during a certification election (e.g., see Getman, Goldberg, & Herman, 1976, Martinez & Fiorito 2009, Montgomery 1989). They also predict a union member's union commitment, and indirectly, participation in union activity (e.g., Bamberger et al. 1999). In this study, we showed that pro-union attitudes predict the member's willingness to help organize non-union workers.

Conclusion

Unions necessarily rely upon their members for effectiveness and survival. Perhaps as important as receiving dues, unions need their members to volunteer their ideas, creativity, resourcefulness, passion, and their time to make their unions run efficiently and effectively. We are not calling for constant mass-mobilization. Others have articulated justified skepticism about that or similar interpretations of what is often called the "organizing model" (e.g., de Turberville 2004). Rather, we interpret the literature and the historical record⁷ to indicate that unions require a relatively small proportion of the membership, under 10% perhaps, to be willing to engage in relatively demanding activism forms, similar to McShane's "administrative participation" (1986), or what Gallagher and Strauss refer to as the "hard-core, expressively-oriented activist group" (1991: 160). "Passive loyalty is not enough" for unions need a "core of activists to supplement the work of their paid officers" and staff (1991: 168). Although this core of activists appears to have "always" been small, there is widespread sense in the union participation and

⁷ See Gallagher and Strauss (1991), Strauss (1991), and Lester (1958) for more thorough discussion of union activism forms, trends, and causes, and their relation to union democracy.

renewal literatures that it has shrunk noticeably, possibly as a result of declining union instrumentality perceptions (Gallagher and Strauss, 1991: 166), or is in any case currently insufficient for union renewal.

Union renewal requires concern not just about present members, but also about potential union members, even those outside current bargaining units. Researchers need to help unions understand the forces that induce their members to participate. This study investigated overall union activism and willingness to help unions organize, and found that pro-union attitudes are a necessary prerequisite in both. Perceptions of union instrumentality were important for overall activism, but did not predict willingness to help organize. Therefore, to mobilize workers, unions are advised to focus more upon pro-union attitudes, ideology-based perspectives, and to “make the case for organizing.” The latter may overlap somewhat with union instrumentality perceptions in that organizing’s appeal, in current members’ eyes, relies partly on its benefits to current members. Yet as the results presented here suggest, union instrumentality *per se* may have limited value in motivating volunteers to assist with organizing. Nissen noted that union activist numbers are “way too small, even in the best cases” (1998: 149) and that “locals are not getting even the mildly motivated members to volunteer. Instead, the volunteers are the most devoted members” (1998: 140). Our results indirectly echo Nissen’s observation, and suggest that this sort of devotion is more a matter of beliefs about what members can accomplish through their unions for all workers and for social change rather than just the question, “What’s in it for us?”

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Table 1
Paired Phrases Used to Construct General Union Attitude Scale

Introductory statement: I am going to read you several pairs of phrases, and I'd like you to tell me in each case which one of the phrases better applies to labor unions. [Read item] Which better applies to unions today?

Leaders

Have leaders who are out of touch with members (negative)

Have leaders who are responsive to the members (positive)

Dues Levels Relative to Value Received

Charge too much in dues for what they deliver (negative)

Deliver good representation for the dues they charge (positive)

Innovativeness

Are innovative and change with the times (positive)

Are old-fashioned and backward-looking in their approach (negative)

Strike-Proneness

Are too quick to go out on strike (negative)

Only go out on strike when necessary (positive)

Member Involvement in Decisions

Let the members make important decisions (positive)

Make decisions and tell the members what to do (negative)

Honesty

Are mostly honest (positive)

Are mostly corrupt (negative)

Helpfulness to Individuals

Discourage individual effort and initiative (negative)

Help individuals make the most of themselves (positive)

Contemporary Relevance

Still have an important role to play in society today (positive)

Are mostly a thing of the past (negative)

Concern for Workers Generally (versus Members Only)

Are concerned about all working people (positive)

Are concerned only about their members (negative)

Note: Responses choosing phrases marked "positive" were assigned a value of 3, responses choosing phrases marked "negative" were assigned a value of 1, and volunteered responses of "mixed" or "both" were assigned a value of 2 for the General Union Attitude scale.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Coefficients, N=269
Decimals Places Omitted for Correlations

Variables	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>
1. Activism	2.61	.88								
2. Will. Help Organizing	2.42	1.06	.47							
3. Pro-union Feeling	4.04	1.00	.42	.49						
4. General Union Attitude	2.45	.48	.37	.39	.54					
5. Union Instrumentality	2.92	.74	.38	.34	.62	.57				
6. Pro-employer Attitude	3.82	1.15	.12	.07	.24	.15	.29			
7. Collectivism Beliefs	2.75	.64	.06	.03	.11	.12	.06	-.11		
8. Democratic Party	3.40	1.54	.16	.24	.21	.13	.11	-.03	.10	
9. Attitude to Organizing	3.21	.89	.29	.45	.38	.40	.36	.07	.07	.22

Note: Correlations of approximately .16 or greater in absolute value are significant at the .01 level in a two-tailed test. Similarly for .05, and .10; the corresponding critical correlation values are approximately .12 and .11.

Table 3
 OLS Regression Results for Hypothesized Models of Activism and Willingness to Help Organize (Organize), N=269

Standardized Betas and Summary Statistics

Dependent Variables:	<u>Activism</u>	<u>Organize</u>	<u>Activism</u>	<u>Organize</u>
<u>Independent Variables</u>				
Pro-union Attitudes				
Pro-union Feeling	.28***	.36***		
General Union Attitude			.21***	.25***
Union Instrumentality	.16**	.04	.18**	.07
Pro-employer Attitude	-.01	-.06	.03	-.01
Collectivism Beliefs	-.02	-.04	.00	-.02
Democratic Party	.03	.07	.07	.11**
Attitude to Organizing	.13**	.26***	.13**	.26***
<u>Controls</u>				
Female	.06	-.07	.05	-.07
Hispanic	-.00	.15***	.01	.17**
Black	.12**	.08	.12**	.08
Married	.04	.07	.02	.04
Professional/Manager	.06	.06	.03	.02
Other White Collar	-.02	.11*	-.03	.09
Public Sector	-.03	-.03	-.07	-.07
Full-time	.06	.04	.07	.06
Age Class	-.14**	.06	-.11*	.09
Schooling	-.04	-.04	-.04	-.05
R-Square	.26	.38	.23	.34
Adj. R-Square	.21	.34	.18	.30
F-Ratio	5.42***	9.67***	4.79***	8.16***
F-test for difference, pro-union attitude effect minus union instrumentality effect				
	1.11	8.05***	0.05	2.16

Significance is indicated relative to .01(***), .05(**), and .10(*) levels for two-tailed tests for regression coefficients. Note that hypothesized effects for coefficients are one-tailed and that one-tailed significance is simply one-half of the significance level shown for coefficients (i.e., a beta coefficient shown as significant at the .10 level in a two-tailed test is significant at the .05 level for a one-tailed test if the direction is correctly predicted).

Figure 1: Current Union Activism and Involvement (Activism)

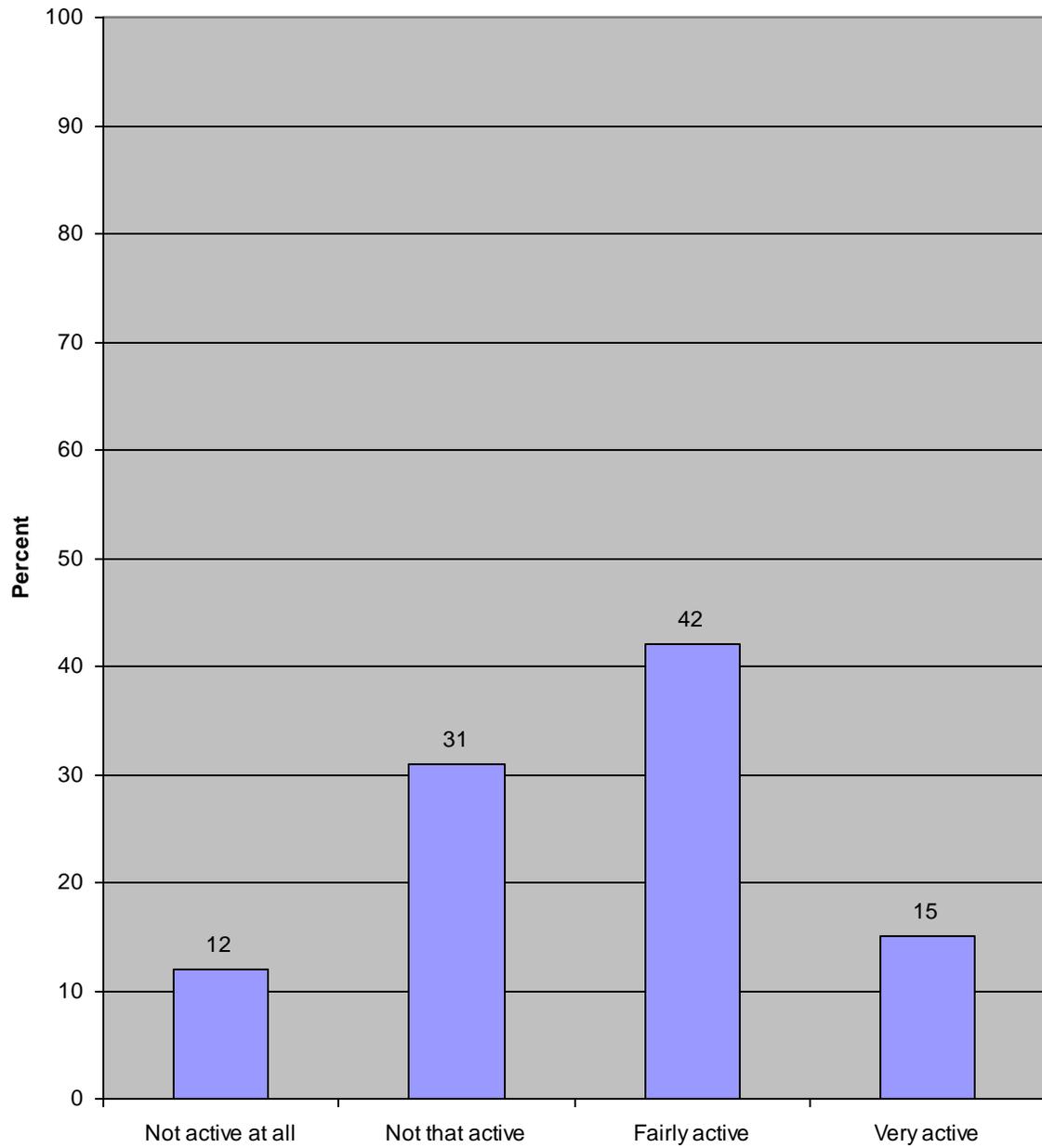


Figure 2: Willingness to Help Organize (Organize)

