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Union Busted: Understanding the Relationship Between Democrats, Republicans, and Teachers' Unions

Roman Motley
Loyola University Chicago

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

UNION BUSTED:
UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEMOCRATS, REPUBLICANS, AND TEACHERS' UNIONS

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BY

ROMAN MOTLEY

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ABSTRACT

There is an almost symbiotic relationship between the Democratic Party and labor unions. Labor unions emerged as the largest donors and staunchest organizers for Democrats. This is all especially true for teachers' unions. The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association represent the largest organizational donors to the Democratic Party. Democrats on the national stage compete fiercely for these two organization's endorsement. So, if teachers' unions represent such an important donor and organizing base for Democrats how can we explain Democratic politics on education? Race to the Top was highly unpopular with unions and supported by Democrats. Liberal stalwarts were crucial in cultivating No Child Left Behind. Secretaries of Education like Arne Duncan and Betsy DeVos support surprisingly similar education agendas despite their opposite party affiliations. Democrats from across the country have endorsed merit pay, charter school expansion, and standards-based teacher assessments. Teachers' unions vigorously oppose *all* of these policies. Despite increased polarization among the parties, there is still some level of policy convergence on education. Using a historical analysis, this thesis will demonstrate how Democrats and Republicans have such similar education policy agendas, and how Democrats feel free to support policies opposed by some of their most critical support.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the Presidential Election of 1948, Republicans were eager to defeat Democratic candidate Harry S. Truman. They had already lost four consecutive elections to Franklin D. Roosevelt, and wanted to reenter the White House for the first time since the early 1930s. Labor unions, Roosevelt most reliable constituency, endorsed Truman. However, there was marked lack of enthusiasm in that endorsement. As one labor leader noted, "I have stood myself face to face with the Truman catastrophe" (Boyle, 1995, p. 35). Truman was not nearly as union friendly as his predecessor (Boyle, 1995, p. 10). Yet, labor unions supported him anyway, and helped him win that election. This anecdote is curious. Labor unions helping to elect a president they considered a "catastrophe" is genuinely head scratching. However, it leads us to a more specific question, how to explain the Democratic Party's relationship with teachers unions. Eventually, teachers became the most unionized career field in the country, and the backbone of the overall labor movement. Going in to the modern day, teachers union face the same problem as the labor unions of 1948. In many ways, teachers would consider the Obama Administration to be a "catastrophe." Yet, teachers unions supported Obama anyway.

This thesis will be a historical study that articulates how teachers' unions, arguably the most important education interest group in the country, fit into education policy. I argue that four factors determines the relationship between political parties and teachers unions. First, the changing demographics of labor unions and public perception of teachers plays a significant role in understanding this relationship. As labor unions changed demographically and became teacher

dominated, they also became less popular and more open to criticism. Labor unions have lost an identification with the working poor, which has shifted how the public perceives them. Teachers unions now exists in an environment that is often resentful of unions. Second, the language of crisis in education has created a culture that justifies radical and intrusive education reforms. Politicians of both political parties are under significant pressure to enact tough accountability standards that are often at odds with teachers unions. This means that even allied politicians are often critical of unions and supportive of contrarian policies. Third, the Democratic Party electorally captures teachers unions. In other words, teachers unions must support Democrats, because the only alternative is the Republican Party, which is even more anti-union. This gives Democratic politicians an easy mechanism to take advantage of teacher union support. Fourth, campaign finance has undergone a drastic change in the last decade, which diminishes the influence of teachers unions. When combined these four factors paint a picture that explains the political relationship of national teachers unions. To ensure their electoral success the Democratic Party must be strategic about alliances, fundraising, and policy. This strategic political deal making means that teachers union do not always emerge as a policy winner. Democratic politicians actively take advantage of teachers union support to ensure their macro-political success.

This thesis will focus on the two national teachers unions; the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), because they are highly influential political actors. The NEA and AFT are two of the largest political donors in the country ("Top Organizational Donors," 2017). They are also the sixth and eighth largest organizational donors to the Democratic Party respectively. In 2016, The NEA and AFT spent

approximately $60 million dollars on Democratic candidates ("Top Organizational Donors," 2017). Combined that makes the NEA and AFT the second largest organizational political spender in the nation. That figure does not include the nearly $5 million dollars those organizations also spent on lobbying ("American Federation of Teachers," 2017; "National Education Association," 2017). This figure also does not capture all of the smaller donations made by affiliate organizations of the NEA and AFT (Cowen & Struck, 2014, p. 13). The NEA and AFT donated to the campaigns of 205 of the 248 Democrats in the House of Representatives ("American Federation of Teachers," 2017; "National Education Association," 2017). Even outside of merely spending, teachers' unions are heavily represented as delegates in the Democratic National Convention (Brill, 2010; DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, p. 18). Teachers' unions also comprise an important cornerstone of the Democratic political organizing and get-out-the-vote efforts (Brill, 2010). This demonstrates the extent to which Democrats rely on teachers for support.

When analyzing public policy one of the important things an academic can do is explain *why* policy happens. Specifically, why policymakers make certain decisions. In our current political landscape Democrats have become more receptive to a set policies opposed by nearly all teachers' unions. This is counterintuitive when one considers the extent to which teachers' unions support Democratic candidates. One would expect the Democratic Party to be vehemently opposed to merit pay, charter school expansions, and teacher assessment programs because teachers' unions strongly oppose these policies. On the contrary, Democrats were instrumental in cultivating Race to the Top (Person, 2011). Democrats across the country have come out in favor of charter school expansion (Barone & Lombardo, 2016; Kirst, 2006). Despite overwhelming

Democratic political dominance in cities like Chicago, Detroit, New York, and New Orleans, they have been host to an explosion of charter schools. That is even more surprising when you realize that all of those cities are homes to large influential and politically active teachers' unions. Despite being harsh critics of No Child Left Behind, the fact is Democrats, especially Ted Kennedy, were instrumental in its passage (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Stolberg, 2007). The Democratic Party initiated the Every Student Succeeds Act, which instituted a few reforms but left most of No Child Left Behind largely intact (Mann, 2016). The Obama Administration has been especially problematic. The Obama Education Department was filled with individuals who have an almost hostile relationship with teachers' unions like Arne Duncan and John King (Grunwald, 2015). The ideological differences between Arne Duncan and Betsy Devos are at times surprisingly similar on issues of education. On education, Democratic policymaking seems to not make sense.

Why would a party that relies so heavily on teacher union support adopt policies that those unions oppose? Why do teachers' unions continue to support Democrats when their policy preferences are not being enacted? The academic literature to answer that question is bare. More research is necessary to understand Democratic motivations in education policy. Additionally, Republicans have emerged as enthusiastic proponents of charter schools, merit pay, teacher assessments, and standardization. So, what exactly are Republican motivations for supporting these policies? Further research on education policy simply cannot happen effectively if we cannot explain why both the major political parties in this country support particular education policies.

Literature Review

The academic literature is clear; there is a very close relationship between Democrats and labor unions (Brill, 2010; Cowen & Struck, 2014; McArrity, 2001). It began with the Roosevelt Administration, which was instrumental in passing the Wagner Act legalizing collective bargaining among private sector employees. After the Wagner Act, unionization of industrialized trades in the country skyrocketed, most prominently in the Midwestern and Northeastern United States (Wright & Gunderson, 2004, p. 2). The newly emerged unions became the backbone of the New Deal Coalition (Scribner, 2015, p. 535). In the 1930s labor unions quickly became one of the Democratic Party's largest and most consistent donors (McArrity, 2001). Furthermore, they also emerged as an important organizing force for the party. Scholars have concluded that the relationship between Democrats and labor unions was largely a result of Roosevelt's political calculus (Asher, 2001). By legalizing collective bargaining, he cemented and institutionalized his own base. Labor unions would be key to Roosevelt's four consecutive presidential election victories. Moreover, Democrats controlled the both house of Congress from the 1930s until the 1960s, won seven of the next nine presidential elections, and controlled all three branches of government for several decades. Democrats did this by creating a political union between Southern Democrats and Northern Laborers, which proved to be a highly efficient political coalition for four decades (Boyle, 1995, p. 83). This political coalition did not falter until the mid-1960s and 1970s when Southern Democrats began to defect to the more conservative Republican Party (Aistrup, 2015).

Aistrup argues that by the 1960s Southern Democrats were losing faith in the party, which jeopardized the historic electoral success of the Democratic Party (2015). As a response to

southern defections, Democrats grew even closer to unions. In the 1960s, Democrats spearheaded initiatives to allow private sector employee unionization beginning with John F. Kennedy's 1962 executive order granting collective bargaining rights to federal employees (Murphy, 1990, p. 214). This led to the unionization of teachers. By the 1970s, 73% of all teachers were members of a labor union (Murphy, 1990, p. 209). Farber has been an important scholar in studying this phenomenon. He concluded the private sector unionization has shrunk since the 1960s, but public sector unions have exploded (Farber, 2005). More than half of all employees who work for some level of government are union members, whereas private sector unionization is less than 8%, an all-time low (Farber, 2005; "Union Member Summary," 2017). Based on Farber's research we know that public sector employees, especially teachers, make up a much larger portion of the American labor movement.

The close relationship between Democrats and teachers' unions is obvious. Nonetheless, this has not reflected in education policymaking. Barone & Lombardo were instrumental in detailing how Democratic politicians have been receptive to policies opposed by unions. A key example would be charter schools. Barone & Lombardo record that the first federal charter school policy was spearheaded by Bill Clinton in 1994 (2016, p. 7). This program provided funds to establish new charters, and both the NEA and AFT vigorously opposed the program (Vergari, 2007, p. 23). Nevertheless, the Obama Administration increased funding for the program with a mandate to create 278,000 *additional* seats in charter schools (Barone & Lombardo, 2016, p. 8). In 2014, Congress reauthorized Clinton's Charter School Program with bipartisan support, including support from every member of the Democratic congressional leadership (Barone & Lombardo, 2016, p. 10). Democrats lead the first two states to adopt charter schools, Minnesota

and California. Of the six cities that have the largest proportion of children enrolled in charters (New Orleans, Detroit, Gary, Kansas City, Flint, and Washington, DC) Democratic politicians lead all of them (Barone & Lombardo, 2016, p. 13). The city with the most charter students in the country at 152,000 is Los Angeles, yet another city lead by Democrats (Barone & Lombardo, 2016, p. 14). Apparently, teacher union opposition to charter schools has done very little to dampen party support from Democrats. In fact, cities that have large powerful teachers' unions are *more* likely to be sites of mass charter school expansion (Kirst, 2006, p. 4; Vergari, 2007, p. 29). The literature here clearly identifies Democratic support for charter schools. However, it falls short in explaining why Democrats support them in the face of staunch teacher union opposition.

Barone & Lombardo have theorized that Democrats support charter expansion because it is actually popular with Black voters. It is true that Black citizens generally support charter schools. Nonetheless, academic sources have not identified charter schools as a salient enough issue to matter electorally. In other words, there is not a strong academic argument that Black voters will vote for other parties because of a lack of charter school expansion. The literature is clear that Black voters are probably the Democratic Party's most loyal voter base (Chideya, 2016; Frymer, 1999). Black voters have voted for Democrats by a margin of 80%-90% in every federal election for the last several decades (Chideya, 2016). This means that Black voters are unlikely to leave the Democratic Party (Chideya, 2016). Therefore, Democrats should not feel pressured to support certain policies to appease them. Frymer argues that is, in fact, the case (1999). Democrats feel comfortable taking advantage of Black voters because they are so unlikely to leave the party.

DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn have argued that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) fundamentally changed education policy and politics (2016, p. 16). They argue that NCLB changed the interest group environment by introducing a number of new groups that advocate specific reforms to NCLB (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, p. 28). Therefore, existing interest groups, like teachers' unions, are in competition with these new groups for control of education. Furthermore, they argue that NCLB counterintuitively has the tacit support of school districts because they have invested so much time, resources, and finances in NCLB mandates that abandoning or substantially changing the policy would be difficult and disruptive (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, p. 28). DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn are helpful in articulating the current political landscape of education, and teachers' unions' role in that landscape. However, they do not explain the rationale behind party advocacies, and much of their research is specific to think tanks and interest groups that emerged after NCLB. Scribner argues that current education policy discourse is largely shaped by conservative opposition to small town unions (2015, p. 532). Scribner's work is important in articulating how conservatives oppose education reforms, but we need to apply it to politics at the federal level for us to understand education policy discourse.

Campaign donations is at the core of the relationship between Democrats and teachers. Briffault argues that the terrain of campaign finance has undergone a huge change since 2010 (2012, p. 1645). Namely, Super PACs now dominate campaign spending in both political parties. Politicians across the country are relying heavily on relationships with Super PACs that may be illegal. La Raja argues that campaigns now rely disproportionately on Super PAC donations (2013, p. 92). It is possible that Super PACs are displacing teachers unions as large donors to Democrats. That could explain why Democrats are advocating policies at odds with teachers.

The genesis of the change in campaign finance begins with the Supreme Court's decision in Citizens United vs. Federal Elections Commission. Briffault and La Raja's analysis is helpful in articulating how modern campaign funding is changing. However, it does not engage with the role of teachers unions within campaign financing.

There is scholarly literature on the rhetoric and motivation behind policymaking. For instance, in a 1961 article Varner argues that for all of human history hysteria has been an important policy motivator (1961, p. 451). Countless pieces of legislation and policy initiatives have been enacted in response to grave public concerns, or hysteria. Policymakers are fully aware of the ability of hysteria to usher in new policies and reforms. This recognition opens up a space for strategic use of public hysteria. One key example of hysteria motivating new policy in American History would be the Cold War (Varner, 1961, pp. 451-452). Just the perceived threat of the Soviet Union lead to the creation of our modern highway system, an unprecedented military buildup, the world's largest stockpile of nuclear weapons, and several proxy wars across the globe. Note that the actual threat of a Soviet attack was immaterial, just the *perception* was enough to enact decades of public policy. In his book, Henig notes that national security has a special relationship with hysteria (1995, p. 26). At least in the United States when social problems are connected with national security concerns it becomes easy to create the hysterics needed to enact reforms. In fact, this is exactly what the Reagan Administration did with education (Henig, 1995, pp. 26-27).

In 1983, Reagan's education staff published *A Nation at Risk*. It essentially argued that the future of America's prosperity, leadership, and security was in jeopardy due to a precipitous decline in educational outcomes. Since 1983 several studies have concluded that the report's

conclusion was probably not true (Berliner & Biddle, 1996; Bracey, 2003; Boyd, 2003; Evans, 2015; Henig 1995; Mirel, 1999). Several reports have demonstrated that educational outcomes were stagnant and not declining, and in several areas may have been improving. Nonetheless, *A Nation at Risk* ushered in a number of sweeping education reforms. "Seemingly overnight, the condition of education became a major issue in the media and began to rise in the public agenda" (Evans, 2015, p. 39). Henig argues that it is possible that the Reagan Administration intentionally manufactured a crisis to enact several ideological education reforms. In other words, policymakers made a conscience decision to use the rhetoric of crisis to induce the hysteria necessary to motivate new policy (Henig, 1995, pp. 26-27). Berliner & Biddle argue that is, in fact, the case. They would say that policymakers have intentionally created a crisis in education for a number of ulterior motives. Framing education as a crisis is in no way limited to *A Nation at Risk* in many ways the Sputnik crisis and No Child Left Behind used many of the same policy tropes. Scholars like Henig, Evans, and Varner are important in articulating how the language of crisis has become so important in education policy. Nonetheless, those findings need to go a step further. This research demonstrates that crisis management is a key tool in education policy, but not the underlying motivations for why we enact certain policies. Vergari argues that further research is needed on teachers' unions because most of the existing research is questionable because it is ideological in nature (2007, p. 30).

A separate area of scholarship also discusses the perception of teachers unions in popular media. Goldstein finds that, at least within the news media she surveyed, that articles about teachers unions have a noticeable negativity (2011, p. 553). She also discusses how a lot of the information used to discuss teachers unions come from non-neutral and anti-union sources

(Goldstein, 2011, p. 7). Alhamdan and colleagues concludes that within multiple countries there is a noticeable trend of blaming teachers unions for problems in education (2014). This research is helpful in understanding the modern terrain of how we discuss teachers unions. It could also help shine a light into why policymakers are such harsh critics of teachers unions.

Education policy within the last few decades has also been following a decided neoliberal trend. In several countries between the years of 1978 and 1980 there some noticeable success of neoliberal policymakers. The accent of Deng Xiaoping and the liberalization of the communist economy in China in 1978, the election of Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom in 1979, and the landslide election of Ronald Reagan in the United States in 1980 being clear examples (Robertson, 2008, p. 11). These events mark an important turning point in politics; neoliberalism became a core component of economic policy across the globe. Neoliberalism emerged as a rejection of Keynesian economic policies that became so popular during the Roosevelt Administration (Robertson, 2008, p. 14). Philosophically, it desired to return to a purely Lockean type of market and social liberalism. The central point of neoliberalism is a distrust of public institutions and social collectives, while stressing the freedom of the individual, especially economic freedom. Neoliberalism is highly concerned with the reorganization of social institutions, and extricating those institutions from the government (Robertson, 2008, p. 12). Neoliberals view the free market as inherently more efficient than bureaucracy. Furthermore, the government's role should be limited to simply guaranteeing the free market not creating social equity (Kuehn, 2008, p. 55). Greater social equity can be achieved by mimicking the elements of the free market that allow for innovation and efficiency in other parts of society. In other words, neoliberals seek to marketize public institutions. The

marketization of public institutions also means that social outcomes need to be reevaluated in quantifiable terms. For instance, schooling is now widely regarded as economic necessity, and a school's worth is determined by how well they teach skills that are easily transferable to jobs. Marketization requires individuals to think of things in economic terms. Furthermore, Neoliberals see public institutions as inherently inefficient, and having little incentive to function more appropriately (Henig, 1995; Rose, 1999). Marketization also manufactures economic industries that would otherwise never have existed. In education, the testing industry with companies like Kaplan, College Board, Sylan, and Cisco are all examples. Neoliberalism sees itself as a movement for individual freedom. However, that bears a striking internal contradiction. Neoliberals call for greater freedom while simultaneously commodifying and monetizing everything in society. This commodification introduces new ways of control and social inequity, which arguably curtails freedom.

By the 1980s, neoliberalism was largely a right-winged phenomenon. However, the 1990s brought a new breed of leftist who also embraced some neoliberal policies. Bill Clinton's election in the United States in 1992, and Tony Blair's government in the United Kingdom in 1997 being two examples. The leftist embrace of neoliberalism came from a desire to be competitive with right wing parties that were enjoying unprecedented electoral success in the 1980s. Additionally, neoliberalism had some very unexpected cross-cultural appeal. Neoliberalism was popular with economic elites who benefitted financially from a more liberalized economy and expansion of new industries. Interestingly, neoliberalism also managed to appeal to various minorities who embraced individualism as a rejection of the white male

collectivism that dominated American politics (Robertson, 2008, p. 16). This appeal to opposite sides of the social spectrum made it remarkably easy for politicians to adopt neoliberal policies.

In terms of education, understanding neoliberalism becomes very important. Neoliberal ideology seeks to dismantle institutionalized schooling, because neoliberals see "schools as black holes into which money is poured-and seemingly disappears-with nothing near adequate results" (Apple, 2000, p. 59). This puts them in stark contrast to teachers unions who seek to protect institutionalized schooling. Also, neoliberals advocated for teacher merit pay, tying teacher performance to set metrics, and to force schools to compete in order to mimic the effects of a market (Robertson, 2008, p. 20). Teachers unions are opponents of all of these policies. The proliferation of neoliberalism would explain why charter schools are becoming such a popular policy choice for politicians. It could also explain why there is such a distrust of teachers and their unions. After all, teachers unions are one of the core bureaucracies of public schools. Rose argues that is precisely the reason that policymakers exclude teachers from education policy (1999). Neoliberal policymakers see teachers unions as an obstacle to reform. This creates a narrative of the policymaker being an innovator, and the teacher being a defender of the status quo. Neoliberalism is certainly part of the explanation behind the relationship between teachers unions and political parties. However, there is still a gap in the scholarship of why Democrats have embraced neoliberal initiatives in the first place. Neoliberals and teachers are almost diametrically opposed on education policy because of their different views on public institutions. Urban argues that one the primary factors in organizing teacher unions was an intolerance of corporate governance structures in schools (1989, p. 26). Some of the same structures advocated in neoliberal policy.

In tandem with the global rise of neoliberalism was the American rise of neoconservatism. Many people viewed the 1960s as an especially turbulent time in American History. The Civil Rights Movement, the simultaneous and more violent Black Liberation Movement, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and the frequently violent Anti-Vietnam War protests were all major social upheavals. Not to mention the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr., which all happened within five years of one another. This social turmoil gave birth to a movement of conservatives that sought to restore "law and order" in society. There was a particular frustration with the Democratic Party's apparent passivity on these issues. Neoconservatism was grounded in returning America to a calmer and more moral past and defensive hawkishness (Apple, 2000, p. 67). Hypolito argued that neoliberals and neoconservatives forged a "conservative alliance," where neoliberal policy is often justified with neoconservative rhetoric (2008, p. 149). There is also a large degree of overlap between neoconservatives and neoliberals in the Republican Party, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush being notable examples. Within education, neoconservatives criticize the supposed decline of American curriculum and education standards (Apple, 2000, p. 68). The decline of education was part of a broader critique of declining social values. Neoconservatives serve an important role in framing how we discuss education. Even outside of conservative circles, the idea that American education has fallen behind is treated as a foregone conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

LABOR UNIONS & TEACHERS

Any analysis of teachers unions would need to be begin with a broader understanding of labor unions generally. The modern American labor union is a phenomenon that emerged as a response to the Industrial Revolution of the early 20th Century. Although the roots of American labor unions is often drawn at a much earlier point in American History. The first labor unions in the country emerged in the 1790s (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1976, p. 1). These unions were local and often weak at organizing. With no formal collective bargaining rights, labor unions were unable to be a true force for change in labor relations. Nonetheless, labor unions continued to organize well into the Civil War period. By the 1860s, several organizations desiring to unify local unions nationally emerged (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1976, p. 7). Of these organizations, the Noble Order of the Knights of Labor was arguably the most successful. Laborers found the Knights in 1869, and it was the first union in American History to have more than a million members (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1976, p. 10). Despite the Knights early initial success, the organization was relatively short-lived. The Knights' most important contribution to the labor movement is it essentially laid the groundwork for the establishment of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The Knights were a politically leftist organization that could easily be considered socialist by today's standards. Workers who were uncomfortable with the Knights' politics established the AFL in 1881. The goal was creating a more conservative labor union that would focus on "pure unionism" and not leftist politics (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1976, p. 12;

Greene, 1998, p. 36). The AFL became the premier labor union in this country for the better part of the next century.

As national labor unions were formalizing, recessions in 1873 and 1897 caused significant damage to the economy. That damage would cause a huge demographic shift in the workforce. By the late 1890s, women and children entered the workforce in remarkable numbers (Greene, 1998, p. 23). It became necessary for entire families to work to make ends meet. By 1900, women made up a fifth of the formal workforce (Greene, 1998, p. 23). Never before had so many women worked outside the home. Approximately a third of women, especially Black women, were household servants. White women increasingly became teachers and nurses (Greene, 1998, p. 23). Teaching had emerged as one of the most viable work options for a woman (Tyack, 1974, p. 62). In 1870, a slight majority of teachers were women, which increased to 70% by 1900, and 86% by 1920 (Tyack, 1974, p. 61). The expanding labor movement largely ignored women. The AFL in particular was highly exclusionary to both women and minority laborers (Greene, 1998, p. 252). Women not gaining the right to vote until 1920 was also a large piece of the puzzle. Without suffrage, it was just difficult for women to lobby and civically organize. Women receiving the right to vote became a major catalyst for teacher unionization (Greene, 1998, p. 49; Tyack, 1974, p. 65). As a response, female teachers organized labor unions outside of the AFL.

The 20th Century brought an unprecedented growth of manufacturing and industry, which necessitated a large pool of laborers. This marked another fundamental change in the workplace. As a whole, the country moved from an agrarian/farming based economy to one that relied heavily on industrial labor. The immediate consequence of this change is that American

institutions did not keep pace. By the early 20th Century, the federal government did essentially nothing to ensure the working conditions or fair wages of laborers. Furthermore, a society accustomed to farmers, many of whom were self-employed, simply lacked an infrastructure or culture to respond to the needs of laborers adequately. As industry continued to expand, laborers increasingly found themselves in deplorable working conditions. As government policy failed to address these conditions, laborers organized independently.

Originally, labor unions faced fierce opposition from the wealthy capitalist elite. This opposition frequently turned violent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1976, p. 14; Greene, 1998, p. 20). One of the defining attributes of the Industrial Revolution was a remarkable expansion of wealth among the upper echelons of society. The capitalists also held a powerful hold on government policy. Furthermore, labor unions immediately picked up an association with socialists, and even communists (Greene, 1998, p. 2). America's ambivalence, suspicion, and even fear of far left policy made it difficult for labor unions to gain support. Nonetheless, labor unions managed to gain support among laborers themselves, and blue-collar workers broadly. As the labor union movement continued to expand it eventually became a viable demographic of voters. By the 1930s, labor unions entered into a very different relationship with the federal government.

In 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president. A large part of his election victory was a national frustration with President Herbert Hoover's lukewarm attempts to overcome the Great Depression. Americans elected Roosevelt in a landslide as the result of a backlash against Hoover. Unlike his predecessor, Roosevelt managed an unprecedented growth in the federal government and a welfare state. Roosevelt was truly the first American president to substantially

utilize deficit spending to spur public works programs and economic stimulation. Broadly speaking, this allowed Roosevelt to enjoy a positive reception with the working poor. However, the extent of Roosevelt's political genius is truly interesting. Instead of keeping unions at bay like his predecessors, Roosevelt was the first president to embrace organized labor. This began with the Norris-LaGuardia Act of 1932, which made it much harder for employers to use court injunctions to stop labor strikes (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1976, p. 22). Roosevelt then passed the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933. That law legalized collective bargaining. It was struck down by the Supreme Court, and Congress reacted by passing an even stronger law in 1935 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1976, p. 22). The Wagner Act of 1935 gave the right to bargain collectively, and created the National Labor Standards Board, which legitimized unions as institutions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1976, p. 23). The Wagner Act is arguably the single most important piece of labor legislation ever enacted. The Walsh-Healy Act of 1936 established minimum working conditions for companies receiving government contracts (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1976, p. 23). Lastly, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 created the federal minimum wage and maximum work hour standards (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1976, p. 23).

In addition, the Roosevelt Administration essentially created workers compensation programs, the modern 40-hour workweek, and strengthened the Department of Labor. Roosevelt's relationship with organized labor was reciprocal. As the Roosevelt Administration passed a litany of union friendly laws and policies these unions responded with large campaign donations and political organizing. By the 1940s, the Democratic Party's get out the vote efforts was shepherded by labor unions. Organized labor became an indispensable part of the

Democratic Party's normal operation. From 1932 to 1941, union membership nearly quadrupled from three million to eleven million members (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1976, p. 26).

As the American labor movement grew, public education was also expanding throughout the country. The growth and expansion of public schools necessitated a robust teaching force. Within a few short decades, the number of teachers in this country greatly expanded. However, like industrial laborers, teachers faced a similar set of poor working conditions and low pay. According to a 1905 NEA study, in some cities teachers made less than sewer workers (Tyack, 1974, p. 258). According to the Businesswomen's Exchange, a teacher would need to make twice her normal salary just to "maintain her health and self-respect" (Murphy, 1990, p. 69). The low pay and poor working conditions of teachers can be attributed to a few key factors. First, teachers were haphazardly trained, if at all, which not only made the job difficult but also made them easily replaceable because training new teachers was simple. Most teachers had little formal schooling, and many only had a grammar school education (Tyack, 1974, p. 59). Secondly, most teachers were women. The gender of teachers is important because it was widely understood that paying women less money was permissible. In 1920, the average male teacher was paid $61 weekly, while the average female teacher was only paid $36 (Tyack, 1974, p. 62). The common thinking of the day was men would be supporting families, and thus required higher wages. The fact that many teachers were single women compounded this problem. Single women were specifically attracted to the profession because it one of the few viable career options for a woman at this time (Tyack, 1974, p. 62). Also, employing women who made less money was an important cost-saving measure for school districts (Tyack, 1974, p. 62). Thirdly, schools, and by extension school staff, were poorly funded, and federal education funding did

not really exist yet. Lastly, school districts barred female teachers from occupying higher paying position of authority such as principals (Tyack, 1974, p. 60). These conditions gave way to teacher unions in much the same way that similarly poor conditions gave way to labor unions in the industrial manufacturing sector.

Teachers organized, however the effectiveness of these unions languished. Pre-1935 labor unions generally faced a legitimacy issues because it was debatable whether unions had the right to collectively bargain. The Wagner Act changed this in 1935, but not for all workers. The Wagner Act excluded public-sector employees from bargaining collectively. This may seem paradoxical because Democrats were relying so heavily on labor union organizing and donations. Roosevelt embraced unions, but teachers were surprised by his general indifference to their concerns (Murphy, 1990, p. 144). However, this too was all part of Roosevelt's political calculus. Democrats controlled both houses of Congress for next couple of decades. This stunning electoral success was the result of Roosevelt weaving together a coalition of Southerners and laborers.

The Roosevelt coalition was an uneasy union of competing interests, but achieved huge federal election successes nonetheless. The Democratic Party's primary donor base was wealthy southern landowners (Wright & Gunderson, 2004, p. 2). Southern economic elites relied on segregation and a lack of unions to pacify Black and poor White people (Boyle, 1995, p. 46). These southerners were less than thrilled about the organized labor movement. If southern farm workers unionized that would cut deeply into landowner profits. The Roosevelt Administration responded by carefully steering the broader labor movement. It was important to encourage unionization in the heavily industrialized Midwest while leaving the South largely without a

major union presence (Wright & Gunderson, 2004, p. 2). Indeed, even in the modern day, the Midwest is the most unionized part of the country, and the South is the least (Marshall, 2012, para. 3; Winkler, et al, 2012, p. 12; Wright & Gunderson, 2004, p. 2). Additionally, there were fears among Democrats that public-sector employee unions would be especially problematic. If public sector employees unionized, they would drastically increase government spending by calling for benefits and higher wages. Also, there was a concern that a public sector employee union strike could be catastrophic to the normal functioning of government (DiSalvo, 2010). Strikes among public employees would bring government functioning to a halt. To assuage these concerns the Roosevelt Administration made sure not to allow the unionization of government employees while explicitly encouraging the unionization of the Midwestern manufacturing sector. So, Roosevelt needed to balance the desires of labor unions with the anti-union sentiment of Southerners and the anti-public employee union sentiment within his own party. The stunning electoral success of the Democratic Party for the next three decades would allow us to conclude that Roosevelt's balancing act went according to plan.

The historical relationship between Roosevelt, labor unions, and teachers provides some important insight. It is clear that organized labor and the Democratic Party share a close and reciprocated relationship. However, it is also clear that since the inception of this relationship the Democratic Party has been perfectly willing to advocate anti-union policy to further its electoral goals. Since 1932, Democrats have been tinkering with a strange marriage of pro-union and anti-union constituencies. On a separate note, as industrial labor unions enjoyed a cozy relationship with the president, teachers received a much colder reception. Simply put, good political calculus outweighs political loyalty.

Despite lacking institutional legitimacy teachers organized anyway. The National Education Association (NEA) was originally found as the National Teachers Association (NTA) in 1890 (Urban, 1982, p. 26). Although it is currently a labor union, it was originally a professional organization like the Bar Association or American Medical Association. Its goal was the professionalization of teachers. However, in the early 1900s it fundamentally changed. Teachers increasingly demanded the NEA address the poor pay and poor working conditions of teachers (Urban, 1982, p. 113). This debate became contentions and splinter organizations formed with the specific purpose of addressing these concerns. Between 1919 and 1920, 143 separate teacher organizations were formed with the intention of addressing the concerns of teachers (Urban, 1982, p. 118). There was a frustration with the NEA's refusal to unionize despite the poor working conditions of its membership. The NEA became a labor union because it did not want to be supplanted by these other organizations (Urban, 1982, p. 118). Its desire was to be the premier organization representing teachers, which forced it to become a labor union. Meanwhile, in 1916 a conglomeration of smaller teachers unions in the Chicago and Gary, Indiana metropolitan areas formed the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) (Urban, 1982, p. 134). In many ways, the AFT was a rival to the NEA; being one of many organizations that arose do to frustration with the anti-union sentiment of NEA leadership. Quickly, the AFT gained support among teachers, especially teachers in large urban areas.

The Changing Demographics of Labor Unions

Recall that labor union have their roots in Midwestern manufacturing jobs during the advent of the Industrial Revolution. Labor unions emerged as organically organized groups made predominately of the working poor with the purpose of improving the industrial workplace. This

is important because for the first half of the 20th Century labor unions were synonymous with blue-collar manufacturing male employees. At the turn of the century, the most influential labor union was the AFL. The AFL excluded women and minorities and was distinctly white Northern and Western European males (Greene, 1998, p. 25). By the 1920s and 1930s, labor unions grew exponentially in size especially after gaining a level of political institutionalization from the Roosevelt Administration. Slowly the public perception of labor unions changed. Originally, there was suspicion of the supposed link between organized labor and socialism. As a result, the AFL worked mightily to distance itself from radical leftism, which included its break with the Knights of Labor decades earlier (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1976, p. 12; Greene, 1998, p. 36). As unions became a basic facet of American society, the opinion of unions became largely positive. For politicians to identify with labor unions was short hand for supporting blue-collar America. As such, politicians, especially Democrats, sought to advertise their links to labor unions. In regions of the country like the Midwest, where labor unions were robust, seeking alliances with those unions was a necessity for electoral success (Boyle, 1995, p. 11).

By 1962, an important change happened in unionization that drastically shifted the public perception of labor unions. In 1962, John F. Kennedy enacted an executive order allowing federal employees to bargain collectively, which allowed the creation of the first federal employee labor unions (Murphy, 1990, p. 214). The Wagner Act previously prohibited such action. Although this order only narrowly effected federal civilian employees (specifically excluding the military), it had a profound impact. Many states followed the Kennedy Administration's lead and allowed state and local public employees to bargain collectively. The Democratic Party's decision to allow public employee unionization was a product of shrewd

political deal making. Democrats were growing concerned with the frustration of the Southern wing of the party (Boyle, 1995, p. 83). Southern Democrats were far more conservative and much more segregationist that the rest of the party. Under the leadership of Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson in the 1950s, Democrats intentionally defied unions and moved to the political center to appease Southerners (Boyle, 1995, p. 84). Johnson's political tactics were all about maintaining a fragile party unity. Nonetheless, by the 1960s Southern Democrats had already began to defect to the Republican Party. Democrats reacted by strengthening labor unions. Without the South, Democrats needed robust labor unions to stay politically viable. Just one decade later after Kennedy's executive order, there were more unionized teachers than there were unionized manufacturing employees. Since the 1970s, teaching has been the most heavily unionized profession in the nation (Murphy, 1990, p. 209). The NEA and AFT supplanted the AFL as the largest and most influential labor unions in the country.

Kennedy's executive order marked an incredible demographic shift in labor union populations. Public employees unionized at remarkably quick rates. Today 40% of all government employees are members of a labor union (Farber, 2005, p. 3). Note that the government primarily hires highly educated technocratic officials. So, for the first time union members were highly educated, and middle or upper middle class (Schmitt & Warner, 2009, pp. 1-2). There is now a considerably higher representation of women and minorities within unions as well (Schmitt & Warner, 2009, pp. 1-2). A typical labor union member was no longer male or blue-collar. Blue-collar manufacturing employees decreased from 30% of union members in 1983, to less than 10% in 2008 (Schmitt & Warner, 2009, p. 1). In fact, typical union members are now far more likely to be college educated middle class women. "Public sector employees,

especially teachers, welcomed unionism but their identities as being working class has always been problematic" (Murphey, 2008, p. 75). The obvious consequence of such a demographic shift is Americans became less likely to associate labor unions with male blue-collar Americans. The unionization of public employees fundamentally changed how people perceived labor unions. The decreasing vitality of private sector labor unions compounded this issue. The rapid industrialization of America had reached its peak, and for the second half of the 20th Century other nations in Central America, Asia, and Africa industrialized at a miraculously quick pace. Manufacturing jobs were being outsourced to other continents. Furthermore, after World War II protectionist government policies declined leading to an opening up of a new global economy. Wage competition from various countries further depressed wages and encouraged outsourcing. From an economic point of view, the higher wage and capital cost of America made large-scale manufacturing in this country unrealistic. So, as private sector unions decreased, public sector unions increased as more states were allowing public employees to gain collective bargaining rights. Chief among those new labor unions members were teachers, because teachers by far outnumbered all other public employees.

Since their inception, some of the primary concerns of labor unions have included improving working condition and increasing wages. This is largely true for teachers unions as well. Teachers unions advocated vigorously for improved wages, professional recognition of teaching, and increased educational spending. One of the early teachers' unions' most famous initiatives was to put a national end to one-room schoolhouses (Scribner, 2015, p. 537). On this effort, teachers were highly successful. Across the board, teachers unions have and continue to advocate for significant increases in educational spending on both the local and federal level.

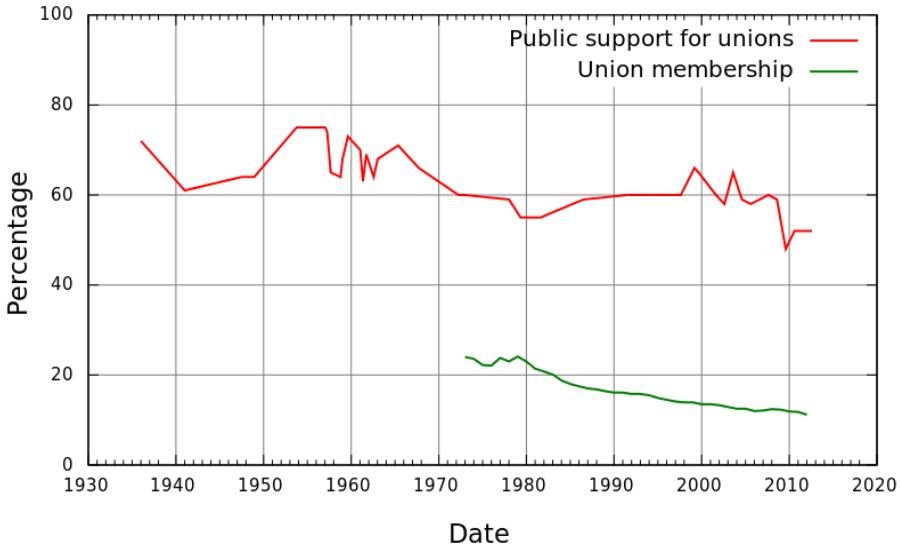
This creates an important contrast to manufacturing labor unions. Manufacturing labor unions also advocated increase spending in the form of wages and working conditions, but that never, or only tangentially, involved public spending. Teachers on the other hand were explicitly calling for public spending on schools and their wages.

An important feature of how Americans perceive teachers unions is their demand for increased spending in education. Several decades ago, Americans largely had a sympathetic view of unions. Today, unions are primarily populated by middle class public employees that are advocating tax increases to fund union demands. This has turned union sympathy into union resentment. Labor union no longer have the strong identification with the working poor or blue-collar workers. Instead, the face of labor unions is frequently a teacher advocating a tax hike to fund smaller class sizes. Many people perceive public sector unions, especially teachers unions, as tax and spend advocates. Furthermore, labor unions have a reputation of defending the demands of their members above all else (Kercher & Cooper, p. 219). For a private sector labor union, this is not a problem. Private sector unions can afford to state explicitly that they weight the demands of union members above corporate profits, for example. Public sector unions have no such luxury. There is a public expectation that teachers are altruistic and self-sacrificing. Therefore, when teachers unions demand raises during a large budget deficit those demands are viewed as unwarranted and selfish. Many expect teachers to forego raises and benefits to prioritize students, schools, and communities. When recession, fiscal issues, or deficits occur, there is frequently a public expectation that public employees, namely teachers, should accept pay decreases and budget cuts. This is strange because private sector employees are not given these same expectations during economic downturns. However, because teachers do have a set of

arguably unfair expectations it allows this level of public resentment to be directed at teachers unions.

So, that brings us to the question. What does public resentment of teachers unions mean politically? For many years, Democrats could not afford to criticize unions because doing so would alienate blue-collar voters. This is no longer true today. Many of those same blue-collar voters actually resent teachers unions. This gives Democrats and politicians broadly, permission to criticize them harshly. Public approval of labor unions began to decline in the 1960s, which

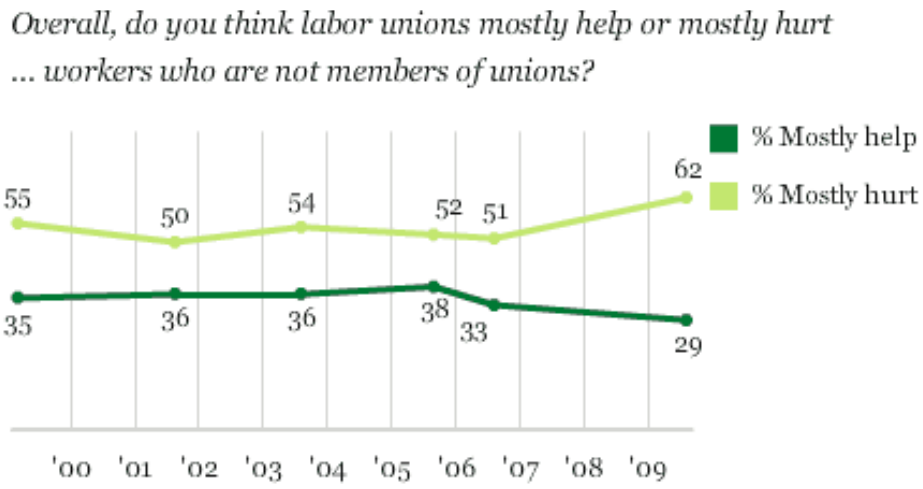
Figure 1. Public support of labor unions since 1930 (Hirch & Mcpherson, 2009)



coincides directly to the advent of public sector unionization. In the graph above between 1930 and 1960 support for labor unions ebbed and flowed but stayed between 60% and 70%. The 1960s begins a decade's long trend of decline in union support. The first time union support reached less than 60% was in the 1970s, which is also the decade where teachers first outnumbered manufacturing employees as labor union members. It is true that decline in labor union support closely correlates to decreasing labor union membership. However, the majority of that decrease is the decline of private sector unions because public sector union membership is

very high. In other words as public sector employees occupy a large portion of total union membership the public begins to view them less favorably. In recent years, labor union support

Figure 2. Labor union support 2000-2009 (Saad, 2010)



has fallen below 50%, an all-time low. (Although in 2015 Gallup reported that union support has rebounded somewhat). As labor union support reaches new lows, negative rhetoric against labor unions has been intensifying. In the graph above, based on data collected by Gallup, one can see a clear majority of Americans see the net effects of labor unions as negative. In fact, 62% of Americans see labor unions as "mostly hurting" non-union workers. This is a stark contrast to the 1930s where just shy of 80% of Americans had a positive opinion of unions. This data also presents another interesting fact. The public do not merely have a negative opinion of labor unions, but partially blame labor unions for the plight of workers. What is also striking about this data is that the public union membership rate (mostly teachers) continued to be five times the rate of private sector unions ("Union Member Summary," 2017). Furthermore, education and library occupations continue to have the highest unionization rates of any career fields ("Union Member Summary," 2017).

The data are clear, demographic shifts in labor union membership has a profound, or at least a large contributing, effect on how people view unions. Additionally, resentment towards unions have been increasing which gives politicians license to attack unions. In practice, this means teachers unions face the lion's share of this criticism because they make up such a large portion of the unionized work force.

Perceptions of Teachers Unions

As previously discussed teachers unions' advocacy of spending can breed public resentment. That resentment creates a political license to criticize teachers unions and advocate policies contrary to them. However, to understand this phenomenon fully we need to investigate thoroughly the history of teacher union perception. The media plays an incredible role in socially constructing society. News media is not an altruistic service for society, but rather a profit-motivated industry. News media is not merely interested in reporting details. "…they are in the business of *producing* news" (Goldstein, 2011, p. 548). In other words, the media consistently shapes and repackages news to induce ratings, and therefore more profit. How education and teachers unions are framed in the news is then highly consequential, because the decisions on how to report about teachers unions is not an accident. It is a purposeful choice.

The media has a history of framing teachers unions negatively. Labor unions generally have been criticized for alleged association to far left political agendas, and public employee unions have been criticized for causing government inefficiency and over spending. Specifically, the criticism of teachers unions begins at their inception. Beginning in the early 1900s the media's tone of teachers unions was highly critical of their identification with women. For examples, the media criticized teachers unions for being early advocates of women's suffrage

(Murphy, 1990; Urban, 1982, p. 139). A more interesting example would be the American South. Labor unions in the South are weak for a couple of reasons. First, public employees in the majority of Southern state still lack collective bargaining rights (Winkler, et al, 2012). Furthermore, many Southern states make mandatory collectively bargaining illegal. Second, the South attempts to attract industries from other regions of the country by emphasizing right to work legislation and lower wages (Marshall, 2012, para. 17). This creates an intense media portrayal of unions preventing Southern states from attracting jobs. Unions are subsequently blamed for slow economic growth despite their weak presence in the region. "The attitude of the press in the South is predominantly anti-union" (Marshall, 2012, para. 13). There is a narrative of labor unions being "outside agitators" that will hurt the southern economy (Marshall, 2012, para 15). This is due to a perceived liberal media bias causing many people to doubt the validity of positive stories about unions (Goldstein, 2011, p. 545). The alignment of teachers unions with the political left is well known, and the liberal bias of the media is widely believed. News outlets may need to be cautious about positive stories featuring teachers unions in order to be perceived as fair. Ironically, fair and balanced coverage of teachers unions may have the appearance of bias. Thus, critical coverage of teachers unions becomes the norm. There is a perception of teachers unions propagating a failing status quo. This belief is constantly replicated in coverage on teachers unions because critics of education dominate policy discourse in education (Boyd, 2003, p. 1). For example, the New York Times ran prominent stories featuring segments reading "vote for the worst unionized teachers" (Goldstein, 2011, p. 555). Many people see teachers unions consistently opposing reform, making them appear inherently oppositional and combative (Cowen & Struck, 2014, p. 16). Alhamdan and colleagues conducted a 2014 study of newspapers

in five countries showed a dominance of negative stories when discussing teachers unions (2014, p. 16). So, negative public opinion of teachers' unions is actually an international phenomenon.

Examples of the media portraying teachers as spending advocates and oppositional are plentiful. The Washington Post ran a story detailing how Oklahoma teachers were demanding more funding days after the legislature approved a funding increase (Associate Press, 2018). The implication being that teachers were asking for funding…again. Another article in the Post had the tagline "Kentucky teachers shut down multiple schools system" (St. George, 2018). In another article, The Post described teachers' strikes as "rebellions" (Murphy, 2018). In the Chicago Tribune, an editorial described district-union relations by saying "if management is from Mars, and labor is from Venus, we must be in the world of the Chicago Teachers Union" (Editorial Board, 2015). Another editorial talked about the "incredible destruction caused by illogical teachers unions" (Editorial Board, 2017). The tone of many of these articles are not necessarily critical (although some are), but they do uniformly paint a picture of teachers being oppositional and stalwart. This has cemented an image of teachers being opponents in the public consciousness. In a review of 66 articles on education Goldstein found that the New York Times referred to teachers unions negatively in 54.4% of articles, and positively in 4.5% of articles with the remainder being neutral (2011, p. 553). Time Magazine was much worst, referring to teachers unions negatively 82.6% of the time (Goldstein, 2011, p. 553). Cowen & Struck found that stories about teachers unions tend to be negative when they oppose polices, despite the reasons they are opposing (2014, p. 16). Oppositions simply connotes negativity. Which is especially problematic for teachers unions because they are much better at opposing than advocating policy (Kerchner & Koppich, 1993, p. 2).

Furthermore, journalist are often uninformed about the nuances of education policy and rely on anti-union data sources (such as Center for Union Facts and the Education Policy Institute) to discuss education policy (Goldstein, 2011, p. 549). Therefore, anti-union organizations shape how the media discusses education policy and teachers unions. A rather controversial example of this would be the Bush Administration. Bush's Department of Education created media content favorable to No Child Left Behind and circulated them to news outlets (Gamboa, 2005, p. 2; Goldstein, 2011, p. 544). These videos incited an investigation by the Government Accountability Office in 2005 at the request of Ted Kennedy. The news media used those videos in coverage about education across the country. In 2010, Oscar winning documentarian Davis Guggenheim released *Waiting for Superman*. The narrative of this documentary was clear. American public education was a failing institution that was falling drastically behind the rest of world. This was due to poorly structured curricula, inadequate education policy, and outright incompetence. However, a large part of the narrative was the obtrusive presence of teachers unions. *Waiting for Superman* explicitly blames teachers for inefficient education spending, tenure system that encourage incompetence, termination procedures that are laughably over the top, and poorly trained teachers. The New York Times ran favorable articles about the documentary, which praised one of the documentary's central figures Michelle Rhee. Rhee was the short lived Chancellor of DC public schools who made a name for herself for challenging the local teachers union, a move which is praised by the Times (Holden, 2010). Reviews were exceptionally strong for the documentary. Many news outlets nationwide regurgitated the arguments and data of this documentary. Within *Waiting for Superman*, one commentator stated "teachers unions are a menace." In another segment, Guggenheim argues

that if we had sent currently incarcerated prisoners to private schools instead, they would not have gone to prison, and would have actually saved the taxpayer $24,000 per prisoner. The implication here is that public schools under the influence of teachers unions are too inadequate to provide a decent education. The underlining thesis of *Waiting for Superman* is schools can succeed once we extricate them from burdensome bureaucracy and allow them to innovate. This is an implicit endorsement of charter schools, and a criticism of teachers unions. This is one clear example of how anti-union discourse was then absorbed into popular media discourse.

Waiting for Superman is not alone in the universe of the media using education documentaries. Look no further than the pro-charter school documentary, *The Lottery*, which shares a number of similarities with Guggenheim's film. According to one editorial in the New York Daily News, "the film is designed to knock the ambivalent off the fence when it comes to the benefits of charter schools, and it does" (Louis, 2010). The rhetoric of the article goes on to criticize teachers unions, "outstanding performance by charter schools has provoked envy, resentment, and an organized backlash from teachers unions" (Louis, 2010). One commentator in *The Lottery* referred to New York City's teachers union, the United Federation of Teachers, as "thuggish."

There are other examples of the news uncritically reproducing anti-union data. Former US Secretary of Education Rod Paige's book *The War Against Hope: How Teachers Unions Hurt Children* is an obvious instance (Goldstein, 2011, p. 557). The thesis of Paige's book is that teachers unions are largely unconcerned with children, and selfishly concerned with the financial security of teachers. Also, teachers unions are powerful actors that diminish school districts and administrators, which makes progress impossibly difficult. Controversially, when Paige spoke at

events about the book he compared teachers unions to “terrorists’ organizations” (Koppich, 2005, p. 149). Nonetheless, the news presented an anti-union data source as objective fact. Yet another example would be an article published by USA Today in 2008 that mentioned, “it cost $250,000 to fire an incompetent teacher in New York” (Eltman, 2008). Afterward, the Center for Union Facts heavily publicized that figure. Several publications repeated that figure including New York Times, the New York Post, the New York Daily News, Fox News, NBC News, the National Review, and even the Orange County Register. All of these publications simply repeated the high cost of firing teachers, often framing it as an argument against costly tenure systems and teachers unions who advocate for these tenure systems. However, $250,000 is actually quite misleading. That number includes severance packages and the cost of hiring and training replacement teachers. Both of which are cost that school districts would have to undertake anyway, regardless of tenure. Indeed, firing employees is expensive in every career field because of severance, hiring, and training costs. The expenses of terminating employees is not unique to teaching.

One of the core reasons why the media frames teachers unions so negatively is the institutional design of unions themselves. Labor unions are designed to be worker centric, not student centric (Kerchner & Cooper, 2003, p. 219). In the early 1900s during the expansion of labor unions they were engineered to have an adversarial relationship with managers and manufacturing owners (Kerchner & Koppich, 1993, p. 9). If labor unions succeeded in increasing wages and improving working conditions it would result in a decline in profits. Despite being demographically very different, teachers unions operate in largely the same manner as labor unions in any other occupation. This means that teachers unions are institutionally structured to

have an adversarial relationship with school administration, school districts, and policymakers. The adversarial nature of teachers unions makes cooperative policymaking difficult. An adversarial system works fine in the private sector, but becomes more problematic in the public sector. Generally, capitalists and corporations engender little sympathy. Therefore, opposing them is hardly controversial. This is in stark contrast to how the most people view public servants. For a teachers union to be an opponent of a popular politician, for instance, evokes very different emotions. As explained above, the media frequently portrays teachers unions as tax and spend advocates, as adversarial obstructionist, and as inherently oppositional. “Most school boards and administration association journals portray teachers unions as shallowly self-interested and incapable of considering the true needs of students and schools” (Kerchner & Koppich, 1993, p. 15).

Negative perceptions of teachers unions do not stop at their tendency for opposition and policy obstruction. At a fundamental level, there is a widely held notion that teachers are not capable, and cannot provide a sufficient expert opinion on matters of education. Various scholars have written about the neoliberal underpinning behind government policy, and education policy in particular. What is significant here is the tendency of neoliberal policy to remove policy decisions away from government institutions and towards private institutions. The advent of charter schools is an obvious example. It is a clear attempt to extricate schooling from government bureaucracy and school districts. A hallmark of neoliberalism is distrust of government bureaucracies and the people within them. For a neoliberal policymaker the “experts” within a failing institution are incapable of solving the issues inherent in the institution (Rose, 1999, p. 87). Additionally, free market forces are just categorically better and more

sophisticated at solving complex problems. The consequence of this kind of thinking is there is now a widespread belief that teachers are *not* experts (Peters, 2005). Therefore, consulting teachers and teachers unions about policy decisions is unnecessary, and maybe even counterproductive. Neoliberal policymakers shape policy by ignoring on-the-ground experts and any deliberative process. Ironically, policymakers shape policy and simultaneously silence the people for whom they were shaping the policy. It is an attempt to empower people by disempowering them. Neoliberal policymaking is also concerned with the benefits of policy in economic terms. This creates a policy bias for metrics that are easily quantifiable, which explains educational policy preferences for things like test scores. The issue is education is not easily quantifiable, and simplistic measurements of student performance may not be capturing what is actually happening in the classroom. Therefore, the very data used to justify neoliberal education policy is questionable. The prevalence of neoliberalism in education policy would provide politicians with a license to ignore the demands of teachers. Routinely, teachers are viewed as incompetent, unskilled, and part of the problem. There is a public acceptance that education policy can, and should happen outside of the sphere of influence of teachers. This further intensifies the adversarial relationship between teachers unions and policymakers.

News media has served an integral role in creating a negative perception of teachers unions. This creates a political culture where criticism of teachers unions and public education is oftentimes commonplace and common sense. Politicians would not be able to wantonly criticize "failing schools" and teachers unions without a media that has already created a conveniently negative narrative. Again, the negative perception of teachers unions gives politicians a license

to criticize. Goldstein writes about how even students within a school of education have squarely accepted negative views of schools.

> At the beginning of each semester, I poll my undergraduate teacher education students to explore their beliefs about teaching, learning, and public schools. They express a number of beliefs that are firmly rooted in the American psyche: parents don't care, teachers are the "least smart," progressive education is too soft, "we" need to go back to basics, money to fund schools isn't important, understanding education theory isn't important, and so on. Quite literally, there is a "crisis" in education. When I prod further to explore the origins of these beliefs, many students comment they just know it, it was from personal experience, their parents told them, they have read/heard about it in/on the news/television/paper/internet, and most recently 'it must be true because we have No Child Left Behind' (Goldstein, 2011, p. 546).

Even among teacher candidates, negative opinions about schooling is present. It is important to recognize that much of these opinions are informed by news media and unflattering public discourse. When negativity of schools and teachers unions is this engrained in the public, it becomes much easier for politicians to blame teachers unions for our educational problems. It also makes cooperative policymaking with teachers unions uniquely difficult.

Our Brand is Crisis

Varner argues that hysteria is an important policy motivator (1961, p. 451). Policymakers are fully aware of the ability of hysteria to usher in new policies and reforms. This recognition opens up a space for strategic use of public hysteria. Henig notes that national security has a special relationship with hysteria (1995, p. 26). At least in the United States, when we connect social problems with national security concerns it becomes easy to enact reforms. In education, hysteria has manifest itself in the language of "crisis." We frame education as a perpetually failing institution teetering on the brink of collapse when compared to other parts of the world. Varner argues that education then becomes a convenient scapegoat for social problems (1961, p. 451). In America, state and local governments typically handle education. However, federal

interest in education does periodically occur. “Usually a major societal change-a ‘crisis’-triggers a burst of concern about schooling” (Tyack & Cuban, p. 43). In 1983, Reagan’s education staff published *A Nation at Risk*. It argued that the future of America’s prosperity was in jeopardy due to a decline in educational outcomes. As previously discussed a number of studies has demonstrated that the report’s false conclusion (Berliner & Biddle, 1996; Bracey, 2003; Evans, 2015; Henig 1995). Henig argues the Reagan Administration manufactured a crisis to enact several ideological education reforms. In other words, policymakers made a conscience decision to use the rhetoric of crisis to motivate new policy (Henig, 1995, pp. 26-27). Reagan’s first Secretary of Education, Terrell Bell, even admitted to using the rhetoric of crisis in education to push policy proposals like further standardization in education (Evans, 2015, p. 7). The rhetoric of a crisis in education is everywhere, for instance, the name of the seminal report on public schools in Detroit is “A School District in Crisis.” Berliner & Biddle extensively document how the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton Administrations all invoked the language of “crisis” to enact their education agendas (1996). Tyack & Cuban argue that “crisis” is a core part of the lexicon used to describe schools (1974, p. 269).

Framing social problems as a crisis, whether real or imagined, is a powerful policy tool. If a policymaker can convince people that a crisis exists then it may be enough to create momentum to enact change. This is especially true when that crisis is connected (no matter how tenuous the connection) to national security just as *A Nation at Risk* did with education. We can distinguish federal education policy with two prominent features. First, schools are asked to do contradictory things by policymakers, and sometimes simultaneously. Policymakers at the federal and state-level design policy independently, and due to that policies will often conflict

(Guggenheim, 2010). For example, the George H.W. Bush administration pushed for decentralized decision making/states rights in education while advocating strict uniform national curriculum standards (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 45). This was an argument in favor of both state and federal autonomy in education. In 1989, Bush had even advocated for both policies in the *same* speech. Second, education governance in America is dramatically decentralized, with reforms having to be disseminated by fifty states, numerous cities, and thousands of school district. Between the federal government, states, counties, cities, and school districts our education system can have as many as five layers of policy and regulation. This makes crafting policy inherently difficult because compliance to new education reforms is hard to monitor when there are so many layers to government. The Department of Education is not nearly as powerful as counterpart ministries of education in other countries, and it has little capacity to manage a national education apparatus. These two features makes it difficult for the federal government to *ever* construct effective education policy.

Furthermore, Tyack & Cuban have written about the "grammar of schooling." The grammar of schooling refers to the institutional and organizational norms of schools. For example, age-graded classrooms, norms about curriculum, and common academic subjects are all examples. These organizational features are essentially universal in schools and have exhibited surprisingly little change over the decades. When policymakers implement changes to these features they usually fail. Tyack & Cuban argue that teachers are one the biggest causes of this institutional stubbornness. They argue that teachers need a predictable atmosphere to discharge their daily duties (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 86). Changes to the grammar of schooling makes instruction unpredictable and thus more difficult in practice. Teachers then opt to find

ways to keep schools systematically consistent. Teachers are therefore pedagogically conservative, and prefer a predictable environment (Urban, 1982, p. 174). Despite not being policymakers themselves, teachers have a significant degree of influence on education policy because all education policies rely on them for implementation. In other words, public schools (teachers in particular) are highly resistant to change which is an even bigger impediment to education reform.

Teachers unions are politically very liberal, but pedagogically they are extremely conservative. Teachers unions are highly resistant to and suspicious of change. The change resistant nature of teachers unions then creates an immediate problem for a federal government attempting increasingly more radical education reforms. Teachers unions have squarely positioned themselves as the defenders of public schools (Kerchner & Cooper, 2003, p. 220). Institutionally, teachers unions are almost designed to oppose sweeping education reform and policy. Teachers unions are quick to argue that the rhetoric of crisis is overblown and unnecessary. This opens teachers unions to significant criticism because there is a public consensus about public schools being failures. By extension, because of the crisis nature of schools politicians are under pressure to introduce more invasive reforms. Politicians cannot afford to be supporting a status quo that the public thinks is inherently failing. In other words, politicians *must* oppose and criticize the change resistant nature of teachers unions. If politicians fail to criticize teachers unions, they run the risk of defending an unpopular school system.

The administrative progressive movement in education, Sputnik, racial integration, *A Nation at Risk*, and No Child Left Behind were all imperative catalysts in national education policy. In each of these cases, education was framed as being woefully inadequate, inefficient,

and ineffective. For decades, the normal rhetoric surrounding education has been that it is a failing institution. In the public consciousness, we often assume that public schools are failing and underperforming compared to both private and non-American schools (Berliner & Biddle, 1996). The rhetoric of crisis has always accompanied schools, but *A Nation at Risk* was important in implanting failing schools as an important federal issue. Before the 1980s, federal politicians often discussed schools in two contexts: (1) issues of racial integration and inequity in the wake of Brown vs. The Board of Education, and (2) issues of Cold War era competition with the Soviet Union. After *A Nation at Risk*, things like school governance and curriculum were now a prominent federal political issue. For example, George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush made education a major part of their platforms, and the elder Bush deemed himself the "education president." Bill Clinton once criticized George H.W. Bush be saying he was the nation's "*real* education president" (Guggenheim, 2010).

The 1990s is a particularly interesting time when examining policy convergence in education and perceptions of schools. The Reagan Administration created the current wave of crisis-style rhetoric in education, which lead to a public outcry expecting more intensive federal education reforms. As a response, Democratic politicians were now under renewed pressure to introduce education reforms and recycle crisis rhetoric. Republicans had succeeded in constructing the narrative of the "failing school" and education being in need of accountability (Apple, 2000, p. 68). Republicans were also enjoying a decade of electoral success. Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan's stunning political successes in the 1970s and 1980s lead to a surge of populist right wing politics, which was part of the larger conservative restoration of that era (Apple, 2000; Hypolito, 2008). Nixon and Reagan's rise to political influence was also aided by

the defection of conservative Southern Democrats to the Republican Party. As a result, voters elected Nixon and Reagan in unprecedented landslides. This also coincides with a global rise in neoliberal politics. Countries as varied as China and the United Kingdom also had a wave of successful neoliberal populist politicians (Robertson, 2008, p. 11). In an attempt to curb Reagan-style Republicans, Democrats moved to the political center. It is no mistake that the Democratic Party nominated a string of moderate Southern Democrats to the presidential ticket (Jimmy Carter of Georgia, Bill Clinton of Arkansas, Lloyd Bentsen of Texas, and Al Gore of Tennessee). Liberal presidential contenders like Michael Dukakis fared poorly in this period of conservative resurgence (Silver, 2008). Democratic politicians made an intentional effort to be more moderate, and often times that meant adopting Republican rhetoric and policy initiatives. This is exemplified in the presidency of Bill Clinton. Clinton was the poster child of the "New Democrats" movement, which controlled the party until being supplanted by a liberal resurgence in the mid-2000s. The New Democrats were centrists, and open to populist conservative policies. This movement emerged in 1984 under the leadership of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC). It was a mechanism to wrestle moderate voters away from the Reagan Coalition, which controlled the federal government during the 1980s. Clinton was also a former Chairman of the DLC. The New Democrats embraced a number of neoliberal policies, especially in education. For instance, Bill Clinton's Administration was the architect of the federal charter school program that established the first charter schools in defiance of teacher unions (Barone & Lombardo, 2016, p. 10). This is interesting because small government conservatives were championing charter schools, and it emerged as a potential policy measure by the George H.W. Bush Administration. Clinton also implemented many of the same accountability polices

advocated by the George H.W. Bush Administration. Clinton's accountability measures pressured school districts to close failing schools and encouraged innovation (Koch, 1999). Those measures in many ways laid the groundwork for later legislation like the No Child Left Behind Act. As Governor of Arkansas, Bill and Hillary Clinton initiated a vast array of accountability measures. Clinton's presidency demonstrates a beginning of policy convergence in education. After leaving office in 2001, the Democratic Party largely continued down a road of agreeing with Republicans on education policy and adopting crisis-style rhetoric. For example, the Presidential Election of 2000 saw both major party candidates make education a large part of their platforms with shockingly similar rhetoric and policies (Boyd, 2003, p. 2). The Presidential Election of far-right conservative George W. Bush and two preemptive wars in the Middle East were catalysts for the liberalization of the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party of today has largely abandoned the centrism of the Clinton years. Nonetheless, the legacy of New Democratic policies remains in education. The rhetoric of crisis and failing schools has become so ingrained in education policymaking that accountability measures are still the preferred policy option of both parties. In addition, the rising tide of neoliberalism and marketization in education has not subsided. Meanwhile, debates of how schools are ran has transitioned from local to federal politics. The rhetoric of crisis in education, paired with a new federal mandate to cultivate education policy had some profound implications. If schools were truly in a crisis and lagging behind the rest of the world then sweeping radical education reform is necessary.

The result is a pernicious cycle of education reform. Policymakers identify some kind of social "crisis" which justifies new intervention in education. They then design a new policy, but

it often has contradictory goals and expects schools to produce simultaneous contradictory results. Then, the bureaucratic bodies implementing these policies have poor assessment tools to measure success, and poor oversight tools to monitor compliance. Then, teachers act as fundamental elements of resistance and rebuff many policies. By this point, the policy has failed. However, the failure of the policy then justifies even more intrusive education reforms that will, hopefully, penetrate this stubborn institution. Failures of previous reforms just create a narrative of needing more reform (Boyd, 2003, p. 3). Each policy failure simply ushers in new education policy but duplicates the errors of the preceding policies. Nonetheless, the most ridiculous part of this cycle is that politicians will frequently continue to replicate the cycle. Politicians cannot afford to do nothing about education because there is a public expectation for someone to "fix" schools. To appease voters, politicians must advocate innovative education reforms, which are continuously more radical than previous education reforms. "A race is on among political leaders to see who can promote the toughest testing and accountability programs in schools" (Boyd, 2003, p. 3). This positions politicians, both Democrats and Republicans, as enemies of teachers unions who are largely defenders of this existing school system and become increasingly exasperated by a string of failed education reforms.

One of the central questions of this thesis is why Democrats advocate policies that are at odds with teachers unions. The partial answer is Democrats are concerned about the appearance of responding to a crisis in education. It is important to the Democratic Party for voters to view them as capable and innovative, not hesitant to change a broken institution. The very nature of education policy in this country necessitates Democrats distancing themselves from teachers in education policy. It may seem cynical, but Democrats might be aware that these policies will not

work. The nature of our educational institutions means many policies will have little chance of lasting effective change. However, actual change may not be the goal. It appears that the goal may be performative. Democratic politicians need to appear to be doing something to fix education to maintain the confidence of voters. As the old political adage goes "we must do something, this is something, therefore we must do it." For example, the Obama Administration mimicking many of the accountability policies of the Bush Administration despite a decade of the Democratic Party saying those policies were ineffective. Another example would be the Democratic Party's continued support and reauthorization of Clinton's charter school program despite little evidence of improvements in educational outcomes (Levy, 2010).

The stubborn nature of schools is important; they are remarkably adept at rebuffing new reforms. Therefore, these reforms will often fail at producing meaningful results. No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, for example, have done little to change education outcomes (Pierson, 2011). That is the cause of the cycle of policymakers introducing reforms, reforms failing, and then policymakers justifying more reforms. The Democratic Party opposes teachers unions because there is an important political incentive to do so. Democrats and Republicans are under tremendous pressure to "fix" schools, and voters expect radical education reform. Meanwhile, the media instigates that expectation for radical education reform.

Republican and Democratic education policy may not be a result of sincere desires to help schools, but rather a result of carefully planned political calculus. Both parties recognize that the appearance of dramatic reform is needed to appease the desires of voters who think schools are failing and falling far behind the rest of the world. Whether these policies work or not is beside the point. The only thing that matters is that voters are satisfied in seeing sweeping

education reform. This explains the great deal of policy convergence on education between Democrats and Republicans.

Weak Teachers Unions: A Key Policy Goal

"If labor unions are the Democratic Party's base, then teachers unions are the base of the base" (Brill, 2010). The Democratic Party has shared a long, intimate, and interdependent relationship with organized labor. Over the past few decades, the share of workers who are unionized has steadily declined. This means that teachers have emerged as a much larger share of the total organized labor pool, and is still one of the most unionized professions in the United States (Brill, 2010). Teachers have emerged as a key constituency for Democrats.

Meanwhile at state and federal levels there have been a clear preference by Republicans for policies that weaken unions. Republican governors in the last decade have campaigned hard for and in many cases succeeded in turning states into "right to work" states, which makes it an order of magnitude more difficult to sustain labor unions. Republicans have now spearheaded right to work legislation in 26 states (Wilson, 2016). In Wisconsin, a Republican controlled legislature was instrumental in dismantling public sector unions (Wilson, 2016). In Iowa, Republican legislators advocated stripping public sector unions' right to bargain for health insurance (Pfannensteil, 2017). In Texas, Republicans advocated barring minors from joining labor unions (Marvit, 2016). In Kentucky, Republicans repealed union supported wage protections (Wilson, 2016). In Florida, Republicans advocated new and unpopular transparency rules for public sector unions (Clark, 2017). Across the country, Republicans have advocated for right to work legislation, rollbacks to wage protections, and preventing public sector employees from unionizing, especially in the South.

All of this begs the questions, what benefit would Republicans have for dismantling labor unions? By attacking unions, Republicans have an easy mechanism to fundamentally damage the organizing efforts of the Democratic Party. Republicans could significantly impact the fundraising and get out the vote efforts of their rival party. Such a situation would undoubtedly strengthen the Republican political position. In no uncertain terms, there is a clear practical and ideological incentive to advocating anti-union policies.

As mentioned previously teachers unions are a key Democratic supporter. It would logically follow that if Republicans advocate policies to weaken labor unions generally, then they may also advocate policies to weaken teachers unions specifically. In recent years, Republicans have embraced decentralization and charter schools as important education policies. An important consideration is that the overwhelming majority of charter schools are *not* unionized (Beabout, 2015; Fabricant & Fine, 2015; Kohl, 2014). Note that charter schools have also been expanding most quickly in major cities, which have a heavy teacher union presence. It is no accident that cities with strong unions have experienced such growth with charters. Detroit is an easily identifiable case study. The Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) have been a major political force in the city for decades (Mirel, 1999). However, a 93% increase in charters, and an 84% decrease in traditional public school enrollment since 1966 has greatly weakened the DFT (Grover & Vander Velde, 2015). New Orleans is another case. After Hurricane Katrina and a big charter school expansion the teachers union nearly disappeared (Bukley, Henig, & Levin, 2010, pp. 177-178). This is further compounded by the fact that traditional public school attendance has been shrinking in many cities while charter school attendance has been growing. The immediate effect of that phenomenon is charters are hiring teachers quicker than public schools;

New York City is just one example where most teacher hiring is done by charter schools (Fabricant & Fine, 2015, p. 14). So, we are adding more and more teachers to a non-unionized pool of workers.

The stated motivation for charter school support is increased competition in education. This motivation may or may not be sincere, but the correlation between charter expansion and teacher union strength is noticeable. Ideologically, charter schools were established to extricate education from bureaucracy, by extension charter schools would also prevent unionization, one of the hallmark bureaucracies of urban education (Beabout, 2015, p. 487). In a world where charter schools are growing in number Teach for America and alternative certification programs have emerged as an important enabler. Teach for America, and programs like it, allow charter schools to easily tap a pool of recruits to fill teaching posts. So, it comes as no surprise that charter schools principals have reported that they would be more likely to hire Teach for America corps members that traditional public school principals (Rudnick, 2015, p. 23). Therefore, Republican support of alternative certification program is probably not accidental. It is to enable the expansion of charter schools, which then weaken powerful teachers unions. Charters schools and accountability measures are an important policy tool used by the Republican Party to weaken the donor base of its primary rival. The Democratic Party, on other hand, takes a calculated risk to also engage in many of these same policies in an attempt to "fix" schools.

CHAPTER FOUR

CAMPAIGN FINANCE AND ELECTORAL CAPTURE

The Changing Landscape of Campaign Finance

Several historical dynamics help explain the relationship between teachers unions and the Democratic Party. However, another dimension also deserves attention. Campaign finance has undergone a dramatic change in the last decade, and those changing dynamics explain why teachers unions have been experiencing a decline in influence within the Democratic Party in recent years. The chart below shows the ten largest organizational donors to the Democratic Party in the last three federal election cycles (2012, 2014, and 2016). This information comes from the Open Secrets database managed by the Center for Responsive Politics. Most of this analysis will be limited to just the last decade due to the limitations of Open Secrets data. In those three election cycles, the NEA and AFT were reliably among the party's ten largest donors.

Table 1. Organizational donors to the Democratic Party

	Presidential Election Year		Mid-Term Election Year		Presidential Election Year	
	2016 Top Democratic Donors (Organizations)	Campaign Contibutions	2014 Top Democratic Donors (Organizations)	Campaign Contibutions	2012 Top Democratic Donors (Organizations)	Campaign Contibutions
1	Fahr, LLC	$ 89,000,000.00	Fahr, LLC	$ 75,000,000.00	Service Employees International Union (SEIU)	$ 23,000,000.00
2	Paloma Partners	$ 42,000,000.00	National Education Association	$ 30,000,000.00	United Auto Workers (UAW)	$ 16,000,000.00
3	Service Employees International Union (SEIU)	$ 40,000,000.00	Bloomberg, LP	$ 29,000,000.00	National Education Association	$ 16,000,000.00
4	Newsweb Corp	$ 39,000,000.00	Next Gen Climate Action	$ 26,000,000.00	Newsweb Corp	$ 15,000,000.00
5	Next Gen Climate Action	$ 35,000,000.00	Service Employees International Union (SEIU)	$ 24,000,000.00	Federation of State, County, & Municipal Employees	$ 13,000,000.00
6	American Federation of Teachers	$ 34,000,000.00	American Federation of Teachers	$ 22,000,000.00	Carpenters & Joiners Union	$ 12,000,000.00
7	Priorities USA	$ 33,000,000.00	Carpenters & Joiners Union	$ 17,000,000.00	Plumbers & Pipefitters Union	$ 12,000,000.00
8	National Education Association	$ 30,000,000.00	Senate Majority PAC	$ 12,000,000.00	International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers	$ 11,000,000.00
9	Laborers Union	$ 29,000,000.00	Federation of State, County, & Municipal Employees	$ 11,000,000.00	United Food & Commerical Workers Union	$ 11,000,000.00
10	Carpenters & Joiners Union	$ 27,000,000.00	Laborers Union	$ 10,000,000.00	American Federation of Teachers	$ 10,000,000.00

Unsurprisingly, there is a large representation of labor unions among the Democratic Party's supporters including the Laborers Union, SEIU (Service Employees International Union), and

UAW (United Auto Workers) to name a few. Twenty of the 30 organizations on this list are labor unions. If you combine the donations of the NEA and AFT in each of these election cycles that would make teachers unions the single largest organizational donor to the Democratic Party.

Since the 1990s, the NEA and AFT have donated $155 million to the Democratic Party and Democratic candidates ("Top Organizational Donors," 2017). However, it is important to contextualize the exact influence of these donations. The financial reality of campaign spending has changed since 2010. In 2010, the Supreme Court decided in Citizens United vs. the Federal Elections Commission that independent campaign spending constituted protection under the free speech clause of the First Amendment. In other words, it is unconstitutional to make any law that prohibits or restricts independent campaign spending. This does not include money donated directly to a political party or candidate. It is still permissible for the government to regulate and restrict those donations. Nevertheless, an organization can avoid all campaign finance regulation provided the donations are "independent." These organizations can engage is whatever political activity provided that they are not part of the candidate's campaign. An example of this would be if an organization not affiliated with a party or candidate collected donations to run aids supporting that candidate. The condition being that these organizations could not coordinate activities with the candidate.

Immediately after the Supreme Court's decision, numerous Super PACs (political action committees) emerged. Citizens United effectively opened the floodgates of campaign spending. The amount of money Super PACs are raising is "entirely expected, yet still shocking" (Firestone, 2012). Super PACs are a class of political action committees who are legally entitled to raise money in unlimited amounts because of the Citizens United decision (Briffault, 2012, p.

1644). Super PACs are, at least in theory, sufficiently independent to be protected by the Citizens United decision. PACs have supplanted candidates and parties as the largest spenders in elections. Indeed, 2012 was the first year Super PACs outspent candidates (Briffault, 2012, p. 1645). Many PACs catered specifically to particular industries, and essentially became an alternative method to lobby government. Car manufacturers, for example, could donate money to a car manufacturing PAC that would then help elect officials friendly to the car industry. Donating to a Super PAC is far more attractive than donating to individual candidates. PACs are strategic and sophisticated, and many of them are highly adept at electing certain candidates. Furthermore, campaign finance law does not restrict donations to these PACs. Lastly, Super PACs often handle negative campaigning, which allows candidates to outsource negative campaign ads (Oliphant, 2012, para. 8).

Refer again to Figure 1. Those are the largest *organizational* donors to Democrats. Understand that there is a large contingent of campaign finance that happens outside of normal political spending. The largest donations for Democrats did not go to candidates or the party they went to Super PACs. In 2016, billionaire environmentalist Thomas F. Steyer donated $89 million to PACs that supported Democratic candidates. Steyer was the largest donor of any kind in the

Table 2. Individual donors to the Democratic Party

	Presidential Election Year		Mid-Term Election Year		Presidential Election Year	
	2016 Top Democratic Donors (Organizations)	Campaign Contibutions	2014 Top Democratic Donors (Organizations)	Campaign Contibutions	2012 Top Democratic Donors (Organizations)	Campaign Contibutions
1	Thomas Steyer	$ 89,000,000.00	Thomas Steyer	$ 74,000,000.00	Fred Eychaner	$ 14,000,000.00
2	Donald Sussman	$ 39,000,000.00	Michael Bloomberg	$ 29,000,000.00	Michael Bloomberg	$ 10,000,000.00
3	Fred Eychaner	$ 35,000,000.00	Fred Eychaner	$ 9,000,000.00	James & Marilyn Simons	$ 10,000,000.00
4	James & Marilyn Simons	$ 25,000,000.00	James & Marilyn Simons	$ 7,000,000.00	Steven Mostyn & Amber Anderson	$ 4,000,000.00
5	Michael Bloomberg	$ 24,000,000.00	George Soros	$ 3,000,000.00	Amy Goldman	$ 3,000,000.00
6	George Soros	$ 20,000,000.00	George Marcus	$ 3,000,000.00	Jeffery Katzenberg	$ 3,000,000.00
7	Dustin Moskovits	$ 20,000,000.00	Donald Sussman	$ 2,000,000.00	George Soros	$ 3,000,000.00
8	James & Mary Pritzker	$ 18,000,000.00	Amy Goldman	$ 2,000,000.00	Jon Stryker	$ 3,000,000.00
9	Saban Haim	$ 14,000,000.00	Herbert Sandler	$ 2,000,000.00	Irwin & Joan Jacobs	$ 2,000,000.00
10	Ronnie Cameron	$ 13,000,000.00	Robert Grantham	$ 2,000,000.00	Anne Cox Chambers	$ 2,000,000.00

2016 election cycle. In the 2016 election cycle, 72.94% of all donations to PACs came from just 100 donors ("Top Individual Contributors to Super PACs," 2018). Refer to the chart above. In each of these three election cycles, the money donated by just ten individuals rivaled or even surpassed the money donated by organizations directly to the Democratic Party. This also is not unique to the Democrats, the Republican Party's largest donor in 2016 (Sheldon Adelson owner of Las Vegas Sans Casino) donated nearly $80 million to PACs supporting Republican candidates ("Top Individual Contributors to Super PACs," 2018). "The overwhelming majority of donors to Super PACs are wealthy individuals" (Oliphant, 2012, para. 8). Some scholars have argued that once adjusted for inflation and extenuating circumstances campaign spending has not increased significantly. However, even if that is true it is still the case that PACs make up a much larger share of campaign spending than ever before (La Raja, 2013, p. 92). The current state of campaign spending post-Citizens United is very important for understanding teachers unions. Despite teachers unions being the Democratic Party's most reliable donor since the mid-1930s, PACs have become a key source of campaign funding. Teachers unions' financial campaign support is not as influential as it used to be. Teachers unions must now fiercely compete for influence within the Democratic Party with a new class of political action committees.

One could argue that despite the growing strength of PACs they are not allowed to engage or coordinate with campaigns. Legally, they can only support a candidate independently. However, that argument assumes PACs follow the law. There is well-documented evidence of PAC coordination with campaigns (Briffault, 2012; Firestone, 2013; La Raja, 2013; Oliphant, 2012). Furthermore, in the past decade it has become an open secret that candidates will finance political activity with PACs.

> Super PACs weren't supposed to have anything to do with candidates for office. Federal elections rules prohibit coordination between political action committees and campaigns. But that didn't stop billionaire Foster Fries from standing next to Rick Santorum at events, keeping his campaign afloat by buying advertising time, and appearing on cable news as a surrogate for the Senator from Pennsylvania. Newt Gingrich, like Santorum, had his own patron. Casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, who almost single handedly kept the former House Speaker afloat through massive infusions of cash to Super PACs. (Oliphant, 2012, para. 4).

In other words, candidates are relying on vast sums of unregulated money to run for office. This scenario has caused a spike in campaign donations, with the majority of that money going directly to Super PACs. Indeed, campaign spending has been steadily increasing since the 1990s. Billionaires like Thomas Steyer and Sheldon Adelson have gained a remarkable amount of policy influence due to this situation. This does not mean that teachers unions' donations are meaningless. However, it does mean that there is much more competition for influence among Democratic donors. The cozy relationship between PACs and candidates makes it much more difficult for teachers unions to penetrate candidates.

To understand the relationship between teachers unions and the Democratic Party it is imperative to understand donor competition. The presence of billionaires and millionaires donating millions of dollars is highly consequential. To be relevant as a top donor, individuals and organizations have to give increasingly larger sums of money. Every year since the Citizens United decision, campaign spending has increased. For example, in 2008 labor unions spent a total of $76 million on campaign contributions. By 2012, that number had increased to $143 million, and in 2016 increased again to $213 million. From 2008 to 2016, that represents a more than 280% increase in contributions ("Business-Labor-Ideology Split in Donations to Candidates," 2018). This is not unique to labor unions. Businesses saw a 168% increase in contributions, and ideological interests groups saw a 176% increase in spending over the same

eight year period ("Business-Labor-Ideology Split in Donations to Candidates," 2018). Teachers unions face an expensive dilemma. To maintain their status as a top donor in the party they are being asked to give larger sums of money. Meanwhile, PACs funded by super wealthy donors are creating a completely new class of policy influencers. Teachers unions have to compete with a number of other donors.

The Democratic Party is in a situation where appeasing its largest donors is of the utmost importance. Democrats are relying on a small class of donors to fund the bulk of national campaigns. Recall that Republican Party policy has been weakening teachers unions. This means the demands for teachers unions to give larger donations to Democrats is tougher to fulfil. It then becomes a serious question of if teachers unions can afford this new era of political spending. In addition, PACs financed by wealthy individuals are beginning to dominate campaign financing which is eroding the influence of teachers unions. This explains why there has been greater divergence between Democratic politicians and teachers unions on issues of education in recent years. Gilens and Page argue that the richest Americans have a disproportionate influence over policy, and government most frequently responds to their needs (2014). Whereas other groups garner little to no influence. Their conclusion has come under a lot scrutiny since their article was published in 2014, because there is clear evidence of other groups wielding political influence. Nevertheless, it helps articulate the change in donor relations in party politics in the last few years. American politics is shifting to almost oligarchic levels.

Another Supreme Court ruling further strengthened the influence of unregulated donors. In Wisconsin Right to Life vs. Federal Elections Commission, the Supreme Court ruled that federal legislation could not prohibit political advertisements provided they did not *explicitly*

endorse a particular candidate. Essentially, this ruling meant a PAC could create an advertisement for a candidate free of federal elections regulations. This is most relevant to attack ads for rival candidates. Attacks ads can criticize political opponents without endorsing any candidates. Also, these ads can still vaguely endorse candidates. The Wisconsin decision combined with Citizens United greatly impeded federal elections regulators. The Wisconsin decision was also very consequential for nonprofit organizations. In the Wisconsin decision, the court had relaxed rules regarding political activity of nonprofit organizations. According to tax law, 501(c)(4) and 501(c)(5) organizations can engage in lobbying and campaign activities provided it is not their primary activity or expenditure (Briffault, 2012, p. 1648). This is important because nonprofits do not have to report information on donors unlike Super PACs and campaigns. The opaque nature of political nonprofits then make them attractive to donors who wish to remain anonymous. Before the Wisconsin decisions, many controversial donors declined to donate politically. That is no longer the case. Democratic politicians can now court a range of donors that would have been too controversial to be associated with in past years (Briffault, 2011, p. 338). The emergence of political nonprofits as large campaign financiers is yet another source of competition for teachers unions. There is no publically accessible information about who is funding these nonprofits. Within the Democratic Party, teachers unions have to compete with an ever-growing slate of other actors to influence the policy priorities of the party and its candidates. This can partially explain why anti-teacher neoliberal policy keeps emerging in the Democratic Party education platform. Democrats are appeasing an array of anti-union neoliberal donors. By extension, as the cost of campaigning keeps increasing Democrats are becoming more sensitive to their largest donors in order to finance these expensive

campaigns, and there largest donors are now PACs and nonprofits, not unions. Historically, the Democratic Party has always been willing to cater to competing interests to win elections. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson's electioneering previously discussed in this paper are examples.

No Where to Go

Teachers unions locked themselves in a state of electoral capture. Democrats do have a history of advocating anti-union politics. However, the Republican Party exhibits a history of being much more hostile. The prevalence of right to work laws in the states being an obvious example. Democrats do, at least occasionally, show favorable policy priorities to teachers unions. So, it is then completely rational for teachers unions to embrace lukewarm Democrats when the alternative is openly hostile Republicans. This is an almost textbook example of electoral capture.

According to Frymer within two party systems, politicians are highly sensitive to swing voters, and tend to ignore reliable constituencies (1999). It is not rational for politicians to focus on appeasing reliable constituencies because those voters would likely vote for that politician regardless. Frymer argues that Black voters are the quintessential example. Black voters have supported Democrats in overwhelming numbers since the 1960s (Chideya, 2016). This enthusiastic Black electoral support seems strange when one then analyzes the lukewarm response Democrats have given to issues facing the Black community. President Lyndon Johnson's indifference to civil rights being one example. The Democratic Party's attempts to be attractive to segregationists for the majority of the last century being a second example. The irony of Democrats simultaneously courting Black voters and southern segregationists cannot be

understated. This scenario continues because Black voters are in no position to support Republicans. Black voters will continue to vote for Democrats because they are certainly the lessor of two evils. Unfortunately, this means our political system will rarely ever be sensitive to the policy priorities of a Black population. Frymer refers to the American political system as "legitimate institutional racism" (1999, p. 24). Even Barack Obama showed some hesitance to appeasing Black voters. It was too important for Obama to be attractive to less loyal white voters. Frymer's analysis is specific to race, but examples of electoral capture are everywhere.

Democrats are fully aware that teachers unions do not have an electable alternative. The nature of two party politics is that third parties are just not workable options. Teachers unions cannot realistically defect to the Republican Party. Therefore, the Democratic Party simply does not have to invest a lot of energy into appeasing teachers, despite their being such an important voting bloc. Democrats will then be much more sensitive to needs of less loyal constituencies who may defect to the Republican Party, like super wealthy donors with very specific policy interests. This does not mean that Democrats completely ignore teachers unions. The relationship is far more complicated than that. However, it shines an important light on how Democrats engage with teachers. Democrat will also create strange and unlikely coalitions of competing interests to ensure electoral successes; the history of the Democratic Party is filled with many examples of doing just that.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In closing, the relationship between Democratic politicians and teachers is peculiar. That relationship has its historical roots in the political deal making of Franklin D. Roosevelt. He defined labor union-Democratic relations for the next century. As the decades passed, teachers became the backbone of labor-Democrat coalition. Yet, Democrats have surprisingly advocated a host of policies that are bitterly antithetical to teachers unions. Even more surprising, there has been a good amount of policy overlap between Democrats and Republicans despite growing polarizations on many other issues. Explaining why this is happening is a complicated multifaceted answer.

First, the labor union population of this country has changed. As well-educated and middle-class teachers became the majority of union members, public opinions about unions transitioned. Labor unions have been slowly losing their identification with the working class. This affects their popularity, which makes it much easier to attack unions. As unions become less popular, it is true that resentment towards unions increases. Public resentment toward teachers unions has been mounting. The public sees teachers unions are tax and spend advocates, oppositionists, and selfishly advocating wages at the expense of taxpayers and students. The news media has instigated this perception. Stories about teachers unions trend negative, and heavily promote the idea of teachers being a combative and unreasonable opposition. Neoliberal federal policy has rendered bureaucracy, including teachers unions, as inherently untrustworthy.

There is a pervasive understanding that teachers have no idea how to fix schools, which justifies making policy without teacher input. All of these forces have made is remarkably easy for a politician to criticize teachers unions. In fact, much of the public now expects criticism of teachers unions.

Secondly, there is a public perception of failing schools, which are falling behind the rest of the world. The language of "crisis" has become commonplace in education policy and discussion of schools. The crisis nature of schools justifies intrusive federal intervention in schools. However, teachers unions are largely opposed to these intrusive reforms. Yet, the public expects these reforms because schools are in a "crisis." This forces politician who should be allies of the teachers unions to instead be critical opponents. Politicians are highly concerned about the appearance of fixing schools. Thirdly, the last decade of PACs and political nonprofits has changed the fabric of campaign finance. Within the Democratic Party donor base, teachers unions must compete with numerous groups having millions, or even billions, of dollars. This has progressively made teachers unions less influential over time. Lastly, electoral capture forces teachers unions to continue to support Democrats, no matter how lukewarm their policies might be.

The Republican Party has made a concentrated effort to dismantle and weaken labor unions nationwide. Support for things like charter schools is an attempt to hurt teachers unions. Democrats are aware of the Republican Party's intentions. However, the political pressure to "fix" schools and be critical of teachers is so great that Democrats allow complacency in the face of Republican political tactics. Furthermore, Democrats are relying more on other donors, like wealthy Super PACs. So, there is also less pressure to protect labor unions from Republican

attacks. None of this means that teachers unions are no longer influential within the Democratic Party. For example, Democratic presidential candidates still try mightily to get teacher union endorsements during the primaries. However, it does mean that this level of influence is diminishing, and will likely continue to diminish over time. The relationship between teachers unions and political parties is the result of decades of carefully planned political calculus and deal making.

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VITA

Roman Motley was born in Detroit, MI and obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Near Eastern Studies from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor in 2014. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, he also obtained a Master of Public Administration from American Public University System in 2016. Currently, Roman Motley is employed as a project associate at North Park University School of Business and Nonprofit Management.

THESIS APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Roman Motley has been read and approved by the following committee:

Noah Sobe, Ph.D., Director
Professor of Cultural and Educational Policy Studies
Loyola University Chicago

Katherine Phillippo, Ph.D.
Professor of Cultural and Educational Policy Studies
Loyola University Chicago

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature that appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Director's Signature